
Frugal Real Food Meal Plans

Quick Start Guide

If you're new to real foods, have never used a meal plan before, or are used to buying most things instead of cooking from scratch, diving into this meal plan with two feet might be a little overwhelming.

Have no fear – this quick start guide will walk you through how to get started with this meal plan quickly, and easily.

Let's jump right in!

1 Login and access the Resource Library.

First, log into Frugal Real Food Meal Plans and notice the Resource Library in the center of the screen.

Download the following worksheets:

- pantry inventory
- fridge inventory
- freezer inventory

Before you cook anything or buy anything, you'll need to take a complete inventory of what you already have in the house.

Write down everything you have in your kitchen on the appropriate inventory sheet and as you work, put a little star next to the items you find that are about to go bad, like fresh produce or recent leftovers.

2 Download the current meal plan.

Next, download the current meal plan and print off the following pages:

- Bulk Shopping List
- Week 1 Perishable Shopping List
- Prep Lists for Weeks 1 & 2

Set these sheets aside for just a moment.

Navigate to the meal plan calendar and compare it to your family's schedule. You're looking for two main things:

1. That you have enough time to prepare the items planned on the days they're planned. Swap days around as needed to accommodate your available time or make notes to add items to the prep list so you can accommodate dinner from scratch during the week. If it helps you to stay organized, print off a blank calendar from the Resource Library and re-write the meals on the appropriate days.
2. That the meals fit your allergy and food preferences. Modify as needed, making notes on the shopping list as you go so you're not buying ingredients you won't need.

3 Shop your own kitchen.

Take your completed inventory sheets and compare them to the shopping lists. Literally, shop your kitchen first!

As you shop, adjust the shopping lists as needed for the following:

- Cross off items from the shopping list that you already have
- Make notes on the shopping list to adjust the quantities needed
- Substitute everywhere you possibly can so that you're using what you already have, and not buying any more than you truly need. The Substitution guide in the Resource Library can help you with substitution ideas.

4 Plan to use what you have.

Remember those stars you placed on your inventory sheets of the recent leftovers or fresh produce that is about to go bad?

Your goal is to do something with it to avoid wasting food, and wasting the money you've already spent on the food.

- If you don't make lunch so you can eat the leftovers, then do it.
- If you make a dinner salad instead of buttered peas, then do it.
- If you won't have the chance to eat the food before it goes bad, consider freezing it for future meals.

5 Review the weekly circulars.

Take 5-10 minutes to review the weekly circulars and see what's on sale in your area.

Your goal is to find the best deal you can on the items left on your shopping list. Annotate next to the item on your shopping list what store to buy it at.

For example, I put a "C" next to items I buy at Costco and "GO" for items I buy at Grocery Outlet.

If it helps, write down the price you found next to the item on the shopping list, so you don't have to try to remember which items was how much at which store.

6 Go Shopping.

Take the lists you've been working through with you to the store.

Shop ONLY the items on the list and use the price guide to help you determine whether or not items are a good deal or if you should substitute for something else.

7 Update and work through the prep list.

Access the meal plan and print the Prep List for Weeks 1 & 2. Update the prep list to account for the following:

- changes you've made to the meal plan
- substitutions you've made

If you have time at the start of the month, work through as much of the prep list as you can, starting from the top.

If you don't have time at the start of the month, start at the top of the list and do as much as you can, when you can.

Use the due dates in parenthesis to guide you, so you know when each task needs to be done by according to when it's needed for the meal plan.