



5 Ways to Save Time & Money in the Kitchen

from Carly Riordan at carlysrecipe.com

1. Shop In Season

There are two good reasons for shopping seasonally using what's on special. The most obvious reason is you'll spend less week to week. When fruit, vegetables and cuts of meat are in season, they'll be cheaper, and they'll taste better too. Specials these days can save you up to 50% on some items. If you plan meals and write your shopping list based on products on special, you'll save hundreds of dollars every year.

The second reason for shopping seasonally is you'll vary your diet giving your body what it needs most at different times throughout the year. It's the way God intended us to eat. Think about it. Oranges are in season during the winter- flu season when we need the extra dose of vitamin C. Summer fruits are packed with vitamins and lots of moisture. Curries, soups and slow cooked meals for Winter, salads, smoothies and lighter meals for Summer. Changing your basic meals throughout the year will ensure that you never get bored and get a variety of nutrients.

2. Make A Plan

Planning the simplest but hardest rule to stick to. Planning ahead saves so much time and money week to week and helps avoid that horrible "what are we having for dinner" quick rush to the shops stage of the afternoon.

Start by setting aside a small amount of time once per week (for me it's a Friday) and look ahead for the next seven days. Block out any meals that you know you'll eat out. add in any extra meals needed. like taking a shared plate for a morning tea. a party. a meal on the run. etc. then write in the basics- brekky. lunch. dinner and snacks. It helps to add in one or two semi-cooking nights using up leftovers too.

It's a big job at first but a big job once a week makes the following seven days of meals a breeze. With foresight. you can plan what the best meal to have on the run. after ballet. when you're home early etc. No thinking. and running out of things and extra trips to the shop- brilliant. You can thank me later :-)

Our weekly meal plan is fluid meaning once we shopped for the meals for the week if Monday night is meant to be burgers but we feel like Wednesday's proposed Mexican then we do a swap. Easy. The important thing is knowing that we are prepared and have everything on hand.

3. Prepare In Bulk

It doesn't take much longer to prepare three or four times as much food but it saves more than that time in the long run. If you're making spaghetti bolognese whether you use 1kg or 3kg of mince will take a similar time to prepare and cook yet at the end of your cooking session you'll have either a meal for one night or meals for many nights ahead.

For snacks prepare small snack bags of nuts. rice crackers. corn chips. containers of cheese. boiled eggs. home baking. vegetable sticks and dips.

For lunches cook up big batches of protein and freeze them ready to defrost. heat and add to your salads or wraps each day. In the winter do the same thing with batches of different veggie soups frozen in portions. Add different proteins each day to mix it up.

For parents: If you're in the season of being at home with the kids, find the time of day when the kids are most settled and prepare dinner at that time. For our family, that is around 9 am right after brekky. Use this time to cut up veggies, prepare the meat and measure out spices ready to go. When it comes to "I can't be bothered to cook" time, cooking dinner will feel much more 'doable.'

For those who work: Saturday or Sunday can become bulk cooking days. Yep, it is a bit of a pain but so is cooking from scratch every night or paying for takeaway. Just try it. You'll be glad you put the effort in when you do.

4. Use Your Freezer

People don't use their freezer enough. Cooking in bulk and freezing will save your hours in the kitchen and hundreds of dollars across a year. I spoke to a friend today who said: "I don't like cooking in bulk because then I have to eat the same thing every day for a few days." Nooooo! That is not true.

If you use your freezer properly, you never eat the same thing twice in a row or even twice in the same week. Leftovers if made properly should feel fresh, prepared with love and more importantly good for you if they're made from scratch.

Our 'leftover staples' are Greek slow cooked lamb, Mexican, beef vindaloo, butter chicken and bolognese. If you make a batch or two of one of these, then portion it out in individual or family serves then it's just a matter of reheating and adding a few quick extras. It's not hard to boil some rice, spaghetti or zucchini noodles or add some veggies or a salad.

Don't freeze leftovers as a complete meal unless you want it for a quick lunch to tote. Freeze leftovers as stand alone products eg curry without rice or spaghetti sauce without the spaghetti. When it comes time to reheat and serve the quick made extras make it feel like a fresh meal.

The thing we get overwhelmed with at dinner time is the whole cooking from scratch and cleaning up. Use your freezer wisely and save yourself some cooking drama.

5. Have Default Meals

Have a handful of go-to meals that you can make on autopilot. Have the ingredients on hand to make them so you prepared even at the last minute.

My lunch go-to is salad or soup with a portion of meat. This might be mince patties or chicken breast that has been pre-cooked in portions and frozen. For dinners it's Mexican, bolognese and Indian curries.

Default meals will be different from home to home, but the important thing is to find meals that are consistent winners, easy to prepare, and freeze well. Try to work these into your food plan once or twice per week to take the pressure off.

I hope this has been helpful for you. Each of these points will be fleshed out in the coming months on the blog at carlysrecipe.com or via email to subscribers. If you have any questions I'd love to hear from you.

To contact me, email carlysrecipe@outlook.com or check out my Facebook or Instagram: [@carlysrecipe](https://www.instagram.com/carlysrecipe)

Here's to you saving time and money in the kitchen!

Carly

