



Day One

[Chicken Pot Pie](#), Green Salad on the side with [Basic Vinaigrette](#) or [Ranch Dressing](#)

Day Two

[Stovetop Mac and Cheese](#), Steamed Broccoli or Peas, Fresh Fruit Cup

Day Three

[Lawnmower Taco](#), [Mexican Rice](#), Green Salad

Day Four

[Beans and Rice](#), Fresh Fruit

Day Five

[Bacon and Broccoli Egg Bake](#), Green Salad

Day Six

[Thursday Night Soup](#) with [Italian Sandwich Rolls](#) - use up excess meat, veg, or rice in the soup.

Day Seven

[Homemade Pizza](#) with [Last Minute Pizza Sauce](#), Veggie Dippers with [Ranch Dressing](#) - use up any leftovers from the week as pizza toppings.

Plan #4: Comfort Foods

Fall is here and that means it's time to snuggle up with some yummy comfort foods. Get in out of the cold — or simply the stresses of the day — and hunker down with these family favorite meals.

This week's meal plan is designed to be easy to prepare and inexpensive to purchase. It comes with a \$70 price tag to feed 4 people for seven dinners.

This plan features some of our family's very favorite cold-weather meals. I've tried to include some meatless meals to keep the costs low, but enough protein to keep your meativores happy.

Prep ahead.

I've taken some of the concepts behind a large freezer cooking day and applied them to a week's meals at home. You can do a lot of the prep work in advance. Spend an hour or two chopping, dicing, and baking — and reap the rewards all week long.



Cheats for Good Cheap Eats (aka creative substitutions)

In order to keep the overall grocery total low, we have often made some substitutions throughout the meal plans in order to trim costs.

For instance,

- While recipes featured in this plan may call for either sunflower or olive oil, we've tested this plan with olive oil only. In this way, if you only have the funds for one purchase, know that you can fudge a bit. Will the flavor be different? Of course, but you'll also spend less if you just can't spring for a bottle of two different kinds of oils.
- Feel free to make the egg bake without bacon in order to curb costs. Or sub in a less expensive protein like ham or sausage.
- I made the Lawnmower Taco with tortillas instead of chips. This was a lot cheaper and my people actually preferred the flavor and texture.

We've tried to anticipate common cheats and short cuts you could make in order to trim costs.

Feel empowered to make creative substitutions in order to eat well, but spend less.

Many of the meals "build on one another" and share common ingredients. That is to say, you can cook enough chicken or broccoli at one time to use in different meals throughout the week.

Make a big batch of rice as a side dish one night and use the rest in rice bowls on another night. Any leftover items will be made into soup or pizza near the end of the week. In this way, you'll reduce waste and save time and effort in the process.

Read the notes
in this meal plan
CAREFULLY!
There are cheats that
we've added to get
the price point
lower.

On healthy eating...

Each family has its own reasons for why they buy certain things: health, budget, taste. I can't predict what everyone will like. Make the tweaks that you prefer for what's on the plan.

For instance, at our house we use unbleached all-purpose flour as well as whole wheat flour and sometimes even designated bread flour. Your price will change based on what you use. You may even grind your own wheat. Go for it! I'm not dictating what kind of flour you *should* use, but I've listed the most economical (generally speaking) option on the grocery list. Feel free to change this according to your preferences. Just know that your total spent may differ.

Keep calm and shop on.

You can buy these ingredients at any grocery store. Choose what store has the best prices available in your area.

However, all the ingredients (except for the yeast) happen to be regularly available at Trader Joe's, a place that doesn't always have everything one might need in a given week. Yeast is a seasonal product for Joe, so you can find it only at the holidays. Readers have reported great success in finding these ingredients at Aldi as well.

You don't have to shop at Trader Joe's, but know that if that is one of your regular stops, you could get it (almost) all in one place. I love Trader Joe's for its healthier bent and its guarantee against additives, GMO's, and other unnecessary junk. Additionally, Trader Joe's serves as a mid-range price point. The ingredients list was purchased for \$70 or less at Trader Joe's, so you should find comparable pricing elsewhere, particularly if you buy items on sale or shop at a store with regularly lower prices than Joe offers.

This week's plan is a little heavy on homemade spice mixes, so if you don't already have them on hand, you may need to spend a bit more than the target price.

Your mileage may vary

That said, we can't guarantee everything. Prices vary from day to day and from location to location, no matter where you shop. But, you should come in close. We've assigned target prices for the most expensive items.

We also assume that you have some basic pantry staples on hand, like salt, pepper, and basic spices. If you are stocking from scratch, your costs may be a little higher.

This Week's Recipes

You'll need to download or print these recipes to reference this week. It's always a good move to read them all first as well since many recipes serve more than 4 people:

[Chicken Pot Pie](#)

[Basic Vinaigrette](#)

[Ranch Dressing](#)

[Stovetop Mac and Cheese](#)

[Lawnmower Taco](#)

[Mexican Rice](#)

[Taco Seasoning Mix](#)

[Bacon and Broccoli Egg Bake](#)

[Thursday Night Soup](#)

[Italian Sandwich Rolls](#)



[Basic Pizza Dough](#)[Jamie's Spice Mix](#)[Last-Minute Pizza Sauce](#)

This Week's Groceries

This is a grocery list for all ingredients needed for the week as well as notes for cutting costs and stretching ingredients.

Read through the list carefully to see what you already have on hand or what you might omit in order to accommodate a family preference or to trim costs further.

Dairy/deli section

- 8 cups or 2 pounds jack or cheddar cheese (target price \$3.99/lb or less) - You will use this in the taco casserole, egg bake, mac and cheese, and in the rice bowls. You can also use less to economize. If a block of cheese is cheaper, go for that and shred your own.
- 1 pound mozzarella cheese (\$4.49/pound)
- 6 eggs (target price \$1 at \$1.99/doz)
- 2 cups milk (\$0.44 at \$3.49/gallon)
- 1/2 cup buttermilk (\$0.25 at \$1.99/quart)
- 1 1/2 cup butter (\$3 at \$3.99/pound)
- sour cream for serving Lawnmower Taco, optional

Produce

- 5 cups bite-sized broccoli florets, 2 for the egg bake, the rest as a side dish (target price \$1.79/bunch)
- carrots, 1/2 cup diced
- potatoes, 1/2 cup diced
- 1 baby leek (or you can use yellow or white onions instead, 3/4 cup chopped)
- 2 to 3 yellow or white onions (target price \$0.69) for pot pie and soup. If these are sold by the piece, as they are at Trader Joe's, buy the largest you can find. I was able to buy one onion for \$0.69 that was as big as two regular onions! You can use any leftovers on pizza or in future recipes.
- enough salad greens/lettuce for 3 nights (target \$5)
- seasonal fruit for two nights (target \$5)
- seasonal vegetables for salad toppings and for veggie dippers on pizza night
- lemon (target price \$0.39) - to use in Jamie's Spice Mix and the vinaigrette (if you want a lemon dressing), but this can be omitted if you like.

Canned/dry goods

- two 15-ounce cans black beans (target price \$0.89) - for rice bowls
- 16 ounces macaroni, shells or elbows (\$0.99/lb)
- 7 1/2 cups chicken broth for Chicken Pot Pie, Lawnmower Taco, and Mexican Rice (\$1.99/qt)
- up to 4 cups additional broth (beef, chicken or veg) for soup, or you can use water
- two 6-ounce cans tomato paste or one can paste and one small can of tomato sauce, for pizza sauce and soup (target price \$0.89/can)

- 8-ounce can tomato sauce for Mexican Rice (target price \$1.49 for large can)
- 12 corn tortillas (target price \$0.99) to use instead of 9 ounces tortilla chips, crushed
- five-pound bag of flour (target price \$2.99 for unbleached all-purpose) - for thickening in the mac and cheese and chicken pot pie as well as in homemade Italian rolls and pizza dough. A bag typically has 16 cups of flour, so you should have a bit leftover. Some of the recipes may call for bread flour, whole wheat flour, etc. Just buy the cheaper all-purpose flour and use it all recipes. There may be slight texture differences, but they are negligible, especially if you're trying to stay under budget.
- 1-pound white rice (target price \$1.10 at \$3.29/3-pound bag) or more to stretch the recipes
- sliced black olives, optional (for Lawnmower Taco)
- salsa, optional (for Lawnmower Taco)

Meat department

A good target to shoot for is 1/4 pound of meat per person per meal.

- 1 pound ground beef or turkey (target price \$2.99/pound) - for the Lawnmower Casserole
- 2.5 pound bag frozen chicken tenders (target price \$2.79/pound) - you should be able to get the chicken for less at a regular grocery store. This is Trader Joe's lowest price. You will need the chicken for the Pot Pie (about 1 pound) and then use the extra for the soup and pizza.
- 4 slices bacon - buy bacon ends to get the cheapest price, omit from the egg bake, or substitute with a cheaper meat, such as ham or sausage (\$4.99/pound)

Frozen section

- 1/2 cup frozen peas - you can use green beans in the pot pie if you prefer (\$1.99 for a 1-pound bag) - use the rest of the bag as a side dish during the week or to use in salads

Regular pantry ingredients

We are making the assumption that you have some basic ingredients in your pantry and spice cupboard. If you don't have these items on hand, it may bump your price point over the allotted \$70. If you don't have the funds to stock the spice cupboard, see if you can find a store that allows you to buy small amounts at bulk pricing.

- red wine vinegar for salad dressing, if not using lemon juice
- olive oil and sunflower (or other neutral) oil - If you can only afford one oil this week (prices vary widely on this) then use the olive oil for best flavor.
- yeast
- honey, sugar, or sucanat (for pizza dough)
- salt - recipes may call for different kinds such as fine sea salt or kosher. Use what you prefer, knowing that you'll need a little less for recipes that call for kosher salt.
- freshly ground black pepper
- mayonnaise (1/2 cup for ranch dressing)
- Dijon mustard (for vinaigrette and egg bake)
- bay leaf

- chili powder (for taco seasoning)
- celery seeds (optional)
- onion powder
- onion flakes
- garlic powder (for spice mixes)
- dried oregano
- sweet paprika
- dried thyme
- grated lemon zest, if not using fresh
- parsley flakes (for ranch dressing)
- cayenne pepper
- dried basil (for Jamie's Spice Mix)
- Jamie's Spice Mix contains onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, dried basil, dried oregano, fine sea salt, black pepper, celery seeds (optional), grated lemon zest, cayenne pepper. If you don't already have these items on hand, it may take you over \$70 to buy them. Trader Joe's 21 Seasoning Salute (\$1.99) is an economical alternative. Otherwise, create a custom seasoning blend with what ingredients you do have on hand.
- Taco Seasoning Mix contains oregano, salt, garlic powder, onion flakes, chili powder, and black pepper.
- Optional mix-ins for salad dressing (choose a few): 1 tablespoon jam, 1/2 teaspoon Dijon or dry mustard, 1/2 teaspoon garlic, 1/4 teaspoon favorite dried herbs such as basil, oregano, Italian herbs, herbes de provence, tarragon

This Week's Prep List

These are tasks you can do in advance to make the rest of the week easier. Please keep in mind that prepped food is generally good for up to 4 days, refrigerated. If you plan to store these items for longer, wrap them well for freezing.

The steps below are in order of how you will need things during this meal plan. So if you don't have time to do them all, just chip away at the list as needed. This list also includes any shortcuts and meal building you need to be aware of.

- Mix up the seasoning mixes: Taco Seasoning Mix, Jamie's Spice Mix. Jamie's Spice Mix is best stored in the freezer, but if you're not using fresh lemon zest, you can store it in the cupboard with the others.
- Shred the cheeses for casseroles, rice bowls, and pizza if you did not already buy them shredded.
- Chop the onions.
- Prepare a batch (or two) of the Basic Vinaigrette. You'll use this on salads throughout the week. Olive oil tends to solidify upon refrigeration. Be sure to pull the dressing from the fridge with enough time in advance of serving to liquify again.

- Prepare a batch of Ranch Dressing, cover, and refrigerate.
- Prepare salad greens and toppings for the week. Store in airtight containers in the fridge.
- Bake the Italian Sandwich Rolls. These are good at room temperature for a day or two. If you're baking far in advance of serving, freeze the rolls.
- Prepare the seasonal fruit for salads and side dishes.
- Cook all the chicken. Use a little less than half of the meat for the Chicken Pot Pie. Use the rest in the soup and as a pizza topping. It's good for four days, refrigerated. If you'll be storing it for longer, freeze the cooled meat in portioned containers.
- Prepare the pizza dough and freeze if making more than a day in advance. Freezing directions are included in the recipe instructions.
- Prepare the pizza sauce, cover, and refrigerate. This should stay good for up to a week in the refrigerator.

Other things you should note:

Day One:

Chicken Pot Pie is one of my family's favorite dishes. I love it that I can prepare all the components in advance. Booyah! You could even make a double batch and freeze half for another night. Just be sure to buy extra ingredients if you will double this. Serve with a green salad on the side.

Day Two:

This stovetop mac and cheese is super easy to prepare. It easily comes together in less than 30 minutes. Serve it with steamed broccoli and/or the rest of the bag of frozen peas that you used in the pot pie.

Day Three:

It's time for tacos. Sort of. Lawnmower Taco is a name that my husband created when one of the boys felt picky about the taco casserole. The name convinced him to eat it, the recipe won his tummy over. This is another dish that is easy to double, make ahead or even freeze. Make a double (or triple) batch of Mexican Rice and save half for later in the week. Serve with a green salad.

Day Four:

Beans and rice couldn't be easier! Reheat last night's rice, open a few cans of beans, and lay out an array of toppings. Let folks pile on the goodies and expect lots of clean plates. This is one of our favorite good cheap eats.

Day Five:

Tonight you'll be making a bacon and broccoli egg dish. It comes together really easily; feel free to make it in advance and store it in the fridge. It can even be frozen if your available prep times comes days or weeks before serving. Serve a green salad on the side.

Day Six:

Survey any leftover cooked or uncooked meat, veg, and grain from the week. Decide what can be used for tomorrow's pizza and then combine the rest into soup!

Combine all the soup ingredients in the slow cooker and bake the rolls if you didn't do that earlier in the week. If you don't want to go the crockpot route, no worries. This soup comes together in mere minutes right before serving time.

Day Seven:

It's time for pizza! In addition to your dough, sauce, and abundant cheese, you might have some other vegetables or leftover chicken to top four 12-inch pizzas. Freeze leftovers or eat them for lunch tomorrow. Serve veggies and ranch on the side.