



Meal Planning Made Simple

The five-step system I use to feed all seven of us — without the 5 o'clock panic.

If you've ever stood at the fridge at five o'clock with no idea what's for dinner, this is for you. Learning to meal plan is the one thing that changed how our family of seven eats. Here's my honest, no-fuss system — five steps, and the only trick is doing them in order.

My five-step system

- 1 Pick your nights.**
You don't have to cook seven dinners. I plan five and leave the other two for leftovers, breakfast-for-dinner, or going out. Decide your number first.
- 2 Shop your kitchen first.**
Before you write a single thing down, look in the fridge, freezer, and pantry. Build a few meals around what you already have — that's where the savings live.
- 3 Reinvent one meal.**
Don't reinvent the wheel — reinvent one meal across the month. Taco night becomes fajitas next week, then enchilada casserole, then nachos. Same flavors, never the same dinner twice.
- 4 Pick a pasta, a potato, a rice.**
Each week, plan one pasta meal, one potato meal, and one rice meal. Three reliable anchors give you built-in variety with none of the decision fatigue.
- 5 Keep a Plan B.**
Days go sideways. Keep a few no-shop dinners ready — three-bean chili, tuna noodle casserole, or spaghetti, all under \$8 — plus a no-thaw night like breakfast-for-dinner for when the meat's still frozen.

Stephanie's Tip:

Start smaller than you think. Plan just three dinners your first week, all meals you already know how to make. Week one isn't about a perfect plan — it's about proving that planning beats the five o'clock scramble.

The full how-to, my weekly plans, and the build-your-own planner — find them all from The Nook:
stephaniecooksforacrowd.com/meal-planner



Or Let the Site Do It

The Nook is your map — here's where every meal-planning shortcut actually lives.

Two small tricks keep our dinners from ever getting boring. And when you don't feel like planning at all, the site will hand you the whole week — shopping list and all.

The two tricks: all the variety, none of the work

The rhythm	What you do
Each week	Pick a pasta, a potato, and a rice meal — three anchors give you instant variety.
Each month	Rotate each anchor four ways: tacos one week, then fajitas, enchiladas, and nachos.

Three ways to skip the blank page

Weekly Meal Plans

A full week of dinners, done for you, shopping list already made — new every Saturday, open to everyone.

Build-Your-Own

Save recipes from anywhere on the site and it writes your shopping list automatically. Free for subscribers.

Seat at the Table

Every weekly plan's printable PDF in one library — yours the moment you subscribe.

Then: put it all on one list

Pull every ingredient onto one list and check it against what you already have — that's what turns a plan into a fast, in-and-out grocery run. Don't love writing it? Every weekly plan comes with the list done (by meal and as one full-week run), and the build-your-own planner builds yours for you as you go.



Scan for The Nook

The Nook is my meal-planning headquarters — the one place that points you to every weekly plan, the build-your-own planner, the printable library, and the full step-by-step how-to.

stephaniecooksforacrowd.com/meal-planner

Want a note from my table every Saturday? Join the newsletter while you're there.