

Getting Started with Your Once-A-Month Cooking Menu Sampler

This free, downloadable one-week sampler of the Once-A-Month Cooking technique will bring you the freedom and satisfaction of less hectic, more economical family meals. It will help you de-stress over having company because you'll have the entrée already on hand.

After you've sampled this technique, if you want to expand its value for your family, you'll find several month and two-week menus in the books *Once-A-Month Cooking* and *Once-A-Month Cooking Family Favorites* at <http://amzn.to/98TmVV>. These books contain the ultimate do-ahead dinner method, and include such helps as a kitchen equipment list, a freezing guide, a measurement conversion table, and even table conversation starters.

Here are some tips to get you started with your menu sampler:

- Set aside shopping time and cooking time; it's best, for your own energy, to shop one day or evening, and cook the next day. This cycle will take you about 3 hours to prepare by yourself: less time if you cook with a friend.
- Read through the cycle to acquaint yourself with the flow and the recipes you'll be preparing.
- Look at the pantry list provided and transfer any items you don't have to the shopping list.
- After you shop, prepare for cooking: Leave out on the counter items that don't need refrigeration. Get out the spices and dry ingredients on the pantry list. Clear the counter of décor and unnecessary items.
- Label the freezer containers that you'll use for each entrée (see bottom of Pantry List).
- Start cooking, using the Assembly Order to move you smoothly through the menu cycle.
- As you finish preparing a couple of entrees, squeeze the air out of the freezer bags, seal them, and put them into the freezer.

Once-A-Month Cooking One Week Menu Sampler 05

Pantry List

Apple cider vinegar (2 T)
 Black peppercorns (6)
 Brown sugar, light (2/3 cup)
 Butter (3 T, 1/4 cup)
 Catsup (1/2 cup)
 Cayenne pepper (3/4 tsp)
 Chives, snipped (1 T)
 Cloves, whole (2)
 Cumin, ground (1 tsp)
 Coffee (1-1/2 cups brewed)
 Coriander, ground (1/4 tsp)
 Crushed red pepper flakes (1/8 tsp)
 Curry powder (1 tsp)
 Dijon mustard (1 T)
 Dill, dried (1 T)
 Olive oil (4 T)
 Oregano leaves, dried (3/4 tsp)
 Minced garlic (4 tsp)
 Minced ginger (1 tsp)
 Molasses (1/4 cup)
 Pepper
 Salt
 Soy sauce (1/4 cup)
 Thyme (1 tsp)
 Worcestershire sauce (1 tsp)
 Chicken bouillon cube (1)

Freezing Containers Needed

- Tilapia with Greens: 1 1-gallon and 1 1-quart Ziploc freezer bags
- Pumpkin Bisque: 1 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bag
- Coffee Molasses Pork: 1 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bag
- Striped Meat Loaf: 1 loaf pan; heavy-duty aluminum foil
- Slow Cooker Beer Corned Beef: 1 1-quart Ziploc freezer bags
- Chile Verde: 1 1-gallon and 1 1-quart Ziploc freezer bag
- Chicken Packets: 2 1-quart Ziploc freezer bags

Totals: 4 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bags, 5 1-quart Ziploc freezer bags, 1 loaf pan, heavy aluminum foil

Once-A-Month Cooking One Week Menu Sampler 05

Grocery List

Meat, Poultry and Seafood

- 4 frozen tilapia fillets*
- 2 pound boneless pork roast
- 2 pounds ground beef
- 3 pound cured corned beef brisket
- 1-3/4 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts

Canned Goods

- 3 14.5-ounce cans chicken broth
- 1 14.5-ounce can beef broth*
- 1 29-ounce can pumpkin puree
- 1 15-ounce can pinto beans
- 1 4-ounce can chopped green chilies
- 1 12-ounce jar salsa*

Grain, Pasta and Rice

- 1 dozen corn tortillas*

Dairy

- 1 pint half and half (1 cup)*
- 8 ounces shredded Mozzarella cheese
- 8 ounces grated Monterey Jack cheese*
- 3 ounces cream cheese
- Milk (2 T)
- 2 packages refrigerated crescent rolls*

Produce

- 2 medium onions (1 cup, 1 cup, 1 cup, 2/3 cup)
- 1 Green bell pepper
- 1 Red bell pepper (1 cup)
- 2 medium carrots (1 cup)
- 3 medium stalks celery (1 cup)

Frozen Foods

- 1 10-ounce bag of frozen chopped spinach

Misc.

- 1 package dried onion soup mix
- 1 12-ounce bottle stout beer*
- Seasoned croutons (1/2 cups crushed)*

Once-A-Month Cooking One Week Menu Sampler 05

Assembly Order

Chop and set aside in bowls:

- 2 onions
- 2 medium carrots
- 3 medium stalks celery

Coarsely chop

- 1 green bell pepper

Finely chop

- 1 cup red bell pepper
- 1 tablespoon green onions and tops

Crush ½ cup seasoned crouton crumbs

Brew 2 cups of strong coffee, unless you have leftover coffee to use.

Using kitchen shears, cut all the chicken into 1-inch cubes and cook on stovetop in boiling water until cubes are no longer pink in the center. Drain and cool.

While the chicken is cooking, prepare the Tilapia with Greens, label and freeze.

Prepare the Striped Meat Loaf, label and freeze.

Prepare the Chile Verde, label and freeze.

Prepare the Chicken Packets, label and freeze.

Prepare the Pumpkin Bisque, label and freeze.

Prepare the Coffee Molasses Pork, label and freeze.

Prepare the Slow Cooker Beer Corned Beef, label and freeze.

Do a kitchen happy dance as you clean up the kitchen!

Once-A-Month Cooking One Week Menu Sample 05

Recipes

Tilapia with Greens

1 10-ounce bag of frozen, chopped spinach
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 green bell pepper, chopped coarsely
1 teaspoon thyme
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
2 Tablespoons water

4 frozen tilapia fillets*
2 tablespoons olive oil*
1 lemon*

Thaw the spinach in the microwave and squeeze it dry. Meanwhile, sauté onion, garlic, and green pepper in 2 tablespoons olive oil until tender, about 3 minutes. Add spinach, thyme, salt and pepper and simmer 5 minutes. Cool. Pour into freezer bag, label and freeze. Keep tilapia frozen in a gallon bag attached to the bag of vegetables. Store lemon in refrigerator.

To serve, thaw both the veggies and fish. Wrap the fish fillets with paper towels and pat to thoroughly remove liquid. Heat skillet on low and add 2 tablespoons olive oil. Place vegetable in bottom of skillet. Heat vegetables through and add 3 tablespoons of water. Place fish on veggies and cover. Cook on low heat until fish is cooked through, about 5 minutes or until flakes easily with a fork. Garnish with lemon wedges.

Summary of Processes: Chop 1 cup onion; coarsely chop 1 green bell pepper
Freeze in: 1-quart Ziploc freezer bag; 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bag

Makes 4 servings

Pumpkin Bisque

3 tablespoons butter
1 cup chopped onion
½ teaspoon minced garlic
1 teaspoon curry powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground coriander
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
3 cups chicken broth
1 29-ounce can pumpkin puree

1 cup half and half*

Sauté onion and garlic in butter until soft. Add spices and cook for 1 minute. Stir in broth and simmer 5 minutes. Add pumpkin and mix well. Blend if desired. Pour into 1-gallon bag, label and freeze. Refrigerate the half and half.

To serve, thaw the soup. Place in pan and heat on low for 20 minutes. Add half and half and stir well.

Summary of Processes: Chop 1 cup onion
Freeze in: 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bag

Makes 6 servings

Coffee Molasses Pork

2 pounds boneless pork roast
1-1/2 cups strong coffee
1/4 cup molasses
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/4 cup soy sauce
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon minced ginger

1 14.5-ounce can chicken broth*

Brew 2 cups of strong coffee (or use leftover from morning). Place the pork roast in a 1-gallon freezer bag. Combine the remaining ingredients except chicken broth in a small mixing bowl, and pour over the roast in the freezer bag. Label and freeze. Mark the chicken broth label and store it in the pantry.

To serve, thaw the ingredients. Pour into Crockpot, add the chicken broth, and cook on low for 8-10 hours.

Freeze in: 1 1-gallon Ziploc freezer bag

Makes 4-5 servings

Striped Meat Loaf

2 pounds ground beef
¼ cup dried onion soup mix
½ teaspoon minced garlic
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 cup finely chopped red bell pepper
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Mix ground beef with soup mix, minced garlic, Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper. Divide into three portions. Press one portion into the bottom of a loaf pan. Sprinkle red pepper over meat. Press second portion of meat over peppers. Sprinkle cheese over meat then top with third portion of meat. Cover with heavy-duty aluminum foil, label and freeze.

To serve, thaw meat and place, covered, in preheated oven at 325 degrees. After an hour, remove the foil and cook 30 minutes more, or until meat thermometer reads 160 degrees. Check when it's close to time to see that the meatloaf is cooked through but not over-cooking and drying out. Drain carefully or blot with paper towel to remove grease.

Summary of Processes: Finely chop 1 cup red pepper
Freeze in: Loaf pan; heavy-duty aluminum foil

Makes 6 servings

Slow Cooker Beer Corned Beef

1 3-pound cured corned beef brisket
1 cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped carrot
1 cup chopped celery
2/3 cup light brown sugar
½ cup catsup
1 tablespoon dried dill
6 black peppercorns
2 whole cloves

1 14-1/2-ounce can beef broth*
1 12-ounce bottle stout beer*

To the corned beef packaging attach a 1-quart Ziploc bag holding the veggies and spices. Label and freeze. Store the can of beef broth in the pantry and the beer in the fridge.

To serve, thaw both bags. Rinse the spices from the corned beef and pat it down. Place the meat in a slow cooker. Add ingredients from the veggie bag and pour beef broth and beer over all. Cook on high for 8 hours or until meat is tender. Remove beef and cut diagonally.

Summary of processes: Rinse corned beef; chop 1 cup onion, 1 cup carrots, 1 cup celery.

Freeze in: Corned beef packaging; 1 gallon Ziploc freezer bag

Makes 6 servings

Chile Verde

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cooked and cubed
1 15-ounce can pinto beans, drained
1 4-ounce can chopped green chilies
1 teaspoon ground cumin
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon dried oregano leaves
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 cup water
1 chicken bouillon cube
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon minced garlic
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup chopped onion

1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese*
1 dozen corn tortillas*
1 12-ounce jar salsa*

Combine all ingredients except cheese, tortillas, and salsa in a medium saucepan and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat and simmer about 20 minutes. Cool and freeze in a gallon freezer bag, with the cheese attached in a 1-quart freezer bag. Store the corn tortillas and the salsa in the fridge.

To serve, thaw and heat the chile. Bring it to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Serve on warmed corn tortillas and pass the grated cheese and salsa.

Summary of Processes: Cut chicken breasts into 1-inch cubes. Chop $\frac{2}{3}$ cup onion

Freeze in: 1 1-gallon and 1 1-quart Ziploc freezer bag

Makes 4 servings

Chicken Packets

2 cups cooked, chopped chicken
3 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 tablespoon snipped chives
2 tablespoons milk (optional)
Salt to taste

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup crushed, seasoned crouton crumbs*
2 packages refrigerated crescent rolls*
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup melted butter*

Mix chicken, cream cheese, chives, milk, and salt in a medium bowl (mixing with hands works best) to make filling and store in a 1-quart freezer bag. Put crouton crumbs in another 1-quart bag, attach it to bag of chicken filling, and freeze them both. Refrigerate crescent rolls.

To prepare for serving, thaw chicken mixture. Unroll crescent rolls. Each tube will contain 4 rectangles of dough with a diagonal perforation. Press dough along each perforation so that the rectangle halves will not separate. Place about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of chicken mixture into the center of each rectangle. Fold dough over the filling and pinch the edges to seal tightly. Dip each packet in melted butter and coat with crouton crumbs. Place packets on a baking sheet.

Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 20 minutes or until golden brown.

Summary of Processes: Cube 2 cups chicken
Freeze in: 2 1-quart Ziploc freezer bags

Makes 8 packets, 4 to 6 servings