

- Speaker 1: [01:19](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast, so I have tried and tried you guys. I bought the eBooks and the plans and the fancy pins and schedules. I've had the best of intentions, but no matter how hard I try, I just can't stick to a meal planning schedule. Yet, even so I'd say we still eat pretty darn good most days, even in the midst of our very full life complete with homeschooling and homesteading and running our businesses.
- Speaker 1: [02:00](#) In today's episode, I'll be sharing my very best tips for creating a weekly menu when you are not a meal planner. I'm your host Jill winger and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel a little bit disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by learning how to grow and prepare your own food and master old fashioned skills.
- Speaker 1: [02:36](#) I consider myself a pretty organized person. I have a trusty paper planner that usually looks like it's been through world war three by the end of the year. I use it religiously and I'm very well acquainted with spreadsheets and Google drive and all the little ways to organize a life. In fact, anyone I've worked with in the past on different projects has always complimented me on my timely organized manner. So for the life of me, I do not understand why I can't make meal planning stick, but my friend, I just can't do it. Even after 10 years of being a mom and learning how to cook much, much better than I could at the beginning of the journey and incorporating all this amazing homegrown food, I just don't meal plan. Now, that being said, healthy from scratch, food is still very much a priority for me. And considering that we live way far away from any sort of fast food delivery or take out options, it's all on me to make it happen. So over the years in my lack of meal planning, this, I've come up with some strategies that helped me keep good food on the table, even with our crazy life and not loving to meal plan. Okay. All right.
- Speaker 1: [04:17](#) So number one, buy your staples in bulk. So I love to batch things. I batch everything in my life because I find that if I can devote concentrated time to an activity and get a large quantity of it done or purchased or completed, it just saves time in the long run. And there've been some interesting studies like in the world of productivity, there's an interesting studies that highlight how much time we waste when we switched from activity to activity. Like our brain has a little bit of a transition period there. So when we switch, you know, every 15 minutes we get distracted. Like it takes us a while to get back into what we were doing. And that's a little bit of a tangent because we're talking about grocery shopping here, but it supports this

concept of doing things in bulk or batches. So that's how I approach grocery shopping.

Speaker 1: [05:20](#) If I have to go to the grocery store every single time I need, potatoes or cheese or flour, like that's going to totally disrupt my life. So I buy in bulk. I make sure that we always have plenty of staples on hand. Now staples are going to look a little bit different for each person. It just depends on what your family eats. The most of for us staples consist of unbleached all purpose flour, rolled oats, lots of good meat. And by good I mean you know organic locally raised for us it's all meat that we've grown here on the homestead and thankfully that's pretty easy to keep in stock because you know we butcher a beef at a time or a pig at a time and we usually have plenty. So the freezer is all the always full of good meat. We also like to keep dry pasta in stock, plenty of tomato sauce, usually home canned, blocks of cheddar cheese because let's face it, it's good on anything and it's a good snack in a pinch.

Speaker 1: [06:36](#) I do lots of homemade broth. I usually make a gallon at a time and I'll either keep it in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks or freeze it or can it. And then of course a rotation of different fruits and vegetables, which really depends on the season, what's in the garden. Although my standbys would be potatoes, onions and garlic, like no matter what time of year it is, I always have some of those in the pantry. Now that's not the extent of everything that's in my pantry and of course there's a few other things. There's lots of olive oil and coconut oil, herbs and spices, but I kind of know what it takes for me to cook most meals, especially any of my quick meals and I just make sure those are always on hand. That ensures that I don't have to have too much forethought to get a good variety of meals on the table and I'm not going to have to run to the store last minute.

Speaker 1: [07:40](#) I like to stock up at Costco. We have a Costco that's about an hour and a half away and I go there about once a month, so we'll buy a lot of the non-perishable staples there. I also will buy things from thrive market, which is an online retailer. It's kind of a cross between Amazon and whole foods and I'll drop a link to them in the show notes. I order from them about once a month and I'll get a whole bunch of herbs and spices at one time or any sort of organic or natural foods that I have a hard time finding locally. That's my source for those. Also on the topic of batching, I've recently ventured into the world of freezer cooking, which is not something I've really done before, but it really is working out well. Thus far. We did about 27 freezer meals in less than five hours last Friday.

- Speaker 1: [08:42](#) They're in my freezer, they're ready to go on those days when supper sneaks up on me. I don't know how that happens, but it does. And I loved the process and I'm really excited to have those, so I will be doing a future podcast episode on what that freezer cooking day entailed and how I made it simpler. But it's that idea of batching anytime you can make double and freeze it or buy a little extra so you don't have to go to the store next week, that's going to save you a ton of time and headache in the long run. Okay. Tip number two have a repertoire of fallback meals is what I call them. So usually in the morning by breakfast, I try to have an idea of what I'm going to make that evening. Every so often the day will get away from me and it will be two o'clock in the afternoon.
- Speaker 1: [09:39](#) And I remember, Oh Hey, everybody's going to want to eat tonight. It's amazing how that works. So I have a collection of recipes that are still decent. You know, they're not junk food or frozen pizza, but I can throw them together pretty darn quick without a lot of forethought or special shopping. Again, now this is going to differ depending on your family's diet and preferences. Here are my fallback meals and maybe this will get your wheels turning. So tacos are my number one. If it ever gets late in the day, we're hungry and I don't know what to make. Tacos are always there to save the day. I usually have some sort of tortilla in the refrigerator of some sort. And if we don't, I can either make up a batch real quick because it doesn't take long to make tortillas or we can just put some taco meat over corn chips and make very simple nachos with some cheese, some salsa or whatever I have in the refrigerator.
- Speaker 1: [10:44](#) Another standby for me is spaghetti. I usually have plenty of home canned tomato sauce in the pantry. I can quickly defrost a couple of pounds of ground beef and add some herbs, cook up some of those dry spaghetti noodles, call it good. That's also a good company meal. If someone shows up close to supper time, you need a nice meal to feed them. If you have some fresh salad greens, even better.
- Speaker 1: [11:15](#) Another one we love is breakfast for dinner. Eggs are something that we usually have in quantity, whether I buy them in bulk or I have them from the chickens. So we'll do scrambled eggs, bacon or maybe sausage patties. We can also usually put together breakfast burritos or breakfast burrito bowls without a lot of forethought and those just would be scrambled eggs, some fried potatoes, cause I always have potatoes. And then whatever sort of meat, breakfast meat, I might have a, whether that's bacon or maybe some bulk browned sausage that seasoned, uh, or some leftover ham. We cook all that together.

You can put it in a tortilla or just eat it in a bowl. That's satisfying. It's filling, doesn't take a lot of prep time.

Speaker 1: [12:07](#) And finally, my other category of fallback meals would be skillet pasta dishes. So there's lots of ideas for these on Pinterest. Some of them contain not my favorite ingredients, but you can get creative with substituting. But usually this entails starting with a pound or two of ground beef. Browning, it with some onions and spices, adding in a pound of dry pasta, water, tomato sauce, and then cooking the pasta right in the pan with the meat. It's satisfying. It's filling, it's not fancy, but my kids and husband alike love the pasta meals. It's one pot and it's just a good quick standby.

Speaker 1: [12:54](#) So you might've noticed as I'm listing these out, that I used some pre-made ingredients in my cheater meals. Things like tortillas that are store-bought or chips from Costco or dry pasta. And to me, you know, you have to decide what you're going to compromise on and what you're not. For us, some store bought potato chips or store bought corn chips and the occasional package of dry pasta is a acceptable compromise. Do I know how to make all those things from scratch? You bet. And when I'm in the mood I can make the most amazing fresh pasta from scratch, but on a busy week night and if I can substitute in the dry pasta instead, it just takes that meal from more of a slow cooked masterpiece into a quick option and it's totally acceptable to do that when you're in a pinch.

Speaker 1: [13:55](#) Okay. Tip number three, I suggest roughing in a weekly schedule based around the meat in your freezer. So I know you're probably like, wait a second, you said you don't meal plan. So I don't meal plan in the sense that I have all three meals a day planned out. Or I know what I'm going to have for two or three weeks out or sometimes I don't even know we're having, actually don't even know we're having tomorrow night for supper. But what I will do sometimes two to three days in advance, I'll walk out to the freezer and I will see what I have, what I need to use up, what is in, you know, maybe getting older that needs to be eaten or we have a lot of, and I'll think, what can I make with this? So the last two nights to the freezer to get, we have last night ground beef for tacos.

Speaker 1: [14:46](#) So last night I realized I don't have a lot of spare ribs from a hog that we broached it a year or two ago. So I decided to have ribs for tonight. I have barbecue sauce that I had made and frozen. I pulled that out last night and let it defrost. This morning I threw the ribs in the crockpot with the barbecue sauce and some other seasonings called it good. And sometimes I'll do that for

two to three nights out. It's one trip to the freezer. I'll bring in an armful of packages of meat that need to be eaten up. And that determines what we're having for a couple of nights out. Another area where this idea of using what you have really comes in handy is if you have a garden. So for us, when the garden is in full bloom, I will go out and see what needs harvested immediately and then craft my menu planning around that.

Speaker 1: [15:36](#)

So if we have cabbage that needs to be used up, I will plan on making some Parmesan cabbage steaks recipes in my cookbook in case you're wondering, or we'll do some sort of beef and cabbage skillet meal. The other night we had a chard and a eggs, cause I have a whole bunch of chard out there. So I saute that up with some butter and garlic and crack the eggs in a pot, put some goat cheese in there. It was delicious. Beets, you know, you gotta use up the beets when they're fresh or if you have a lot of potatoes. So let the garden in the freezer help you with your planning. And even if you don't plan a week out, nobody says you have to do that. You just plan a couple days out or go two to three day chunks. That's going to greatly simplify your calendar and give you a little more peace of mind.

Speaker 1: [16:29](#)

All right? Tip number four is to let yourself have a cheater night at least once a week. So for us, our tradition is to have popcorn that we make it ourselves, right? We don't, we have a worldly pot machine. We make it with good old fashioned butter and salt, no microwave packages. But we do that once a week, every Sunday night. We also usually have some sort of smoothie with berries and spinach or whatever to go with it. And I love popcorn and smoothie night because I don't have to worry about cooking and Christian, my husband usually is the one who spearheads the popcorn making and the kids help him. And I just know that I have one day off. I don't have to worry about anything fancy and everybody looks forward to popcorn night. Because even if you love to cook and home grown from scratch, meals are your thing. We all need a break sometimes.

Speaker 1: [17:29](#)

Okay. And my last tip, tip number five would be to maximize your leftovers. So I never ever menu plan out lunches, believe it or not. I just don't have the bandwidth to do that. So what I do instead is I always try to have plenty of leftovers from the night before that we can have for lunch. Does the family always love the leftovers? No, they do not. But I usually just tell my children they have to eat it anyway. That doesn't work so great with husbands. But you can do that with kids most of the time, or at least, you know, I can eat it for leftovers and the kids can have something else. We also do like, let's say on the days we have

no leftovers in the fridge, it's completely bare. There are a few lunch standbys. One thing I'll do if we're completely out of food is I will cook up some dry beans in my instant pot with some salt and some garlic.

Speaker 1: [18:35](#) And then the kids love those over chips or just like a bowl of beans with some cheese and some sour cream. It's got a lot of protein and I feel good about them eating it. It's not junk food. So that's a cheater idea. Another thing that I will do on occasion is get some of the natural lunch meat from Costco. This is a little bit of a compromise food. This is not something I would say you want to eat every day of your life, but I get a couple packages of that. I keep it in the freezer. It's also nice if we're having a bunch of people over for like a Workday. Occasionally we have people helping us build things. You know what? I need to do a big lunch for a lot of people and have sandwiches. I have that lunch meat ready to go, whether I'm doing homemade bread or store-bought bread.

Speaker 1: [19:21](#) It just gives me a little bit of a backup. So I'm not having a heart attack when someone stops by for lunch. So those are my five tips. I hope that gave you some encouragement and some ideas. I wholeheartedly believe that you can feed your family good homegrown from scratch food without having to kill yourself or menu plan like it crazy person. And remember homestead cooking is about progress, not perfection. Sometimes you'll have that perfect homegrown homemade supper that you masterfully crafted piece by piece and sometimes you'll have nachos with corn chips from Costco that my friend is balance.

Speaker 1: [20:15](#) So if you are falling in love with the idea of an old fashioned intentional kitchen full of nourishing food and rich memories, you will love my heritage kitchen handbook. I packed this mini ebook full of my very best tricks for cooking and eating like a farmer. Even if you live in the city, grab it for free at heritagekitchenhandbook.com Cheese making is one of those things that kind of makes you feel like a home setting rock star. It's just magical to transform an ingredient as simple as milk into all sorts of amazing things like butter and ricotta and cream cheese. The biggest issue I ran into when I was trying to start making these things was finding the right equipment and cultures because let's face it, they don't exactly sell mesophilic starter culture at your local grocery store. One of my favorite resources for home dairy projects is new England cheese making supply company. They have everything you need to turn milk into magical things and I have put together a downloadable quick start guide that you can grab for free over at

theprairiehomestead.com/cheese I included my favorite recipes in there, a list of the cheese cultures that I like best and a little discount code to save you some cash on your order. You can grab it theprairiehomestead.com/cheese

Speaker 1:

[21:54](#)

And that's it. Thank you for listening and if you have a minute I would be so honored if you'd pop over, hit subscribe and leave a quick review to let other homesteaders know that you found this podcast helpful. I will chat with you next time on the old fashioned on purpose podcast.