

Step-by-Step Guide to Once a Month Cooking

by Candace Anderson

Does the thought of making thirty meals in one day sound beyond impossible? Before you write off once-a-month-cooking as something only Martha Stewart wanna-bes can manage, let's break it down step-by-step so you can visualize the whole process. Once you see how easy it is, you will have your freezer filled with ready-to-serve meals in no time.

The next time you panic because it is 6:00 and you have no idea what is for dinner, just remember the stack of meals you have in the freezer; your stress will melt like butter. Ask anyone who loves once a month cooking (a.k.a. OAMC or freezer cooking), and they will tell you it is the cure for the "what's for dinner" dilemma.

Tip - If one big cooking day is too daunting, start with baby steps. Cook one week's worth of meals and call it once-a-week-cooking. The idea is to simplify your life, not complicate it.

The secret to once-a-month-cooking is in the planning; the more you plan, the better prepared you will be. Planning includes planning your menu, your grocery list, and most importantly your time. Let's look at the basic steps:

1. Decide on a day.

Choose your day carefully

- it should be a day with minimal interruptions and commitments; this is not a day you can easily share with other activities. If possible, have things planned for the kids or have a friend take them for the day. If you are cooking in smaller batches (think once-a-week-cooking), consider cooking at night when your house is quiet.

An entire day is best but not always possible.

2. Check what is on sale.

When you check the local groceries stores for what is on sale, you are working towards saving money.

Plan your meals around the things you can get the cheapest.

Here are some

general guidelines you can use for buying meat. If you search, chicken breasts can almost always be found for under \$2.00 per pound; and whole chickens, drumsticks, and thighs can be found for under \$1.00 per pound. For ground beef, try not to pay more than \$1.50 per pound although it is getting harder and harder to buy good quality for that price.

3. Meal Planning.

I bought, at an office supply store, a large dry erase refrigerator

magnet that is a calendar. On this calendar I write down the meal we will be eating each day of the month. Other ideas are to use a calendar or a sheet

of paper to plan your meals. In addition, I have designed 2 forms for you. Feel free to use these forms and modify them to fit

your needs. I designed them in Word to make them easy to modify.

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Monthly Calendar of Meals

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Weekly Meal Schedule

Do you need recipes? Once a Month Cooking World has my favorite recipes that I use in my once a month cooking. And please - if you have a once a month cooking recipe to share, please post it to our website.

Tip - Does your family have a favorite recipe? Instead of making one batch - make 3!

4. Plan your Grocery List.

Go through your recipes and list the ingredients and quantities you need to buy.

Tip - Don't forget the freezer bags, freezer wrap and aluminum foil!

5. Grocery Shopping.

Do your grocery shopping on a different day than your cooking day. Cooking day has enough going on without adding to it. Another plus, if you do your shopping on a different day, you'll have time to visit a variety of stores to get the best prices.

6. Cook Your Meals.

- Know your recipes:
Before you start cooking, familiarize yourself with your recipes. Make sure you fully understand each one. Now is the time to settle any questions you may have.

- Establish Cooking Order:
If you have a crock pot recipe, start that first. Do you have whole chickens to cook and de-bone? They should be started in the beginning as well.

- Combine Steps: You will save a great deal of time if you do like tasks together. For example, how much chopped onion do you need? Chop them all at once and divide them up. How many pounds of browned ground beef do you need? Save a pan and time by browning them together.

- Begin Cooking: Put on a comfy pair of shoes, your favorite tunes and start cooking. As you finish each meal, set it aside to fully cool.

7. Freeze your Meals.

Once your meals are cool, you are ready to freeze them. Here are some common methods for freezing meals:

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Freezer Bags - This method is used primarily to freeze meals that have a lot of liquid. The bags spread out flat on the freezer shelves and they stack up nicely on top of each other. It is very efficient use of freezer space. Remember to remove as much air as possible from the bag to prevent freezer burn.

Tip: Label all meals.

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Name of the meal,
-
Cooking instructions,
-
Date it was frozen.

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Foil and Plastic Wrap - This method is used to freeze dishes that are cooked in a particular pan such as meatloaf or lasagna. It is a brilliant method because you don't tie up all your baking dishes in the freezer and your food fits perfectly into the baking dish when it is time to cook. It is very important you wait until your meals have cooled down before wrapping.

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Begin by lining your pan with foil .
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Next put a layer of plastic wrap on top of the foil.
Make sure that you use enough wrap to cover over the entire top of the dish.
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Place your food into the dish directly on top of the wrap.
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Seal all the foil and wrap securely; do not allow any air to get to the food.
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Place the food, in the dish, into the freezer. Leave it in there for a couple of hours - just until the food is frozen enough to hold the shape of the dish.

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Remove the dish from your freezer and leave the food in the freezer.

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When you are ready to cook, thaw the food slightly, remove the foil and plastic wrap and place the food back in the dish to finish thawing.

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Vacuum Sealer - These are great because they help to protect your food from freezer burn allowing the food to stay really fresh tasting.

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Any disposable, or reusable containers that are for the freezer.

Want to talk about OAMC with other moms? We have a great message board at our sister site - Mom.net. You can get lots of help and support there! Visit [the message board](#).

Frugal