

This Week's DINNERS

\$70
OR LESS

LIFEASMOM.COM

Day One

Pasta with [Quick Meat Sauce](#), green salad on the side with [Basic Vinaigrette](#)

Day Two

Skillet-cooked Chicken with [FishMama Spice](#), [Easy Roast Potatoes](#), [Lemon Broccoli](#) and [Peas](#)

Day Three

[Turkey and Black Bean Tacos](#), [Mexican Rice](#), green salad

Day Four

[Crockpot Chili Bean Soup](#), [Italian Sandwich Rolls](#)

Day Five

Grilled Chicken & Vegetables, [Seasoned Rice Pilaf](#)

Day Six

Sandwich/Salad Night with [Italian Sandwich Rolls](#), Veggie Dippers and [Ranch Dressing](#), seasonal fruit on the side

Day Seven

[Cheese Pizza](#), Veggie Dippers with [Ranch Dressing](#) - use up any leftovers from the week as pizza or salad toppings.

Plan #3: Pretty Meaty

This week's meal plan is designed to be easy to prepare and inexpensive to purchase, even though it features a fair amount of meat. It also comes with a \$70 price tag to feed 4 people for seven dinners.

This plan is a mixture of lighter fare that's perfect for summer, but enough protein to keep your meativores happy. While there's a soup in the lineup, it's one to prep in the slow cooker, making for easier, cooler meal prep. If your people balk at the idea of soup in summer, just tell them it's chili.

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.

Many of the meals “build on one another” and share common ingredients. That is to say, you can brown enough ground meat at one time and then use it in different meals throughout the week. Bake a big batch of rolls one night and use half for sandwiches on another night. Any leftover items will be made into a pizza dinner





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 pasta sauce or chili without meat in order to curb costs.

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.

at the end of the week. In this way, you'll reduce waste and save time and effort in the process.

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.

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



However, all the ingredients (except for the yeast) happen to be available at Trader Joe's, a place that doesn't always have everything one might need in a given week.

You don't have to shop there, 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 heavy on spice mixes, so if you don't already have them on hand, you may need to spend a bit more.

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:

[Taco Seasoning Mix](#)

[Jamie's Spice Mix](#)

[FishMama Spice](#)

[Basic Vinaigrette](#)

[Ranch Dressing](#)



[Quick Meat Sauce for Pasta](#)

[Italian Sandwich Rolls](#)

[Turkey and Black Bean Tacos](#)

[Crockpot Chili Bean Soup](#)

[Mexican Rice](#)

[Seasoned Rice Pilaf](#)

[Easy Roast Potatoes](#)

[Lemon Broccoli and Peas](#)

[Basic Pizza Dough](#)

[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

- 24-ounces (1 1/2 pounds) jack or cheddar cheese (target price \$2.99 or less) - You will use this in the tacos as well as on salad/sandwich night and on pizzas. You can also use less to economize. If a block of cheese is cheaper, go for that and shred your own.
- one pound mozzarella cheese for pizza (target price \$3.99 or less)
- 1/4 cup butter (target allowance \$0.50) - you just need a bit for the rice pilaf. You can use oil instead if you like, instead.
- 1/2 cup buttermilk - for ranch dressing

Produce



- 1 onion (target price \$0.69) for pasta sauce 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.
- 12-ounce package broccoli florets (target price \$2.29)
- one 12-ounce package sugar snap peas (target price \$1.99)
- enough lettuce or salad greens for three nights of salad as well as to tuck into sandwiches and tacos (target \$3) - The tacos call for cabbage, but you can use lettuce to make it easier.
- tomatoes for tacos, salads, and sandwiches (target \$1)
- 1 bunch celery (target price \$1.29) - for meat sauce and cut-up veggies.
- 8 ounce package mushrooms (target price \$1.69) - for meat sauce, grilled veg, and/or pizza
- 3 pound bag gold potatoes (target price \$3.99 organic) - use 2 potatoes in the soup and use the rest in the roasted potatoes.
- lemon (target price \$0.39) - to use in broccoli dish and Jamie's Spice Mix, but this can be omitted from the latter if you like. Use any leftover to slice it up and add to iced water.
- seasonal fruit for side dishes - We budgeted \$3 for seasonal fruit.
- seasonal vegetables for grilling (such as baby zucchini, bell peppers, mushrooms, snap peas), as cut-up veggies (carrots, cucumbers, peppers), and to use in the salads. We budgeted \$5 for seasonal veg.
- fresh basil, optional - This is a very pricey item if you don't grow it yourself, so we recommend omitting it for this week or using 1/3 the amount in dried form instead.

Canned/dry goods

- two 15-ounce cans black beans (target price \$0.89)
- 15-ounce can hominy, or corn if you can't find hominy (target price \$0.89) - This is for the chili bean soup.
- 15-ounce can red beans (target price \$0.89) - you can use pintos or black beans if you prefer.
- one 4-ounce can chopped green chiles (target price \$0.79 per can; prices vary) - you will only use half the can, so feel free to omit it or use chopped fresh jalapeños instead which can be cheaper
- 1 to 2 cans tomato paste (target price \$0.89 organic) - This is for the meat sauce and the pizzas. You will need a partial can for the meat sauce, so it's your call if you want one or two cans. The pizza sauce recipe makes a lot, so most families can probably make a smaller batch of pizza sauce and just buy 1 can.

- one to two dozen corn tortillas (target price \$0.99/dozen) or crunchy taco shells
- five-pound bag of flour (target price \$2.99 for unbleached all-purpose) - for homemade Italian rolls and pizza. A bag typically has 16 cups of flour, so you should have a bit leftover. Some of the recipes call for bread flour, whole wheat flour, etc. Feel free to buy one kind and use it all recipes. There may be slight texture differences, but they are negligible, especially if you're trying to stay under budget.
- five 8-ounce cans tomato sauce (target price \$0.45 each)
- 1/2 cup salsa verde - you can use additional tomato sauce instead, if you prefer
- 1 pound pasta (target price \$0.99)
- 1/4 cup orzo pasta, optional - better to omit this to stay under \$70.
- 4 to 6 1/2 cups (1 to 2 quarts) chicken or vegetable broth (target price \$2/quart) - this is for the two rice dishes
- 2-pound bag white rice (target price \$2.00)

Meat department

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

- two 20-ounce packages of ground turkey or 2.5 pounds ground beef or turkey (target price \$2.99/pound) - We're going to skimp a bit on the meat in the sauce recipe, so don't panic that the numbers don't add up. Feel free to get more if you've got big meat eaters at your house.
- 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.

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 and chicken marinade
- 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)
- chili powder (for bean soup and taco seasoning)
- onion powder
- onion flakes
- garlic powder (for spice mixes)
- ground cumin (for enchilada sauce, if making from scratch)
- dried oregano
- sweet paprika
- dried thyme
- parsley flakes (for ranch dressing)
- cayenne pepper
- dried basil (for Quick Meat Sauce, if not using fresh, Jamie's Spice Mix, and FishMama Seasoning Salt)
- 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.
- FishMama's Seasoning Salt contains sea salt, garlic powder, oregano, basil, thyme, paprika, and black pepper.
- Taco Seasoning Mix contains oregano, salt, garlic powder, onion flakes, chili powder, and black pepper.

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, FishMama 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 tacos, pizza and salads if you did not already buy them shredded. Slice some for sandwiches, if desired.
- Chop and slice the onions. Slice enough for sandwiches. Chop 1 cup for the meat sauce and soup.
- Prepare a batch (or two) of the Basic Vinaigrette. You'll use this on salads throughout the week as well as 1/2 cup to marinate the chicken on Day 5. 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. You can marinate 1 1/2 pounds of the chicken now and store it in a zip-top freezer bag in the freezer.
- Prepare salad greens and toppings for the week. Store in airtight containers in the fridge.
- Bake the Italian Sandwich Rolls. You'll want enough for a side dish on Day 4 as well as for sandwiches on Day 6. If your family has big eaters, consider making a double batch, but adjust your grocery list accordingly. Be sure to set aside the required number of buns for each meal. These are good at room temperature for a day or two. If you're baking far in advance of serving, freeze the rolls.
- Slice/chop tomatoes for tacos, sandwiches, and salads. (If you don't want to refrigerate your sliced tomatoes — the flavor can lessen once in the fridge — hold off until right before serving.)
- Prep seasonal vegetables for grilling, veggie dippers, and salads.
- Prepare the seasonal fruit for salads and side dishes.
- Cook all the ground turkey. Reserve half of the meat for the tacos on Day 3. Use one-fourth of it to prepare the Quick Meat Sauce for Day 1. Use the fourth in the crockpot chili bean soup. for Day 4. Cooked meat is good for four days when properly refrigerated. If you don't think you'll serve these meals according to the previous schedule, store the cooled meat in portioned containers in the freezer.
- On Day 2, you'll cook everything fresh, but they are all super easy recipes.

- On Day 5, marinate 1 1/2 pounds of the chicken in 1/2 cup Basic Vinaigrette if you haven't done so already. Cook the chicken and an assortment of grilling vegetables on a hot grill. Serve with the rice pilaf.
- On Day 6 serve any leftover chicken, salads, sides and vegetables as a sandwich/salad bar. Cooked rice goes great in salads.
- 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:

It's pasta night! You can prepare all the components in advance. Booyah! You could even make a double batch of sauce and freeze half for another night. Just be sure to buy extra meat. Note that for this plan we're using a bit less than a full pound of meat. Serve with a green salad on the side.

Day Two:

This meal is super easy to prepare. Start the potatoes in the oven. Heat a bit of oil in a skillet. Season 1 pound of chicken tenders with the FishMama Spice. Saute until cooked through. While the chicken is cooking, start the broccoli and peas in another skillet..

Day Three:

It's time for tacos. Combine the precooked meat with the other taco ingredients. Prepare Mexican Rice as an easy side along with a green salad.

Day Four:

Make supper in the morning! Combine all the soup ingredients in the slow cooker and bake the rolls if you didn't do that earlier in the week. Be sure to reserve enough rolls for sandwich/salad night.

Day Five:

Time to cook out! Marinate the chicken early in the day if you didn't already do that. Once the grill is hot, add the chicken and an assortment of grilling vegetables. Serve with the rice pilaf. If you've got a lot of the Mexican Rice from the other night, you could reheat that and serve that instead.

Day Six:

This is a sandwich/salad night. Keeping in mind that you'll want veggie dippers and ranch dressing for pizza night, prepare a large salad and sandwich bar with any leftovers from the week.

Day Seven:

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