

General Storage Tips

- Foods lose flavor under refrigeration, so proper storage and maintaining a temperature below 40°F are important.
- Freeze foods at or below 0°F to retain color and flavor.
- Don't crowd foods in the refrigerator or freezer. Air should circulate freely to keep foods evenly cooled.
- If necessary, use a refrigerator or freezer thermometer to monitor the performance of your fridge and freezer.

Freezer Shortcuts

- When freezing raw meat, poultry or seafood, remove it from the original packaging and wrap it in one- or two-serving portions, which can be individually thawed as needed.
- Chop or grate fresh garlic and ginger and freeze in small amounts in an ice-cube tray. Transfer the frozen cubes to a resealable plastic bag and store for up to 1 month.
- When preparing recipes that call for marinating as a first step, double the amount of meat and marinade; freeze them separately for a future meal.
- Freeze unused broth or coconut milk in resealable plastic freezer bags.
- Keep packages of presliced bell peppers, peas, squashes and green beans and bags of peeled shrimp in the freezer for preparing balanced meals on short notice.

Freezing and Thawing

Wrap properly: Use only moistureproof wrappings, such as aluminum foil, airtight plastic containers and resealable freezer-weight plastic bags. Choose plastic containers that can be filled almost to the brim with liquids such as stock or soup; leave some room for expansion but not so much that the container holds excess air. Other foods should be enclosed in a double layer of wrapping, and as much air as possible should be expelled before sealing.

Label clearly: Use a permanent marker to label all packages or containers with the contents, today's date and a "use-by" date.

Thaw safely: To preserve the texture of frozen meat, poultry and fish and to prevent bacteria growth, always thaw these items in the refrigerator. Vegetables can be thawed at room temperature, if necessary. For safety reasons, do not add frozen or wet ingredients to very hot oil in order to avoid splattering and potential burns.

Cold Storage Tips

Fresh Herbs and Vegetables

- Trim the stem ends of a bunch of fresh parsley, basil or cilantro, stand the bunch in a glass of water, drape a plastic bag loosely over the leaves and refrigerate. Wrap other fresh herbs in a damp paper towel, slip into a plastic bag and store in the refrigerator crisper. Rinse and stem all herbs just before using.

Make the Most of Your Time

Once you've decided on your meals for the week, give some thought to how you will organize your time. The more you can do in advance, the more quickly and easily a meal will come together when you are ready to prepare and serve it.

Stock up: Avoid last-minute shopping trips for missing ingredients by keeping your kitchen well stocked. Over the weekend, check the pantry and refrigerator for the staples you'll need during the week. Also, keep a good supply of basic nonperishable ingredients on hand so you can improvise simple main dishes and sides when needed.

Shop less: If you've made a weekly meal plan and your pantry is well stocked, you should need to shop only a couple of times a week for highly perishable ingredients, such as fresh produce, meat, poultry or seafood. If you know that you'll be really pressed for time during the week, purchase your meat and poultry on the weekend, and wrap and freeze what you won't be using within the next couple of days.

Cook smarter: Before you begin, read the recipe carefully. Take note of steps that could be done simultaneously, such as mixing the eggs for a frittata while the vegetable filling cooks, or seasoning and cooking shrimp while the rice steams. Get out all the equipment required so everything is ready when you need it. Finally, set out the serving dishes and utensils.

Prep ahead: Use a food processor to make quick work of chopping vegetables. Double up the prep by chopping extra vegetables for one or two other recipes one night and then storing them in an airtight container in the refrigerator until you need them. Or, depending on your daily schedule, you may be able to get a jump on dinner earlier in the day by prepping the ingredients.

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Pappardelle with Beef Ragù

This rich, meaty ragù is excellent tossed with fettuccine, linguine or bucatini. It can also be added to ¼ lb. cooked penne, ziti or gemelli, piled into a baking dish, and topped with shredded mozzarella cheese. Bake at 375°F until warmed through, about 10 minutes.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, cook the pancetta, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a small plate.

Add the leeks and fennel to the drippings in the pan and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté until softened, about 1 minute.

Add the brisket, sauce, tomatoes and their juices to the pan. Increase the heat to high and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the flavors are blended and the sauce is slightly reduced, about 10 minutes. Stir in the basil and cook for 1 minute more. Stir in the reserved pancetta.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add the salt and pasta and cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is al dente, according to the package directions. Drain the pasta, add it to the sauce and toss to coat. Divide among shallow bowls and serve immediately. Pass the cheese at the table. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Food Made Fast Series, *Weeknight*, by Melanie Barnard (Oxmoor House, 2006).

Shepherd's Pie

The mashed potatoes can be prepared up to 2 days in advance. Store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator. This is also an excellent way to use up leftover mashed potatoes. Make sure you have 3 cups total.

In a large saucepan over high heat, combine the potatoes, water to cover and a generous pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and cook until the potatoes are tender when pierced with a knife, 12 to 15 minutes. Drain well.

Pass the potatoes through a ricer into a bowl, or mash in the bowl with a potato masher. Add the milk and 1 Tbs. of the butter, and beat with a wooden spoon or with a handheld mixer on medium speed until smooth and fluffy. Season with the ½ tsp. salt and the pepper.

Meanwhile, in another large saucepan over medium heat, melt the remaining 1 Tbs. butter. Add the onion and carrots and cook, stirring often, until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in the peas, brisket, sauce and thyme and bring to a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through, 7 to 10 minutes.

Preheat a broiler.

Spoon the hot filling into a shallow 9-inch square baking dish. Spread the mashed potatoes evenly over the filling. Place under the broiler and broil until the potatoes are tinged with brown, about 1 minute. Serve directly from the baking dish. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Food Made Fast Series, *Weeknight*, by Melanie Barnard (Oxmoor House, 2006).

August 20, 2011

Notes

Ingredients for Pappardelle with Beef Ragù

2 oz. pancetta or bacon, diced

2 large leeks, white and light green portions, halved, rinsed well and thinly sliced

1 small fennel bulb, trimmed and chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 cups braised brisket, shredded

1 cup sauce from brisket

1 can (14½ oz.) diced tomatoes with juices

¼ cup minced fresh basil

2 Tbs. salt

¾ lb. pappardelle or other wide egg noodles

½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Ingredients for Shepherd's Pie

2 lb. russet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks

Salt, to taste, plus ½ tsp.

¾ cup milk or half-and-half

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper

1 small yellow onion, finely chopped

2 carrots, finely chopped

¾ cup frozen baby peas, thawed

3 cups shredded braised brisket

2 cups sauce from brisket or 1 cup beef broth

1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme

Ingredients for Classic Roast Chicken

2 chickens, each about 3½ lb.

4 Tbs. minced fresh rosemary or tarragon

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

¾ cup chicken broth

¼ cup dry white wine or chicken broth

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Technique Class: Cook Once, Eat Twice

Cooking delicious dinners every night of the week takes planning and organization. This means keeping a well-stocked pantry, putting together a weekly meal plan, and giving careful thought to how dinner preparation fits into your schedule each day.

You might feel that you're too rushed to sit down and work out an entire week's worth of meals each weekend. However, the time you spend doing just this will actually save you time over the course of the week. With these simple strategies, you'll save hours in the kitchen and at the market, you'll waste less food and money, and you'll also avoid unhealthy take-out and fast-food choices.

Look at the whole week of meals: During the weekend, take time to think about how many meals you need to prepare in the coming week. You'll want to keep your menus varied, such as a vibrant Asian stir-fry one night, a hearty pasta the next and a savory roast pork loin the third night.

Match your menus to your schedule: As you plan your week's meals, keep your own calendar in mind. Extra-busy evenings might call for a simple soup, sandwich or salad that can be put together quickly, or a dish that can be assembled in the morning to braise all day in a slow cooker. Celebrations or even casual get-togethers with friends can be a good excuse for putting more festive dishes on the menu.

Cook on the weekend: When cooking dinner is not a harried chore, you can relax and take pleasure in it. If possible, prepare some or all of Monday night's meal over the weekend. Or, if you decide to roast a chicken or braise a brisket for dinner on the weekend, double the recipe and you can save time preparing another delicious home-cooked meal later in the week. You can also cook a double batch of a dish that freezes well, such as a stew, curry or soup, and store the leftovers in the freezer for future use.

Get everyone involved: Enlist kids and other family members to help plan menus for the coming week. When everyone gets involved, they'll be sure to enjoy each meal more.

Classic Roast Chicken

Roast chicken is a wonderful supper centerpiece, and it is also great the next day. Here, you roast 2 birds so that you will have dinner for one night plus leftovers for making other delicious meals.

Preheat an oven to 450°F.

Place the chickens, breast side up, on a rack in a large roasting pan (or use 2 pans). Pat the chickens dry with paper towels. Rub the outside of each chicken with 2 Tbs. rosemary and a generous amount of salt and pepper.

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Chicken quesadillas

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Chicken quesadillas

Roast the chickens for 20 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 400°F and continue to roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh, away from the bone, registers 170°F, about 40 minutes more.

Transfer 1 chicken to a carving board and let rest for 10 minutes. Set the second chicken aside to cool before shredding the meat and storing.

To make a pan sauce, discard all but about 1 Tbs. of the fat from the roasting pan. Place the pan over medium-high heat and add the broth and wine. Bring to a boil and stir, scraping up the browned bits from the pan bottom. Cook until slightly reduced, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper.

Carve one of the chickens into serving pieces and divide among 4 plates. Top with the sauce and serve. Serves 4; makes about 8 cups cooked chicken total.

Storage Tip: To store the second chicken, let it cool, then remove the meat from the bones, discarding the skin and carcass. If you have pieces left from the first chicken, remove the meat from them as well. Shred the meat and store in an airtight container or resealable plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Food Made Fast Series, Weeknight, by Melanie Barnard (Oxmoor House, 2006).

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Chicken and Spinach Quesadillas

Quesadillas are ideal for using up leftovers. Experiment with different combinations, such as black beans, shredded cheese, and fresh herbs or sliced smoked sausage and roasted red bell peppers.

In a large, heavy fry pan over medium heat, warm 1 Tbs. of the oil. Add the mushrooms and sauté until tender, about 3 minutes. Add the spinach and chicken and sauté just until the spinach is wilted, about 30 seconds. Transfer to a bowl.

Divide the chicken mixture among the tortillas, spooning it onto half of each tortilla and leaving a ¼-inch border uncovered. Sprinkle evenly with the cheese. Fold the tortillas in half over the chicken mixture to enclose loosely.

Wipe out the fry pan with a paper towel and return to medium heat. Brush lightly with the remaining 2 Tbs. oil. Working in batches, add the quesadillas to the pan and cook until golden brown on one side, 1 to 2 minutes. Using a large spatula, carefully turn the quesadillas and cook until golden on the other side and the cheese is melted, 2 to 3 minutes more.

Divide the quesadillas among 4 plates and serve. Pass the sour cream and salsa at the table. Serves 4.

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Individual Chicken Potpies

Potpies are an excellent way to use up leftover roast chicken. Here, the potpies come together quickly because the recipe calls for store-bought puff pastry. Choose a good-quality brand that includes real butter, and keep frozen until ready to use.

Preheat an oven to 400°F.

In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Slowly add the stock, whisking until smooth, and bring to a boil. Add the thyme, bay leaf, onions, celery, carrots and mushrooms and cook until the vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes, chicken, peas, salt and pepper and cook until the potatoes are tender, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool for 5 minutes. Discard the bay leaf.

Divide the filling among 4 ovenproof bowls and place on a baking sheet. Brush the puff pastry squares with the egg mixture. Brush the rims of the bowls with water. Place 1 pastry square on top of each bowl, pressing lightly on the edges. Bake until the pastry is puffed and golden brown, about 20 minutes. Let rest for 5 minutes before serving. Serves 4.

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- Store tomatoes, eggplants and winter squashes at room temperature.
- Cut about ½ inch off the ends of asparagus spears; stand the spears, tips up, in a glass of cold water and refrigerate, changing the water daily.
- Rinse leafy greens, dry in a salad spinner, wrap in damp paper towels and store in a resealable plastic bag in the crisper.
- Transfer mushrooms to a paper bag and store in the refrigerator. Rinse or brush clean just before using.
- Store other vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and summer squashes, in resealable bags in the refrigerator’s crisper; rinse just before using.

Meat, Poultry and Seafood

- Place packaged meats on a plate in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Use before the expiration date. If only part of a package is used, discard the original wrapping and enclose in fresh wrapping.
- Most seafood should be used the day of (or day after) purchasing.

Cheese and Dairy

- Wrap all cheeses well to prevent them from drying out. Hard cheeses, such as Parmesan, have a low moisture content, so they keep longer than fresh cheeses, such as fresh mozzarella or ricotta.
- Store dairy products in their original packaging. Use before the expiration date.

Storing Leftovers

- You can store most prepared main dishes in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days or in the freezer for up to 4 months.
- Let food cool to room temperature before storing it in the refrigerator or freezer. Putting hot food in the refrigerator will warm up the other foods stored there and may encourage bacterial growth.
- Freeze soups and stews in small batches, which allows you to heat up just enough to serve one or two people.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or in the microwave. To avoid bacterial contamination, never thaw them at room temperature.
- To keep meals interesting, wait a couple of days before reheating and serving leftovers. Or, freeze them if they will keep.

Reheating Meals

- When reheating refrigerated or frozen leftovers in the oven, reheat them at the original cooking temperature; using a higher temperature could result in dry, overcooked food.
- Preheat the oven first. Transferring frozen food in a ceramic or glass baking dish directly from the freezer to an unheated oven could cause the dish to break.
- If reheating food in a microwave, use medium power. If high power is used, the edges of the food could overcook before the center is heated.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma The Weeknight Cook (Weldon Owen, 2009).

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