

# Never Make Just One:

Tried-and-True Freezer Meal Recipes  
for Swaps and More...



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### **How we got started...**

In November of 2011, MOMentum, a mom's ministry at CedarCreek Church did a program on batch cooking. Many of the contributors to this book were a part of the programming of that meeting or in attendance. We covered 3 different styles of batch cooking: Batch Prepping, Once a Month Cooking and Freezer Swaps. Batch prepping is the concept of instead of browning 1lb of beef why not brown 5lbs. Or just doubling a recipe when your making it and popping one in the freezer for later. Once a month cooking is a big time commitment where you set aside a day and cook 2 batches of 10 recipes. Then we had found a news clip on a group of women doing a freezer swap. I think there were 6-8 of them and they made 6-8 of the same recipe then went to the swap and came home with 6-8 different recipes. They discussed the recipes ahead of time and had a review process afterwards to see how the recipes went over with everyone. In November when we presented this idea to the group we knew no one actually doing this style of batch cooking. But that changed quickly.

In December of 2011 Alison Frye hosted our first meal swap. It was a "make it and take it" style swap. So if you brought 6 batches of a recipe to the swap you left with 6. If you brought 10 you left with 10. This was nice in that you could pick and choose how much to make and what recipes you wanted to take but the swap itself was long and a little tricky.

Then in January 2012 we started a monthly "even" swap. We started with 10 ladies. Each made 10 batches of a recipe and left the swap with 10 different meals. We coordinate the events on Facebook and have slowly refined our process over the last year.

### **What we have learned...**

Batch cooking and meal swaps have absolutely revolutionized dinner at our house. I used to call the 5 o'clock hour the witching hour. I was trying to cook dinner with whining, crying kids hanging on my legs just waiting for daddy to walk in the door. Now the day to day dinner hour requires very little time from me and is mostly hands off time. It's such a relief. A monthly meal swap yields me 10 to 12 meals so that is not enough to get our family through an entire month but I do batch cooking for myself too. So I may cook once or twice a week and when I do, whenever possible, I at least double the recipe and throw one in the freezer. So I'm constantly restocking my own freezer. Certainly, I have some quick, go to meals too that I can prepare fresh; but not having to cook every night really is such a huge relief that even the word revolutionary is an understatement. On my meal swap prep days it takes anywhere from 2-5 hours to prepare 10-12 batches depending on the recipe. I usually do it on a Sunday afternoon when my husband is home or my kids are down for nap. It makes a disaster of my kitchen but then it's over and you don't have to do it again for about a month.

## How we do it now....

Organizing the swap:

- Create a Facebook event and invite at least 15 people (if you are shooting for a 10 person swap) We create the event 4 weeks ahead of the event date. We also have a set rotation of the 3rd Tuesday of the month.
- Create a deadline for people to RSVP and post 2 options. We make this deadline 3 weeks ahead of the event date. We allow our swap to be up to 12 people. We want it to be at least 10 so if we are not meeting that number we'll invite some more people to join. We make this deadline 3 weeks ahead of the event date. On Facebook you can "ask a question" like "Would you rather?" and post 2 options for voting on. We then ask everyone to post the two recipes in the comments so people can look over the ingredients etc. and make their decision. This has been a fairly recent edition to our meal swap structure and we love it. It has been our solution to eliminating the not so popular recipes without having to have that awkward conversation with someone telling them their recipe was not a hit with our family.

Example of a post for voting:

Would you rather?

- Chicken Enchiladas
- Cheese Stuffed Shells
- Create a deadline for everyone to vote on all the options so the selections are decided and people can start cooking. We make it 5 days after the posting options deadline. Most people vote as the options are posted but it's good idea to have a deadline nonetheless.
- Our rules vary by season. In the summer we do a simpler grill swap with no sides. The rest of the year we provide a meal that serves 6 with a side for a cost ~\$10-\$12/meal.
- These are the rules we post in the Facebook event in the Fall/Winter/Spring:

***Just some reminders:***

- *By Friday, March 29th, using the Ask a Question option, post your 2 choices for the meal you will bring along with the recipe.*
- *Vote for your choices by Weds, April 3.*

**Some other things we agreed on:**

- We'll be an even swap up to 12.
- Typical budget is \$10-12/meal
- Rule of thumb on providing a side when the main dish includes veggies, potato, or pasta is when you've reached the typical budget amount, or wouldn't add a side for your family, you're good.
- If you have a spot in the swap, but for some reason aren't able to do it, try finding a replacement from the invited group or if it's someone new, we'll get them added to the group.

**Once the meals have been selected:**

- Double bagging is very helpful. If using foil pans, place a layer of foil directly against the food and cover with foil lid or an additional layer of foil.
- Label the meal in some way on the container, foil or freezer bag with the name of the meal and date of swap.
- Include instructions for cooking the meal at the swap or on the container as well as in the FB group.
- Post complete recipe on FB group along with the swap instructions.

- These are the rules we post in the Facebook event in the Summer:

**Just some reminders:**

- By Weds. May 1, using the Ask a Question option, post your 2 choices for the meal you will bring along with the recipe.
- Vote for your choices by Sunday, May 5.

**Some other things we agreed on:**

- We'll be an even swap up to 12.
- Typical budget is \$10-12/meal for winter. Grill and crock-pot swaps are a NO SIDES swap so \$10/meal it is.
- If you have a spot in the swap, but for some reason aren't able to do it, try finding a replacement from the invited group or if it's someone new, we'll get them added to the group.

**Once the meals have been selected:**

- Double bagging is helpful. If using foil pans, place a layer of foil directly against the food and cover with foil lid or an additional layer of foil.
- Label the meal in some way on the container, foil or freezer bag with at least the name of the meal and if you're feeling extravagant, the date of swap.
- Include instructions for cooking the meal at the swap or on the container as well as in the FB group. For grill and crock-pot swaps, this is fairly self-evident.
- Post complete recipe on FB group along with the swap instructions.

At the swap:

- Everyone arrives and we arrange our coolers in a circle. When the weather permits we swap out on the driveway. When it's not so nice out we usually swap in the garage. When it's really cold we leave the coolers in the garage or on the porch and head inside until we are ready to swap everything.
- Once everyone is there we go around the circle saying what we brought and go over the preparation instructions.
- Once everyone has shared we take turns distributing our freezer meals. We've found the best way to do this is to have 1 person at a time hand out their own freezer meal to all the other ladies and continue around the circle until everyone has distributed their meals.
- Each person should bring one less meal than there are people participating in the swap. So if 12 ladies are swapping you only need to bring 11 of your recipe to the swap since 1 is for you.
- Once all the meals are distributed we pack the coolers back into the car and head home. When everyone arrives on time the swap can be done in 15 minutes. Our norm may be a little closer to 30 minutes but either way it's quick and easy. No real hosting responsibilities. In the beginning we rotated the location of our swap and it worked but we ended up settling on one spot for consistency sake and it has worked out well.

After the swap:

- I started compiling a cheat sheet after the swap for myself because it was hard to remember what went with what and I kept finding myself pulling meals out of the freezer to see how long they took to cook etc. when I was trying to make my meal plan for the week. Since I had already typed it up for myself I figured I might as well send it out to everyone and they loved it.
- I now type it up every month and send it via Facebook Message to everyone. I try to get it done within a day or two of the swap. I include what we got and how it's packaged and then the preparation instructions. I think at one point or another we had all ended up with a little baggie of cheese or something and wondered "what does this go to?"
- Now I just print the cheat sheet out and hang it on the fridge for quick reference. (See example on next page)

Here is an excerpt from a cheat sheet:

#### Chicken Enchiladas – Kristin Watson

- Foil pan of Cream Cheese Chicken Enchiladas
- Box of Mexican Rice
- Thaw completely
- Bake at 325F for 20-25 min or until cheese is melted and enchiladas are heated through
- Prepare rice as directed on package

#### Pesto Ranch Chicken & Orzo with Sundried Tomatoes & Basil – Julie Mackett

- Ziploc bag of pesto chicken
- Ziploc bag of orzo
- Thaw completely
- Pesto Ranch Chicken
  - Place chicken breasts in crock pot
  - Spoon pesto onto chicken
  - Sprinkle packet of ranch dressing over chicken
  - Dissolve bullion in 1 cup of water
  - Pour half the broth over chicken
  - Cook on high for 4 hrs or so. Low 5-8hrs
- Orzo
  - May be served cold or warm
  - When heating you may need to add a little water or olive oil to moisten

#### Baked Tacos – Laura Bell

- Ziploc bag of taco meat mixture, guacamole and cheese
- Box of crunchy taco shells
- Bag of Tortilla chips
- Thaw completely
- Reheat taco meat mixture on stovetop or in microwave just until warm and mix
- Arrange taco shells in 2 rows of 6 in a 9x13 pan – even if some of the shells are broken I got them to stand up enough for filling
- Fill taco shells with meat mixture and top with cheese
- Bake at 400F for 10-12min or until heated through and cheese is melted
- Top with sour cream and any other desired toppings and serve with chips and guacamole

#### Million Dollar Spaghetti – Jennifer VanVorhis

- Foil pan of Million Dollar Spaghetti
- Loaf of Italian Bread
- Ziploc bag of garlic butter
- Thaw completely
- Million Dollar Spaghetti
  - Bake at 350F for 45 min
- Garlic bread
  - Soften butter, mix together and spread evenly over bread.
  - Place in 350F oven until bread is toasted. Optional: Add cheese to bread before placing in oven.

#### Cilantro Lime Chicken – Stephanie Coil

- Ziploc bag of cilantro lime chicken
- Package of tortillas
- Package of Spanish rice
- Thaw in fridge for 24 hours.
- Dump bag contents into crockpot and cook on low for 8 hours (or high for 4 hours)
- Serve with tortillas and your favorite toppings (sour cream, guacamole, salsa, and cheese)
- Prepare Spanish rice as directed on package



Tips on selecting a meal swap recipe:

- Doing a test run is highly recommended. Some things don't freeze well or you may find the reheating times are very different once it's been frozen. The only time I skip this step is if the recipe specifically references that it freezes well.
- Think about the time involved. Chop 3 bell peppers...not a big deal. Chop 36 bell peppers...that will take a while. Sometimes I find it better to batch cook in phases. Setting aside some time to prep the ingredients (wash, chop, etc.) and then doing the assembly or side dish later.

Freezes Well:

- Most anything you prep and then bake
- Many soups
- Marinated meats
- Slow Cooker dump type recipes

Does NOT Freeze Well:

- Unbaked refrigerated dough (cans of biscuits, crescent rolls, etc.). They just don't rise properly after freezing
- Some soups separate after freezing and just don't combine right again (trial and error here; many soups freeze very well)
- Rice is very hard to maintain the proper texture after freezing. If you are sending a plain rice along with a meal send it dry. If not be sure to undercook the rice before freezing this helps it maintain it's texture when reheating.
- Pasta can be tricky on texture too. Like the rice if you are sending pasta along plain just send it dry. Baked pasta dishes (lasagna, baked penne, etc.) do fine.

### Packaging your frozen goodness:

- Foil pans are great for many casseroles and dishes that need baked. Don't bother with the plastic clam shell lids they take up a lot of space and don't do much to protect the food.
- When using foil pans place a layer of foil directly against the food and then an additional layer or a foil lid on top.
- Gordon's food service has really nice foil pans with flat foil lids. They are cheapest by the case (100 pans and 100 lids). It comes out to \$0.52 a set when you use a \$5 off \$50 coupon that runs in the paper regularly. Costco also has foil pans for \$0.23 a pan but does not come with flat lids. Glad ovenware is also very handy. It's plastic and has lids that seal really well and it's oven safe.
- Ziploc bags are definitely the cheapest way to go and are great for many meals but not very practical for lasagna. Make sure to get freezer bags and double bagging is always recommended. Even when you buy the expensive bags they can leak especially when thawing.

### Things to consider adding to your kitchen:

- A giant bowl. IKEA makes some huge, inexpensive stainless steel bowls that come in very handy when you are making multiple batches of a recipe all at once
- Plastic shoebox container (like Rubbermaid) is very handy for setting food in while thawing in your fridge to avoid spillage. Also if you need to speed up the thaw of a meal in a freezer bag; fill the shoebox container with water around the bag and place in the fridge. Change the water every hour or so to really speed up the thawing process.
- Old school Tupperware square cake carrier lid is the perfect size for thawing Ziploc bags flat.
- You may already have this but you can repurpose your blender jar to assist in filling Ziploc bags. Take the blade out put a bag in and fill away.

# Chicken Entrees

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- 12: Savory Chicken Tacos
- 13: Buffalo Chicken & Potatoes
- 14: Ooey Goey Chicken
- 15: Texan Ranch Chicken Casserole
- 16: Italian Chicken & Tortellini Casserole
- 17: Cheesy Chicken Enchiladas with Salsa Rojo
- 18: Slow Cooker Chicken
- 19: Slow Cooker Sesame Chicken
- 20: Garlic Lime Chicken
- 21: Grilled Bruschetta Chicken
- 22: Top Secret Miami U Marinated Chicken Kabobs
- 23: Caribbean Jerk Chicken
- 24: Greek Grilled Chicken or Tilapia
- 25: Perfect Marinade for Grilled Chicken
- 26: Root Beer Chicken
- 27: Slow Cooker Tex Mex Chicken
- 28: Slow Cooker Chicken & Bean Tacos
- 29: Hawaiian Chicken with Confetti Rice
- 30: Jamaican Jerk Chicken
- 31: Slow Cooker Rosemary Chicken & Potatoes
- 32: Baked Pesto Chicken
- 33: King Ranch Casserole
- 34: Slow Cooker Caesar Sandwiches
- 35: Chicken Parmesan Bake
- 36: Bacon Wrapped Chicken
- 37: Chicken Pot Pie
- 38: Monterrey Jack Chicken with Stuffing
- 39: Slow Cooker Chicken & Dumplings
- 40: Beer BBQ Chicken
- 41: Chicken Enchiladas
- 42: Cream Cheese Chicken Enchiladas
- 43: Slow Cooker Cilantro Lime Chicken
- 44: Loaded Potato & Buffalo Chicken Casserole
- 45: Pesto Ranch Chicken

# Savory Chicken Tacos

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From: Laura Bell

Serves: 6 to 8

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## Instructions

- 1:  
Preheat oven to 450. Spray 9x13 baking dish with cooking spray.
- 2:  
Mix all ingredients, except taco shells and sour cream, in a large bowl.
- 3:  
Spread evenly into baking dish.
- 4:  
Bake at 450 for 20 minutes or until bubbling. Let stand 5 minutes.
- 5:  
Spoon into taco shells and serve with sour cream.

## Meal Swap Instructions

- 9x13 pan
- Box of crispy shells
- Package of soft tortillas
- Thaw
- Bake at 450 for 20 min uncovered or until bubbly
- Serve in shells of your choice and top with sour cream if desired
- It's also yummy to eat like dip with chips

## Notes

- Freeze recipe in foil 9x13 pan. Place a layer of foil right against the food & then top with lid or another layer of foil. Optionally you can provide crispy or soft taco shells.
- Rotisserie chickens are easiest to debone and shred when hot. The easiest way to shred chicken is in a stand mixer with the paddle attachment.
- You can easily make 10 of these at once with the mixer to shred the chicken. I buy the rotisserie chickens and pop them in the oven (oven was off) to stay warm as I worked. I deboned and shredded one chicken at a time. You can bag it and throw it in the fridge to mix up later or dump it in a bowl with all the other ingredients.

## Ingredients

Cooking Spray

1 whole  
rotisserie chicken, deboned and shredded

1 pkg (12oz)  
frozen steamable rice

1 cup  
shredded Mexican cheese

1 can  
diced salsa style fire roasted tomatoes

1/2 tsp  
salt

1 cup  
frozen corn

1 jar (16oz)  
verde enchilada sauce

1 pkg  
crisp or soft taco shells

Sour Cream