

# This Week's DINNERS

**\$70**  
OR LESS

LIFEASMOM.COM

## Day One

Pulled Chicken Sliders on  
Homemade Italian Rolls, Baby  
Carrots

## Day Two

Chicken, Bean, and Cheese  
Burritos with Fruit on the side

## Day Three

Grilled Sausages, Lemon and  
Herb Rice Pilaf, Steamed  
Broccoli and Grape Tomatoes

## Day Four

Salsa Verde Chicken, Green  
Salad with Rice and Basic  
Vinaigrette

## Day Five

Tortellini Pasta Salad with  
Seasonal Fruit and Veg on the  
side

## Day Six

Thursday Night Soup made  
with Leftover Chicken,  
Vegetables, Rice, etc., Rolls  
reserved from Day One

## Day Seven

Sausage Pizza, Salad - use up  
any leftovers from the week as  
pizza or salad toppings.

## This Week's Recipes

You'll need to print these recipes to reference throughout the week. It's always a good move to read them all first as well since we've made some tweaks so that the meal plan serves for for less than \$70:

[Pulled Chicken Sliders](#)

[Homemade Italian Rolls](#)

[Chicken, Bean, and Cheese  
Burritos](#)

[Lemon and Herb Rice Pilaf](#)

[Salsa Verde Chicken](#)

[Basic Vinaigrette](#)

[Tortellini Pasta Salad](#)

[Thursday Night Soup](#)

[Basic Pizza Dough](#)

[Last-Minute Pizza Sauce](#)

[Jamie's Spice Mix](#) - Trader Joe's 21 Seasoning Salute is an economical alternative if you don't already have the spices for the homemade mix on hand.

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





## 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 sunflower only. In this way, if you only have the funds for one purchase, know that you can fudge a bit and use the more neutral-tasting oil. 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.

We've tried to anticipate common cheats and short cuts you could make in order to trim costs. If you find great prices on the items on the list, feel free to prepare the recipes as they are written. Feel empowered to make creative substitutions in order to eat well, but spend less.

## Ready to eat well?

This week's meal plan is designed to be easy to prepare and inexpensive to purchase. We've taken some of the concepts behind a large freezer cooking day and applied them to a week's meals at home.

Many of the meals share common ingredients and "build on one another". That is to say, some of the rolls you bake on Monday will be enjoyed on another day later in the week. Likewise, any leftover chicken will be made into soup a few nights following. In this way, you'll reduce waste and save time and effort in the process.

All the ingredients except for the yeast happen to be available at Trader Joe's. You don't have to shop there, but know that if that's one of your regular stops, you could get it (almost) all in one place. Additionally, Trader Joe's serves as a mid-range price point. The ingredients list was purchased for less than \$70 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.

### *Your mileage may vary*

That said, we can't guarantee everything. Prices vary from day to



day and from location to location. 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 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*

- 12-ounce bag shredded cheddar cheese (target price \$2.99 or less) - You will use this in the burritos as well as on the sliders (in place of sliced cheese as it will stretch farther, but still give flavor). If a block of cheese is cheaper, go for that and shred your own.
- one pound block of mozzarella cheese or a 16-ounce bag shredded mozzarella for pizza (target price \$3.99 or less)

### *Produce*

- slicing tomatoes - used on sliders, leftovers will go on pizza and salads
- one 12-ounce bag baby spinach (target price \$1.99) - for the salads, topping the sliders and pizza, and stirring into soup
- one 5-ounce bag baby greens (target price \$1.99) - for side salads
- 1 bag/head of broccoli (target price \$1.79)



- 16 ounce package grape tomatoes - for salads and side dishes (target price \$2.29)
- 1 to 2 bags baby carrots
- onions - this is a very forgiving ingredient. You can use a lot or a little depending on your tastes and what you have on hand. You'll only need onions for the rice on Day Three and the soup on Day Six. You can use a lot less than the 3 cups called for in the soup.
- 1 lemon, optional - This is used in Jamie's Spice Mix and in the Tortellini Salad. You can use the Basic Vinaigrette for the pasta salad if you prefer. See notes below regarding spice mix.
- 1 lime
- seasonal fruit for side dishes - We budgeted \$5 for seasonal fruit to serve as side dishes on Days Two and Five.

### *Canned/dry goods*

- 12 ounces cheese tortellini (target price \$1.99) - dried is typically cheaper than fresh
- one 12-ounce jar salsa verde (target price \$1.99 or less) - You'll use it in the burritos and the salsa verde chicken
- two 15-ounce cans of pinto beans or use 4 cups homecooked beans
- one 16-ounce can garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 to 2 cans tomato paste - This is for the pizzas. If you want to make a tomato-based soup this week, get two cans. We made our soup without tomatoes.
- 12 burrito-size tortillas (target price \$1.99)
- rice - You'll need at least two cups, possibly more, depending on the leftovers you think you'll need for Days Four and Six
- five-pound bag of flour - for pizza and homemade rolls; you'll probably have some leftover to stock the pantry for next week

### *Meat department*

A good target to shoot for is 1/4 pound of meat per person per meal. You'll need to make a little leftovers so that you have meat for the pizza and soup later in the week.

- 1 package Italian sausages for grilling - We bought five sausages: one per person to serve 4 on Day Three and one extra to slice up and use as a pizza topping.

- 1 to 2 bags frozen chicken tenders or 2.5 to 5 pounds fresh - You can get by with the smaller amounts by using less chicken in both the sliders and burritos and allotting a small amount to add to the soup. We used the smaller amount for testing this plan, at a cost of \$2.79/pound. If you find chicken for less, then use the larger amount or apply that savings to other things. Be sure to make some leftovers for pizza and soup later in the week, if you want meat on those.

### *Regular pantry ingredients*

- red wine vinegar - this is for the salad dressings
- olive oil and sunflower (or other neutral) oil - If you can only afford one oil this week (prices vary widely on this) then sub the neutral oil for olive if you don't already have the olive oil. The Italian rolls, pizza dough, and pizza sauce will have a bit less flavor, but they will still be great.
- chicken or vegetable broth, optional - We decided to use the poaching liquid from the sliders instead of buying chicken broth. This cut costs and provided great flavor without adding more things to the cart.
- garlic
- yeast
- honey or sugar for pizza dough
- salt
- pepper
- oregano
- bay leaves
- peppercorn
- chile powder
- cumin
- thyme
- paprika
- condiments and pickles for sandwiches
- 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.

## 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.

- Poach enough chicken (at least 1.5 pounds) for the burritos, sliders, and a bit of leftover for the soup. Save the poaching liquid; strain it, and use this as the basis of Thursday Night Soup. Freeze the broth if you won't be using it within 4 days.
- Prepare the pulled chicken (at least 1 pound): shred and season the poached meat, wrap, and refrigerate. We had leftover chicken that we used in the soup later in the week.
- Bake the Italian Rolls. You'll use some for the chicken sliders and serve some with the soup. Reserve some now for soup night: cool, label, and freeze until the day of serving.
- Slice tomatoes for sandwiches. If you prefer not to refrigerate the tomatoes, then do this step right before serving.
- Shred the cheeses if you did not already buy them shredded.
- Prepare the burritos and freeze them until ready to serve. We used half the chicken the recipe calls for which was about 1/2 a pound. This makes 12 burritos. Depending on the size of your family, you may want to package them in two separate ziptop freezer bags: one for dinner and the rest for snacks.
- Chop the broccoli into florets if you didn't already purchase it that way.
- Marinate at least 1 pound of chicken for the Salsa Verde Chicken. Freeze this if marinating more than 1 day in advance.
- Reserve enough carrots for snacking on Days One and Five. Slice the rest for Salads on Days Four, Six, and Seven.
- Cook the tortellini, rinse, and store in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Better yet, assemble the salad, just leave out the spinach until ready to serve.
- Prepare a batch (or two) of the Basic Vinaigrette. You'll use this on salads for Days Four and Seven. If you like, you can substitute this for the vinaigrette in the tortellini salad.

- Chop onions for soup, if using.
- Prepare the pizza dough and freeze if making up to 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:

Let diners assemble their own sandwiches, offering plentiful vegetables (spinach, tomatoes, pickles) for toppings as well as carrots for munching on the side. If it's important to you to have chicken in your soup, prepare the full recipe of chicken or be sure to set some aside (at least 1/2 to 1 cup) for the soup.

### Day Two:

The burritos can be made ahead and frozen. Or if you have leftovers the night you prepare and serve, stash them in the freezer.

### Day Three:

You'll serve grilled sausages (follow package instructions), rice pilaf, and steamed broccoli. We threw in some tomatoes for good measure. Reserve one sausage to put on pizza later in the week. Save leftover rice for the salad on Day Four or to mix it into the soup. Since you bought a big bag of rice, you should be fine and be able to make more if needed.

### Day Four:

Grill the marinated chicken (about 1 pound for 4 people) and serve it over salad with rice and vegetables. In this way, the chicken is a supporting character not the star of the show. It's a great way to stretch your dollar.

### Day Five:

This day is your meatless day. Since it's independent of other menus, feel free to move it around in the line-up.

### Day Six:

Prepare a soup, based on Thursday Night Soup. You may not have everything the recipe calls for. That's okay. Use it as a guide. You should have chicken broth, chicken, rice, carrots, onions, spinach, and possibly broccoli and tomato paste to add in. Season generously and you'll be good to go. Be sure to serve hot rolls on the side. You should have enough ingredients to make more rolls if you gobbled those down earlier in the week.

**Day Seven:**

It's time for pizza! In addition to your dough, sauce, and abundant cheese, you should have some sausage, onion, tomato, spinach, and possibly chicken or broccoli to top four 12-inch pizzas. Freeze leftovers or eat them for lunch tomorrow. Assemble any leftover veg or fruit into a side salad.