



a custom meal plan

Designed Expressly for: Nina

Work Deets: Work-from-home Sustainability Consultant

Family Deets: Work-from home husband; Two boys, ages 11 and 10

Culinary Pluses: Kids like all forms of meat plus salmon (!) and a few key vegetables: frozen peas and corn. Additionally: "They will eat broccoli, but they won't like it."

Logistical Pluses: Family Dinner ritual – everyone sitting down at the same time every night – is firmly in place.

Culinary Handicaps: Kids do not like soups or things that are "mixed together."

Goals: To shop and plan more efficiently and hopefully expand the meal repertoire.

The Prescription: This should come as no surprise, but the secret to good shopping is good planning. The goal, as always, is to create a *sustainable* system, so don't set the bar too high with dreams of Osso Bucco and 17-ingredient Arroz con Pollo on the night your meeting goes until 7:00. On Sunday, take a look at your schedule for the week. If there is a busy night like that – or even if there isn't – make sure you earmark it a Storebought Dinner Night. (There, don't you feel like some pressure is already off?) Then, apply each of the DALs Main Strategies to the other meals of the week.

Attached, please find your day-by-day game plan.

the schedule

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Make a deposit in the bank. Even just a few minutes on the weekend can make your weeknight meal-making easier. Split up the duties with someone else in the house – none of these tasks take any kind of culinary expertise...particularly the shopping one.

Take 5 minutes: Make a salad dressing. I can't explain the science behind this exactly, but I believe there is a direct correlation between the amount homemade vinaigrette consumed and an elevated quality of life.

Take 15 minutes: Make a chili oil that will grown-up-ify your boring steamed vegetables you give the kids.

Take 25 minutes: Make a Turkey Bolognese, freeze it, and have it with pasta later in the week.

Take an hour: Hit the supermarket, armed with shopping list below. Encourage the kids to come with you so they are *invested* in the meals to come. ("Dude, you picked out the sweet potato fries, so you have to at least try them.")

MONDAY

Strategy: Try Something New...ish

Two options: Salmon with Yogurt-Mustard-Dill Sauce OR Yogurt-Marinated Chicken (note: chicken requires 3 hours of marinating)

TUESDAY

Strategy: Homemade Dinner from the Freezer

Pasta with Bolognese and Greens with homemade vinaigrette.

WEDNESDAY

Strategy: Think about it in the morning!

Ginger-and-soy marinated pork tenderloin with Spicy Broccoli (plain for the boys)

THURSDAY

Strategy: Storebought Dinner from the Freezer

Trader Joes Mandarin Chicken with Rice! Done!

FRIDAY

OUT

the recipes

Basic Turkey Bolognese

Few glugs of olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
Salt and pepper to taste
1 pound ground beef or turkey (if using turkey, dark meat is always preferable)
1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 cup wine (red or white preferably dry) optional
1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes, in their juices
8 shakes of dried oregano
1 pound tubular pasta (penne, rigatoni, ziti)
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese, for serving

Add the oil to a medium saucepan set over medium-low heat. Add onion, garlic, pepper flakes, and salt and pepper and cook for about 2 minutes, until onion is slightly wilted.

Push everything to one side of the pot, turn up heat slightly, and add the ground meat, breaking it up with a fork as it browns. Once most of the pink is gone, stir it together with onion mixture.

Add the tomato paste, fennel seeds, sugar, and wine (if using) and stir everything together. Raise the heat to medium-high and cook until most of the liquid has been absorbed, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and oregano. Bring the sauce to a boil and then turn heat to low and simmer uncovered for at least 30 minutes and up to 1 hour.

If you are freezing for later, let the sauce cool at this point and then ladle it into a freezer bag. If you are not freezing for later, while the sauce is simmering (or reheating), prepare the pasta according to package directions. Toss the drained pasta with sauce and serve in bowls topped with freshly grated Parmesan.

Homemade Vinaigrette

In a jar, combine all of the following ingredients and shake vigorously:

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon sugar or a squeeze of honey
squeeze of lemon
1/2 teaspoon salt and freshly ground pepper
Chopped herbs (chives, parsley, dill, thyme, whatever you've got)
1/2 cup good olive oil

Chili Oil with Garlic and Mint

This recipe is from my friend Christine – who got it from Russell Moore at Camino in Oakland. It elevates just about everything (eggs, grilled meats, fish) but this week we'll probably just use it for the broccoli. Crush two medium-hot dried chili peppers into small pieces. Place in bowl and add just enough hot water to cover. Let sit until hydrated, about 10 minutes. Add 1 clove garlic, pounded into a paste, and ¼ cup chopped mint leaves. Slowly stir in ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil. Season to taste. Let sit a few hours before using.

Salmon with Yogurt-Mustard Dill Sauce

Sprinkle a 1 1/4-pound salmon filet with salt and pepper. Roast in a foil-lined baking dish in 400°F oven for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the following in a small bowl: 1/2 cup plain yogurt, 2 heaping teaspoons mustard (preferably Dijon), 1 tablespoon chopped dill, squeeze of lemon, salt and pepper.

Serve with buttered and salted frozen peas and a baguette.

Yogurt-marinated Chicken

Pound five or six medium boneless chicken breasts (about 1 ½ pounds) between sheets of wax paper until thin. (If you don't have a meat mallet, just use a hammer.) Halve the breasts if they spread out too much and are too unwieldy.

In a bowl, whisk together: ¾ cup plain yogurt, 1 minced clove garlic, 1 roughly chopped onion, juice from one juicy lime, 1 good squeeze of honey, 1 tablespoon olive oil, 1 tablespoon garam masala (or curry powder), handful of cilantro (rinsed and torn with fingers) salt and pepper.

Pour marinade into Ziploc storage bag, drop in chicken, mush around until coated, and seal. Chill in the refrigerator for a minimum of 3 hours.

Broil (or grill) about 4 minutes a side until flesh is firm but not rock hard.

Serve with sweet potato fries and your choice of frozen peas or corn. (You want *something* on the plate to look familiar.)

Soy-ginger pork tenderloin

This recipe is from *Everyday Food's* awesome new Youtube series. Please cut and paste this URL into your browser if you need more convincing of how freaking easy it is: <http://ow.ly/90vAM>

In the morning, make your marinade by whisking together the following ingredients:

1 teaspoon ginger
squeeze of lime
¼ cup rice vinegar (unseasoned)
¼ cup soy sauce
1 tablespoon neutral oil (vegetable, canola, grapeseed)

Add 1 pork tenderloin to the marinade, place in fridge, and go to work.

During the day: Take note of why you feel so good about yourself today – dinner is halfway finished!

When you walk in the door, steam some broccoli. Remove your special chili oil -- the one you made on the weekend -- from the fridge.

Broil pork loin 14 minutes, flipping once about half way through. It's done when the flesh feels firm, but not rock hard.

Serve pork loin with steamed broccoli. Try to convince the kids to try a drizzle of spicy oil on their florets.



shopping list

This is everything you need to make dinner this week. I'm including ingredients for both the salmon and the yogurt-marinated chicken even though I gave a choice of one or the other on Monday. If you decide you want to make the chicken, omit the salmon from the ingredient list here. If you decide to make the salmon, buy the chicken anyway and keep it in the freezer for next week. Don't be put off by how long the list looks. Most of what you see are pantry staples – a few of which you have already -- that will last through next week and the week after that, too. You can get a sense of how short and sweet the shop will be next week by pretending the “Staples” list doesn't exist.

Staples

Olive oil
Salt and pepper
Neutral oil (canola, vegetable, grapeseed)
Soy sauce
Rice vinegar (unseasoned)
Red wine vinegar
Dijon mustard
Honey
Red pepper flakes
Garam masala (look for McCormick's) or curry powder
Dried chili peppers (2)
Dried oregano
Small can tomato paste
1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes
Tubular pasta (penne, ziti, rigatoni)
Brown or white rice (if you are at Trader Joe's by all means pick up the frozen prepared basmati)
Sugar
Red wine (optional)

Freezer

Frozen peas
Frozen corn
Sweet potato fries
Trader Joe's Mandarin Chicken & Rice

Produce

2 small onions
2 lemons
2 limes
Fresh herbs: dill, cilantro, mint
Small knob of ginger
Broccoli
Bag of Greens

Meat & Fish

1 lb ground beef or turkey
1 ½ pounds chicken breasts
1 ¼ pound salmon filet

Dairy

Parmesan
large container plain yogurt

Other

Baguette