

## #174 - Try a Meal Formula this Fall!

Hey there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. This is episode 174 - try a meal formula for fall. I'm such a big fan of meal formulas, and we had our first real one this past summer. You're welcome to go back and listen to that; it's episode 164. Now it's not fall yet in weather or on the calendar, but it's getting close. And while you might not think you're the kind of person who would do a meal formula and very well could be right about that, I'd love to share with you how you might put one together to help your meals come together even more easily over these next few months. And as everything around here, I hope to share tools and principles with you that you can use however you need to based on what matters to you. This isn't a copy and paste situation, hence the whole "try it!" thing. Just listen and give the ideas a try and see if they might work for you.

Before we get into this episode about food, I have something to ask you regarding food. I have a few recipes on my site, some of which some of you have tried! Change Your Life Chicken, Change Your Life Shawarma, King Biscuits, Trashy Tamales, Magical Pancakes, I Want Them Now Chocolate Chip Cookies, Fearless Chicken Tikka Masala, The Chickpea Bowl, Homemade Hamburger Helper... the list is long and delicious. Most of the time, I get the kindest DMs from you about how much you enjoyed a recipe. A lot of Instagram stories as well. It's all incredibly kind, and I'm grateful for every word. One way Instagram has changed the food blogging rhythm for many of us is that we don't leave comments on recipe posts anymore. We have direct access to our favorite recipe people through DMs, but if you think about when you look for a recipe on a food blog, you look for comments if the recipe was good or not. If I search a dish on Google and I have one option that's got 54 comments and another option that only has one, I'll absolutely click on the one with 54. We want social proof when it comes to recipes. So here's what I'm asking! If you have made a recipe of mine, I would absolutely love it if you'd go and leave a comment on the actual post so that other people who happen upon it or search it very much on purpose have that social proof right there on the post. This is something you can do for other food bloggers and other recipe posts you enjoy. It's such a huge way to help. And if you substitute something or make something that has dairy dairy-free, that kind of thing, please share those things! Think about what you would like to see if you click on a recipe post, and share whatever that is. It would be a huge help to me and to other people who come looking for a new way to cook chicken. Thank you thank you!

Okay, let's talk about a meal formula for fall. Here's what's often true of fall food. We don't have to be forced to make it. Right? We generally really dig moving into cooler weather and cooler weather food. So I think the problem with cooking in fall versus say cooking in the summer is that we want to make everything. We have what feels like so many options, too many options, and we let our excitement sort of spin out without having a place to put it. So the fall meal formula is a little different than the summer one. Maybe we can use a similar structure, but the perspective shifts a bit. If you have kids or live in a hotter part of the country, cooking is a bit of a bummer. People say oh I just grill all the time, but what if you don't have a grill? What if you

don't have AC and hate heating up the house with the oven? What if you spend a lot of time at the pool or outside or wherever because it's summer and you don't enjoy coming home when everyone is hungry and cranky and you're trying to figure out what you can get on the table in fifteen minutes?

Fall food feels different. Fall food is naturally really comforting. Soups and stews, hot bowls of stuff. That's the official term for it - hot bowls of stuff. So what we want to do with this fall meal formula is put a little structure around our excitement and not get burned out. Or not feel let down when we make our first two pots of soup and then feel like we're weirdly out of ideas.

I also think another important aspect of fall cooking is to distinguish between practices and plans. There are certain things you naturally already put into practice, maybe soup once a week. Maybe you like roasting a chicken or making casseroles or whatever else. It doesn't matter what the thing is, but think about the things you already do, the things that already exist in your cooking during the cooler months, your practices. I want you to distinguish between those practices and any plans or goals you have for your fall cooking. Maybe you have big plans this year where you want to learn how to roast that chicken or you're feeling inspired to make a few new recipes or whatever. Fall is the season where we often have the most practices and the most plans, and if our meal formula doesn't accommodate both of those things, I think it affects our motivation and energy in the kitchen, especially as we get closer to the holiday gauntlet and kind of want any excuse to just shut down.

So with those things in mind, let's talk about how you might set up your fall meal formula.

First, we'll start with categories or buckets. You can categorize or bucketize anything that makes sense for you, but you need some kind of lens that turns your current meal situation of what meal will we eat tonight where you're choosing from the entire world of recipes into a kind of limitation that can help you make an easier, more thoughtful decision. So you can create buckets based on the type of meal. Soup, roasted stuff, casseroles, meat and three, tacos, pizza, breakfast, that kind of thing. Your buckets could be your protein if you're a meat eater - chicken, beef, pork, fish, that kind of thing. Your buckets could be the cooking vessel - Instant Pot, a roasting pan, a sheet pan, a wok, a Dutch oven or soup pot, et cetera. Your buckets could be your energy level or the amount of time you have. Maybe you need meals that are ready in less than twenty minutes, ones that are quick but need prep beforehand to be quick, low and slow, or ones that can be tended to while you're home in the afternoon. Again, you get to make your buckets, but having buckets is really important when you're creating your formula. You need a place to start, so think about how you naturally categorize food.

Our family's fall meal formula categories are soup, rice bowls (always rice bowls), pasta, breakfast, pizza, sheet pan meals, and then a catch-all of other family favorite meals that don't fit into one of those categories.

Now what do you do with your categories? I'd like you to put a few practices in each category and then a few plans. This is where we pay attention to that difference. Basically it's the

difference in things you love but also gives you a place for things you're wanting to try. And that's not just recipes themselves. It could be a cooking skill. It could be this is the fall when you actually figure out how to use your Instant Pot. So let's say you have similar categories that I just listed, buckets based on type of meal. As you list out some meal options under those bucket labels, you could focus on making sure there are a couple of Instant Pot recipes within each category so that you're putting yourself in a position to practice using your Instant Pot. Does that make sense? You get to be intentional about your plans for fall food as well as give plenty of space to continue engaging in the practices that make you love fall food and fall cooking in the first place.

Now this might all sound a little general, but that's on purpose. I'm not going to give you a list of recipes to cook this fall. I know that's what a lot of us want, is for someone to just tell us what to do, but we also know from doing that a lot and then not following through that that doesn't really work. This is where you get to name what matters to you about meals this fall and then you can name those practices and plans. From there, you can create categories that make sense for your life.

So name what matters, name what you want to do often, what practices you want to have, name what plans you have, what skill you want to learn or what cuisine you want to try if you have one, and then create buckets or categories that make sense to how you already eat and think. From there, just list out a few recipes or meal ideas under each one.

Now comes the formula part. When it's time to decide what's for dinner whether you decide that every day, one a week, or once a month, you have limits so you're not choosing from everything that has ever existed but are choosing from what matters to you. You can just have that one list that's already categorized so you know you're not going to repeat. Or you could use your categories and list to build what I call a meal matrix. You could choose to cook from one category a night and even assign each day a category. So Monday is one category, Tuesday is another, and on and on, and you know that when you're planning your meals that week, you only have a few options that will work for your regular fall practices and fall plans. Or if that feels too restrictive, just cook from that one long but manageable list.

And that's really it. It's really simple but very freeing. And you can always add or take away recipes from your list. You make this work in whatever way serves your life the most. The list itself I call a seasonal dinner queue which is a familiar term for those of you have been around awhile; it's a list of meals that make sense for the season you're in, but this episode goes a step further in giving you a little more guidance in how you might choose the meals that go on that list.

So what's your practice? What's your plan? What really matters about meals in this next season on the calendar and this next season of life? Give yourself a limited number of choices to create the most freedom. And you can even decide once by creating that meal matrix if that sounds fun. Regardless, the point here is to bring you joy in the kitchen. You do whatever does that,

even if it's the opposite of what I just shared. You do what works for you and what you care about. Always always amen.

And that's how you could try a fall meal formula! Thank you in advance for leaving a comment on a recipe post on my blog, too! I really appreciate that. I'm so grateful you listened today, and until next time be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!