

Recipes as Roadmaps

When cooking from whatever might be on hand in a pantry or refrigerator/freezer, think of a recipe as a basic roadmap to guide meal preparation. Just as there are alternate roads on a map to arrive at a specific destination, when you don't have the exact ingredient listed, there are alternate options to complete that recipe. This publication provides a framework for this process.

First think of your ingredients in categories or groups. What do you have for protein, vegetable or starch ingredients? How can you add sauces, liquids, other flavors? Certain types of recipes makes substituting and using what's on hand easier, including stir frys, skillet meals, casseroles, soups, and even salads.

Then choose which recipe type you want to prepare. Use the ingredients you have on-hand from each group and cook as directed. Note: Each meal type generally serves 4 adults.



Protein:

- 2 cups cooked ground beef, chicken, or turkey
- 2 cups cooked and diced chicken, turkey, ham, beef, or pork
- 2 cups chopped hard-cooked egg
- 2 cans (6 to 8 ounces each) fish or seafood, flaked; or other canned meat
- 2 cups cooked dry beans or one 15-ounce can kidney, black, red, etc.

Vegetable:

- 1 package (10 ounces) thawed and drained frozen spinach, broccoli, green beans, green peas, etc.
- 1 can (16 ounces) green beans, peas, carrots, corn, drained
- 2 cups sliced fresh vegetables

Starch:

- 2 cups uncooked pasta (macaroni, penne, spiral, bow tie), cook following package directions
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain white or brown rice, cook following package directions
- 3 cups uncooked noodles, cook following package directions
- 3 cups diced potatoes; cook in 6 cups water. Heat water until it boils. Add potatoes, cook until tender (poke with a fork), about 10 minutes. Drain.

Liquid:

- For a skillet meal: 1½ c water, broth, tomato juice, or milk
- For soup:
 - 4 cups of vegetable, chicken, or beef broth made using bouillon cubes; or 2 (16-ounce) cans of broth
 - 2 cans crushed or diced tomatoes and 2 to 3 cups water
 - 4 cups milk and bouillon (use whatever proportion you desire)



Sauce:

- 1 can sauce-type soup (mushroom, celery, cheese, tomato, etc.) mixed with milk to make 2 cups
- 1 can (15 ounces) diced tomatoes with juice
- 2 cups gravy: 2 tablespoons cornstarch or 4 tablespoons flour, ¼ c cold water, 2 c HOT chicken, beef, or vegetable stock; mix cornstarch or flour into cold water with fork. Slowly add mixture to boiling stock, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and continue to cook and stir until thick.

Flavor:

- ½ cup chopped celery, ¼ cup chopped onion, ¼ cup sliced black olives, or ½ cup salsa
- 1 to 2 teaspoons mixed dried leaf herbs (basil, thyme, marjoram, tarragon; 2 to 3 teaspoons for soups)
- 2 to 4 tablespoons fresh herbs
- Stir fries could use 1 to 2 teaspoons Worcestershire or low-sodium soy sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste

To make a stir fry: Choose 1 or more vegetables + 1 or more flavor + 1 protein. Cook the vegetables and flavor in 1 to 2 tablespoons oil over high heat for 2 to 3 minutes; cook fresh vegetables, especially root vegetables like potatoes, carrots, and onions, first and then add your other vegetables. Add cooked protein, heat through, and serve with 1 cooked starch.

To make a skillet meal: Choose 1 protein + 1 starch + 1 or more flavors + 1 to 3 vegetables + 1 liquid + 1 sauce (optional). Combine ingredients in a skillet or pan, cook on medium heat, stirring often to prevent sticking, until meat is thoroughly cooked and vegetables and starch are tender, 15 to 45 minutes.

To make a casserole: Choose 1 protein + 1 starch + 1 to 3 vegetables + 1 sauce + 1 or more flavors. Combine all ingredients in a 9-inch by 13-inch pan or 2- to 2 1/2-quart casserole dish coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350°F until bubbly, 45 to 50 minutes.

To make a soup: 1 or more vegetables + 1 protein + 1 starch + 1 soup liquid + 1 or more flavors. Combine all ingredients in large pot (except fresh herbs, if used). Partially cover pot and simmer 20 to 30 minutes (if using fresh vegetables, check for fork tenderness). Add fresh herbs. Simmer another 5 minutes. Serve.

To make a salad: Choose base: lettuce or salad greens OR 1 starch (see list) + 1 protein + 1 vegetable + 1 or more flavors + 1 dressing. (Any bottled dressing will work. Low-fat options are recommended) Combine all ingredients except dressing in a large bowl. Either dress salad before serving or allow family members to dress as desired.

Some additional easy, quick ideas for families today include pizza and sandwiches or wraps.

To make a pizza:

1. Pick a crust option: premade crust, flour tortilla, flat bread, pita bread, English muffin, bagel, French bread, biscuit
2. Choose a sauce, amount to cover your chosen crust option: tomato paste thinned with water + basil + oregano + pepper; canned tomato sauce; refried beans or dip; BBQ sauce; sweet chili sauce; hummus, salsa
3. Choose 1 or more flavors
4. Choose toppings — be creative



Preheat oven to 425 F. Put crust on pan covered with cooking spray. Top with sauce, flavors, and toppings. Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until crust is cooked and sauce bubbles.

To make a sandwich/wrap:

1. Choose a base: 2 slices bread, 1 bun or roll, corn or flour tortilla, ½ a pita (whole grain options are encouraged)
2. Choose one or more proteins. For sandwiches you can also use 2 tablespoons of peanut or almond butter, hummus, or refried beans; sliced, cubed, or shredded cheese
3. Choose one or more fillings: vegetables, fruits, nuts, jelly, honey, pickled foods
4. Choose one or more spreads: low-fat mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup, ranch dressing, Italian dressing, hummus

Select foods from each category. Place spread directly on base chosen. Build sandwich/wrap by placing remaining ingredients on one side of base; cover with other side or roll up tortilla.

Resources:

Essential Living Skills – Essential Food, Nutrition and Physical Activity Curriculum; Sandy Procter, Ph.D., RD, LD, assistant professor and extension specialist in human nutrition, Kansas State University; K-State Research and Extension publication S1234B

Website: Nebraska Extension, UNL Foods, Healthy Tips and Recipes, Cooking Tips. Make a Meal from What's On Hand. <https://food.unl.edu/article/making-meal-whats-hand>

Create Better Health - Utah State University Extension, Adult Nutrition Education Curriculum; Casey Coombs, MS, RD, CD, Create Better Health Utah Assistant Director and Jaqueline Neid-Avila, MDA, RD, CD

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