

welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcasts. So here's my deep dark confession for the day. I have never been much of a fan of freezer meals. I've always really associated them with those bland, mushy casseroles that are just not tasty. And I never really wanted to make them myself, especially since I kind of had this high horse attitude that, hey, I'm home, I'm a homesteader and I'll just make it fresh.

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However, I have been eating my words just a little bit here lately, as our kids are growing, they're in more activities, I'm in the car more than I have been in the past, so I decided that I had probably better give freezer meals a second look now, considering I may go big or go home type of person.

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My very first freezer meal Cooking day involved making 27 meals in less than five hours. I learned a few things in the process, and I'll share them with you in today's episode. I'm your host, Jill Winger, and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills.

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Our life is getting increasingly more complex and I can't help but laugh when I think back to the days when I had one baby and I was staying at home all the time and I thought my life was so overwhelmingly complicated. Yeah, let's just say that was barely scratching the surface. So now we have three kids. Our oldest is in 4-H, now we are home schooling, two of them. The Third Born is not quite old enough for home school, but we're also doing homeschool co op every Thursday, which is a great opportunity, but it means we are in town all day long.

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So as we've been gearing up for the school year, I've been like looking at the Thursdays on the calendar, and I feel like this sense of foreboding of Oh, my gosh, here they come. What am I gonna do? How am I gonna keep up? It's gonna completely shift our entire weekly schedule. So the first thing, of course, that pops into my mind because I like food, is what are we gonna eat on Thursdays like I can get a crock pot meal in, but we usually have to leave the house really early, and sometimes the Crock Pot meals take a little prep, and I was getting stressed out about it until I decided to try some freezer meals.

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Now, like I said a minute ago, I've had this really negative attitude towards freezer meals. Like, you know, they're cheating or they're not as good or I didn't need them. But, hey, we all grow and mature. And so I think I've matured to the point where I am willing to try something new. So I got really excited as I started researching different options and realized if I committed 1/2 a day to some hard core freezer meal cooking, I could feasibly have enough meals to get us through our first half or more of the school year. So I committed to it. I made a plan, and I wanted to walk you through today, some of the things that I did ahead of time that made our freezer meal cooking day a whole heck of a lot easier.

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We ended up doing 27 meals in four and 1/2 hours. It was intense, but oh, my word. It felt so amazing when I was done. I think I'm like, addicted to it now. So here are some of the very best strategies, but I kind of figured out by trial and error the first time around, and hopefully, if you're looking at doing freezer mill cooking or maybe you've already done it, you just want to improve the process. Hopefully, this will give you some good ideas.

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So the very first thing that I found was crucial to this whole process was to prepare. Sometimes in the kitchen, especially, I have this bad habit of flying by the seat of my pants where I will be, you know, looking through a cookbook, see a recipe and decided to start making it at 4:30 in the afternoon when it takes, like, three hours of prep time. And it's just crazy. And there's stuff all over the kitchen.

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I've also been known to do the same thing with canning, where I'm like, totally in another project, and all of a sudden they go, Hey, let's can something. And then within 30 minutes there's the canner and the jars and all the stuff, and it's just like not a lot of mental preparation. However, I knew that I couldn't go that route with this freezer meal day if I really wanted to be efficient. So I forced myself to think of all the variables and get very prepared.

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So the first thing I did and this is not something you have to do by any means for your freezer meal day. But I got a membership to this online site called Freezer Meal Pro. So, like I said, this is not a requirement. There are so many free freezer meal recipes out there. They're all over Pinterest, all over google. But I love this membership site because it helped me to organize a shopping list, so I literally would just select the recipes I wanted to make. And it would auto populate a shopping list with everything organized, amazing, and that saved me a lot of time.

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So that was worth the cost of the membership for me, it may not be for you. You can always make your own shopping list, but that really simplified the process, and I'll leave a link to that website in the show notes. So I made my list. I

scheduled an actual day on the calendar for shopping. Normally are shopping is more of Oh, hey, we're out of stuff. Let's go to town. Whereas this was an actual scheduled day, I told Christian he needed to watch two of the kids. I was going to take one with me, and I was like on the calendar.

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Before I left, I also did in a thorough inventory of my pantry, so I usually kind of have a working knowledge of what I have in there. But I wanted to have a very clear visual picture of what I did and did not have in stock. So I checked everything from the onions and potatoes, the milk, the broth, all of that stuff. The spices, the salt to make sure we had everything well stocked. And if it wasn't it went on the shopping list I printed out in this fancy binder. I have a shopping list in the front. I have the recipes in the back. This is all from that membership site I told you about, and then I took that whole thing to the grocery stores and Costco.

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So I went to our little local grocery store first, and then I drove a little bit farther into Colorado and went to Costco. So it was two stores in a row. It took half the afternoon. I had my binder and highlighters and pens, and I probably looked like a psycho person in Costco with, like, the little check boxes and the highlighters. But I didn't care because I was bound and determined. I wasn't gonna forget anything. So I brought home a carload of groceries. And then the night before freezer meal day, I set out all the ingredients other than the refrigerated ones, of course, So everything I had purchased from the store that we were going to use, I organized it on our kitchen table, I brought all of my herbs and oils and seasonings and placed them in the middle of my kitchen island. And then I took my binder and list out to our freezers.

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We have, like, three freezers in our barn, and I took a giant basket and brought in all of the meat that we would be cooking or using it, not cooking, because we

actually didn't cook I'll explain that in a minute. But all the meat would be we would be using the following day because I did want it to be partially defrosted so we could actually stick it in the bags. Okay, so that was the prep. Then night went to bed early. I set my alarm. I got up early. I got the kids on board. I told Christian the plan. I'm like, Hey, don't be in the kitchen that morning. It is reserved, I bribed my Children and said, Hey, if you help Mommy do freezer meals, you'll get a treat in the afternoon.

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So the whole family knew it was happening. Overkill? Maybe. But hey, it ended up working out pretty darn good. Another strategy that I found to be super helpful, which is something I usually don't do, is a bought some cheater ingredients. So let me explain. So normally I'm all about from scratch, and I use homegrown or the whole list form of an ingredient possible. I made some exceptions for freezer meal day just because of the sheer quantity of food I needed to get out of my kitchen in a short amount of time.

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So here's what I did. I bought some minced garlic. Um, you know the jars like it costs go the big jar of minced garlic. To be perfectly honest, I don't think that garlic has the best flavor as compared to fresh garlic. But it was a compromise, right? I'm like Either I am chopping garlic cloves for six hours, or I can scoop it out of the jar and add it to the recipes. The mince garlic doesn't have weird additives or preservatives. It's just garlic in a jar. So you know it's not a unhealthy ingredient. It's just maybe slightly less on the flavor scale than it would be if I had used fresh. I was cool with that, though.

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Another place I cheated a tad is that I bought canned beans like canned pinto beans, canned black beans, navy beans, those sort of things. I have dry beans. I can whip up a batch of dry beans in about 60 minutes with my instant pot, and I

do it all the time. However, the recipes I was using called for a variety of beans that were already, you know, cooked, not dry and raw. And so I didn't really want to be having to make all those ahead of time or try to coordinate that instant pot while I was doing everything else. So I bought some organic cans of beans, totally fine. Don't contain junk, so cost a little bit more, but to me, that was worth it.

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I also, this was a little bit more of an edgy cheat for me, I ended up buying some organic chicken breasts from Costco. I, and you've heard me rant on this on the blog before, I'm kind of anti chicken breast, which sounds so weird. But I like whole chickens, right. They're cheaper. It helps us learn how to use more parts of the chicken. And we butcher our own chickens. So whole birds are my jam. But a lot of the recipes I found that would've been a great fit for our family on a busy week night called for chicken breast. So I did cheat and get some organic chicken breasts. It's not something I would do all the time. And I still am a huge fan of whole chicken. But you got to do what you've gotta do!

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Okay, so the morning came, I got my coffee. We got breakfast, I got the kitchen clean, the sink empty. And then I set up stations, which this sounds so incredibly organized. And let me tell you, by the end of the morning, the stations were unrecognizable in a sea of stuff. But I started out with good intentions, and I think it's still kind of set the flow to have areas for each thing, even though it turned into just mostly chaos by the end of the end of the session. But anyway, so I had a veggie chopping station on the one side of our island, and I actually set my Children up here.

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I had my six year old peel the carrots and the potatoes. We have a lot of carrots for some reason in the recipes. I had my nine year old cutting the carrots into

slices or the celery or the potatoes into cubes. So she did that and they were very efficient and really, really helped. Just keep the vegetables coming. There was a lot of onions to be used, and I am, Ah, horrendous crier with onions like I am so ridiculously sensitive to onion fumes. It's embarrassing. So I got my food processor out and said it over on the counter away from the island and made a little onion station. So most of the recipes called for one whole onion that was diced. So I would just give it a buzz in the food processor so fast. And it saved me a lot of tears and like not being able to see what I was doing, So that was a lifesaver.

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I also had a area where I had my freezer bags and a sharpie so I could label before I put the food in. I figured that one out after the first recipe. Don't try to label when the food is in the bag. It doesn't work so well, So you wanna label it ahead of time. That might be obvious to everyone but me, but, hey, now I know. And then I also had, um, an area with all the herbs and the vinegars, the oils, the warchestershire sauce, the soy sauce. Anything that was a flavoring was in one area, so I would open the bag, put the meat and put the vegetables in, and then put the seasonings on top another thing that really, really helps. And this is something I actually learned from this freezer meal website. And this is not an ad for that membership. I have no affiliation with them. It just was really helpful to me.

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And I've had a lot of people ask what I used to prepare. So that's what I used, so anyway, not an advertiser for this freezer mill website. It's just helpful. So anyway, one thing I learned from this website is that sometimes the recipes that we associate it associate with being mushy, bland freezer meals are the ones that have been cooked first. There are exceptions to this. Like I've had some frozen lasagna That was pretty darn good. But sometimes if we're doing the

whole 1985 casserole in the freezer and we're trying to take those out and re bake them, that's when we kind of get less than tasty meals.

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So this freezer site recommended that you only do no cook recipes. So everything I was putting into this bags these freezer bags was raw, raw meat, raw vegetables, and it was fine that those two things touched because they're gonna be cooked all together. So there wasn't any issue with food safety there. But that saved so, so so much time. Especially, you know, if I hadn't been browning ground beef or searing roasts or doing things like that before I put them in the bags, this would have taken so much longer. So I love that everything was raw. And, of course, it's all gonna cook together in the Crock Pot or the instant pot or the stove top, whatever the method is later, when I thaw it out, that that saved a lot of time and I think it's really going thio preserve the texture and the flavor of the finished dishes.

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Um, on a little side note here. I love to sear meat, and this is weird side note. But bear with me here. It makes sense. I love to sear meat. Um, when I make a roast, whether it's beef or pork or I'm doing pork chops in the crock pot or whatever searing really increases flavor it gives it. The brown is just way better. So a little part of me cringe when I was putting whole roasts in bags with seasonings and beans or whatever other ingredients and they weren't seared. First, do I suspect I might have a slight reduction in flavor because we didn't sear? I do. I think it may not be as succulent and tasty as a seared roast, but I had to take an account, just the ease of what I was doing.

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So if I had been deciding, I wasn't going to make any of these recipes because they weren't seared and the flavor wouldn't be is good. What I would have probably done is by fast food on the way home from Homeschool Co op day,

because I wouldn't have had anything prepared. So I decided to choose having food that was healthy and wholesome and maybe a little less flavorful than it would have been if I'd made it from scratch that day versus Eating Junk. So hopefully that makes sense. So for me, it was a really doable compromise.

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Okay, then my last strategy that I found to be helpful is I actually just made one recipe at a time, so I've seen some really cool spreads on social media where these amazing freezer meal women have, like 10 bags lined out. They're standing up on end and they just go boom, boom, boom All the chicken, all the salt, all the garlic and they're just like doing it in this crazy assembly line. I tried to do that with two bags, and I got so confused I didn't even know, like, what was going in where? So I found that I would, you know, have my printed out recipe. Definitely. Don't try to use your recipes on your computer or your phone because it will drive you insane. So print them out. And then I would feel that entire bag make sure was labeled ahead of time filled, sealed, placed over in a nice, tidy pile. And then I would start the next recipe.

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If you are better at multi tasking than I am, you can probably do the whole 10 bags at the time assembly line thing. I was just getting so confused, so one bag at a time worked best for me just an fyi. So all in all the day was actually pretty darn enjoyable. I had my coffee. We turned on some good music. The kids were in there. Everyone is excited to accomplish this goal and knowing that the day or that morning had just been reserved for freezer meals. Really help me to relax into just enjoying the process. And when we got done like it was such a high knowing that we had done it, we had to climb the mountain had accomplished the thing. And we have food.

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Hey, we have food for many, many months to come and many, many days worth of homeschool co op lessons. So we stacked the **meals** in my freezer. They're in there now here's a confession. This is weird, but I actually occasionally will go into the freezer and open the door just to look at the freezer meals because it just makes me feel happy to know that they're in there. But we will definitely be doing this again. I think maybe I'd say after the first of the year will probably be running low and we'll pick some new recipes and so schedule another day. So I highly recommend looking into freezer cooking. If you have a full life like we do, it reduces the stress and hey, it's actually kind of fun in the process.

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So if you are falling in love with this idea, of an old fashioned intentional kitchen that's full of nourishing fruit and all sorts of rich memories you are gonna love. My Heritage Kitchen Handbook is a little e book that I packed full of my very best tricks for cooking and eating like a farmer, even if you live in the city and you can grab it for free at www.heritagekitchenhandbook.com. And that is all for today, my friend. Thank you so much for listening. And if you have just a second, I would be so honored to have you pop over hit, subscribe on your favorite podcast player and leave a quick review so more people can bring home studying into their lives. I can't wait to catch up with you next time on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcasts.