

SQUASHES, MASHES, & ONE HELLUVA HASH!



Autumn

sometimes gets a bad rap in the food world because it happens to follow the food-rich months of summer. But that is just plain silly. You just have to re-orientate yourself to the richness of fall. That's what this week's meal plan is all about. It features some of my favorite fall ingredients in easy-to-make recipes. Pick a few of these meals, make them, and enjoy the cooler weather.

Don't forget to go onto the Macheesmo Meals forums to ask any questions you have about any of the recipes this week and tag your recipe photos online with #macheesmomeals !

Macheesmo Meals

Helpful Equipment:

- Cast Iron Skillet (12-inch is nice)
- Non-stick Skillet
- Blender (or immersion blender)
- Potato masher
- Good vegetable peeler
- Meat Thermometer
- 4-quart pot



You can click on these to zap you to Amazon and see my recommendation for each.

MEAL 1

- Stuffed Acorn Squash
- Cucumber, Pomegranate Salad

MEAL 2

- 30 Minute Squash Soup
- Smoked Cheddar Grilled Cheese

MEAL 3

- Seared Cajun Pork Chop
- Smashed Bliss Potatoes
- Wilted Chili Spinach

BRUNCH!

- Bacon & Chive Hash
- Fried Egg
- Greek Yogurt Parfait



MEAL 1 | Stuffed Squash and Cucumber Salad

This is a meal that can take hours because roasting squash isn't exactly a quick preparation. But the trick to making this dish on a weeknight is to actually microwave the squash to soften it and then finish it in the oven stuffed with orzo, sausage, and herbs.

Stuffed Acorn Squash

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 1 hr.

Ingredients:

- 2 large acorn squash, halved
- 8 ounces hot Italian sausage
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 ounces orzo pasta, cooked
- 4 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons real maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage (opt.)
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

- 1) Poke each squash with a fork and place in a microwave safe dish. Microwave on high for 5 minutes. Let cool briefly and slice in half. Scoop out seeds with a spoon and add 1 tsp. butter, 1 TBSP. syrup, a pinch of sage, and a pinch of salt and pepper to each squash.
- 2) Meanwhile, cook orzo according to package.
- 3) In a large pan, add sausage (removed from casing) and cook on medium-high heat until browned and fat is rendered. Add peppers, onions, and garlic and continue to cook until veggies are soft.
- 4) Mix orzo into sausage mixture.
- 5) When filling is done, stuff each squash with 1/4 of the filling. They will pretty much overflow. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top of each squash.
- 6) Bake squash at 350 degrees F. until cheese is melted and filling very hot, about 15 minutes. Serve immediately with salad on the side!

Cucumber Salad with Pomegranate

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 20 min.

Ingredients:

- 2 medium cucumbers, sliced
 - 1/2 red onion, sliced thin
 - 1 cup pomegranate seeds
- Dressing:
- 1/4 cup Greek yogurt
 - 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
 - 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
• Pinch of kosher salt

Directions:

- 1) Stir together yogurt, lemon juice, dill, and salt.
- 2) Slice cucumbers and red onions and add to dressing. Let sit for at least 10 minutes in the fridge.
- 3) Chill salad until you serve it and top with pomegranate seeds right before serving.

Pesky Pomegranates

Removing pomegranate seeds seems completely impossible when you bust one in half. The key is to use a bowl of cool water to trap the seeds.

Cut the pomegranate into quarters and submerge one quarter under water. Use your hands to break apart the seeds. They will sink to the bottom and you can drain off the water and pith and be left with clean, mess-free seeds.

Store them in the fridge for up to a week.



Save Time - Cook Smart!

Peel and chop a butternut squash or whichever squash you choose to use for the soup in Meal 2. Since your oven is already hot, roast the squash tossed with some olive oil and salt while you eat and then store it for soup tomorrow or the next day! The cubes will need around 20 minutes to soften.



Plan This Meal!

1 hour ahead - Start filling for squash. Cook orzo.

45 minutes ahead - Mix together salad ingredients with dressing.

30 minutes ahead - Microwave squash, cool slightly, half squash, fill with butter, spices, and filling.

15 minutes ahead - While stuffed squash bake, peel your pomegranates and (optionally) prepare squash for soup the next day.



Vegetarian Options

To make a vegetarian version of the squash, replace browned sausage by adding an extra 4 ounces of orzo or sauteeing 1 pound of crimini mushrooms in a few tablespoons olive oil until they lose their liquid. Season with salt and pepper and stir those into the filling mixture to replace the sausage.

MEAL 2 | Soup and Grilled Cheese

Tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches were staples as meals when I was growing up. Actually, soup and a sandwich is still one of my favorite quick meals. This meal is a little fall twist on the classic.

30-Minute Squash Soup

Yield: 6 Servings | Time: 30 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 medium butternut squash or 1 large kabocha squash, peeled, and roasted
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 quart vegetable stock
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- Salt and pepper
- Greek yogurt (optional garnish)
- Chopped chives (optional garnish)

Directions:

- 1) Ideally, you will have peeled, chopped, and roasted your squash in advance, but if you didn't, toss 1/2-inch squash cubes with olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper and roast at 350 degrees F. for 15-20 minutes until tender.
- 2) Meanwhile, in a 4-quart pot, add butter over medium heat along with onions, carrots, and garlic. Season with a pinch of salt and cook until veggies are soft, 5-6 minutes.
- 3) Add stock to pot and heat. Once squash is roasted, add squash and cook for about five minutes to combine flavors.
- 4) Use an immersion blender to blend soup until smooth. If you use a normal blender, let soup cool slightly and blend in batches. Return soup to pot.
- 5) Bring soup back to a simmer and season with cayenne, cinnamon, and a pinch of salt and pepper.
- 6) Optionally, serve soup garnished with a dollop of yogurt and chives.

Macheesmo Meals: 10/10/2013

Smoked Cheddar Grilled Cheese

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 15 min.

Ingredients:

- 4 pieces sturdy sandwich bread
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, soft
- 6 ounces grated smoked cheddar cheese

Directions:

- 1) Butter one side of each piece of bread and grate cheese so it melts easier.
- 2) In a large skillet over medium heat, add one two pieces of bread if they will fit, buttered side down.
- 3) Divide the grated cheese between the two pieces of bread and top with other piece of bread, buttered side up.
- 4) Cook sandwich for about 3-4 minutes per side until bread is nicely browned and cheese is melted. If bread is browning too quickly, turn heat down to low and flip sandwiches frequently.
- 5) When sandwiches are cooked, slice in half on the diagonal and serve half a sandwich with soup.



Plan This Meal!

A day or two before - Roast squash if you can to make day-of prep easier.

30 minutes ahead - Start cooking veggies for soup and roast squash if you haven't already.

10 minutes ahead - Finish soup and keep warm. Start sandwiches.



Squash Prep Tips

Peeling and chopping squash can be difficult because of the thick squash skin. It's best to use a good veggie peeler or a paring knife to slice off the skin, then you can dice the flesh into 1/2-inch cubes.

While you could microwave the squash and then add the softened flesh to the soup, roasting the squash intensifies the flavors and makes for a much better final flavor.



Grilled Cheese Ideas!

This recipe represents a simple, but tasty grilled cheese. Go onto the Macheesmo Meals forums and share your favorite grilled cheese add-ins with other meal plan members!



MEAL 3 | Cajun Pork Chop, Potatoes, and Spinach

These pork chops are great either on the grill or in a cast iron pan. Remember, it's okay to serve pork chops a bit pink in the center which is fantastic news because you don't want to dry these guys out. The wilted spinach with apple cider vinegar goes especially great with the pork.

Cajun Pork Chops

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 30 min.

Ingredients:

- 4 bone-in pork chops (6-8 ounces each)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2-1 teaspoon cayenne powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

Directions:

- 1) Mix together all the spice ingredients and rub each pork chop well with the rub. Feel free to be liberal with it. For best results, rub the chops the morning that you want to grill the chops and let them sit in the fridge.
 - 2) Prepare a medium-high heat grill or heat a cast iron skillet over medium-high heat.
 - 3) Grill pork chops for about 4-5 minutes per side depending on thickness until the internal temperature registers 145 degrees F. for a slightly pink pork chop.
- If you're using a cast iron skillet, cook over medium high heat and cook chops for 5-6 minutes per side. You'll probably have to cook the pork chops in batches so you don't crowd the pan. Wrap cooked chops in foil to keep them warm.
- 4) Remove chops from the grill and let them rest for 5 minutes, wrapped in foil. Then serve immediately.

Smashed Bliss Potatoes

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 25 min.

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds red bliss potatoes, skins on, quartered
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2/3 cup heavy cream or milk, warm
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

- 1) Bring a large pot of water to boil and add a big pinch of salt to the pot. Once boiling, add the quartered potatoes and garlic and boil until tender, about 15 minutes.
- 2) Drain potatoes and garlic and mash together well with butter, warm cream, and a pinch of salt and pepper.
- 3) Cover and keep warm until you serve them.

Wilted Spinach

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 10 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound spinach, washed well
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 medium onion, sliced thin
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

- 1) In a large skillet, add oil over medium heat with sliced onions and garlic. Cook veggies until soft, about 5 minutes.
- 2) Add washed spinach to the pan and stir until spinach is wilted, just a minute or two.
- 3) Add vinegar and let it cook down. Season with salt and pepper.



Plan This Meal!

Morning Of Dinner - If you can plan ahead, mix together the Cajun spices and rub the pork chops liberally. Wrap them in plastic tightly and store them in the fridge.

1 hour ahead - Remove pork chops from fridge and let them warm up a bit which will help them cook evenly. If you didn't rub them before, do so now.

30 minutes left - Start potatoes and preheat grill.

20 minutes left - Grill chops.

10 minutes left - Let chops rest, mash potatoes, and cook spinach.



Cooking Pork Chops

Buying bone-in pork chops will give you a better chance of cooking the chops without drying them out, but feel free to use boneless if you want.

In my opinion, it's very important to use a meat thermometer when grilling or searing pork because it overcooks so easily. Grab a digital one for \$30 and you'll never overcook pork again.



A Lighter Version

Feel free to substitute chicken for the pork chops or toss some meaty veggies like peppers and mushrooms with olive oil and sprinkle them with the cajun spice. Grill them until lightly charred.



BRUNCH! | Bacon & Chive Hash, Eggs, and Parfait

One of my favorite things to do on a lazy weekend is make a nice breakfast and serve it to some friends. It doesn't have to be fancy, but I think it can be okay for the prep to take a bit longer. Relax, have an extra cup of coffee, and make this great meal!

Bacon & Chive Hash

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 45 min.

Ingredients:

- 4 large Russet potatoes
- 8 ounces bacon, chopped
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2-3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh chives
- Salt and pepper
- Smoked paprika (opt.)

Directions:

- 1) Scrub the potatoes well to get off any dirt and dice potatoes into 1/2-inch cubes.
- 2) As you cut the potatoes, toss them in a large bowl of cold water to let some of the starch rinse off. Swirl the bowl and let them rinse for a few minutes.
- 3) In a large cast iron skillet, add bacon (chopped into pieces) over medium heat. Cook until bacon is crispy and fat has rendered out, about 10 minutes. Then remove bacon from the pan.
- 4) Once bacon is out of the pan, add cubed potatoes and keep the heat on medium. Season with salt and pepper and let potatoes cook until they are tender and getting crispy around the edges, about 15 minutes. If the pan is ever dry, add oil. You'll probably need to add a tablespoon or two depending on how much bacon fat you have in the pan.
- 5) When potatoes are almost done, add onions and garlic and continue to cook until veggies are soft and potatoes are really crispy. If pan is dry at any point add a good drizzle of oil.
- 6) Stir bacon back into the hash at the end and top hash with smoked paprika (optionally) and/or lots of fresh chives.

Greek Yogurt Parfait

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 15 min.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups granola
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 1 cup assorted fresh berries
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 1/2 lemon, juice only
- Honey

Directions:

- 1) Stir together Greek yogurt with lemon juice. Set aside. In a dry skillet over low heat, toast almonds until they fragrant and lightly browned.
- 2) Divide granola between four bowls. Top with yogurt mixture.
- 3) Top each bowl with berries, almonds, and a drizzle of honey.

Butter-Fried Eggs

Yield: 4 Servings | Time: 10 min.

Ingredients:

- 4-8 eggs, 1-2 per person
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

- 1) Add butter to a nonstick skillet over medium heat or in a very well-seasoned cast iron skillet.
- 2) Once butter is bubbling, crack in 1-2 eggs per person. You might have to cook them in batches depending on the size of your skillet.
- 3) Let eggs fry for about 2 minutes on the first side, then flip and fry for 15 seconds for a runny yolk. Don't cook it longer than a minute or two on the second side or it will get hard and rubbery. Serve eggs immediately over hash seasoned with salt and pepper.



Vegetarian Hash

For a vegetarian version of the hash, you can simply eliminate the bacon and be sure to be liberal with the oil since you will be starting with a dry pan. Feel free to add a diced pepper to add some extra flavor.



Plan This Meal!

In Advance - You can make the parfaits a few hours in advance without an issue. I'm not sure I would make them too far in advance or the granola might get soggy.

45 minutes ahead - Dice potatoes and get bacon cooking.

30 minutes left - Start cooking potatoes and dice other veggies.

10 minutes left - Finish hash and fry eggs.



SHOPPING LIST

This is a full list of all the ingredients used in every meal in this week's plan. I recommend reviewing it for stuff you probably already have on hand before rushing out to the store and buying everything! If items on the list don't have amounts, it is most likely because the recipe uses a very small amount of that ingredient or it is used as a garnish.

Fresh Produce

- Acorn squash (2)
- Butternut or Kabocha squash (1)
- Carrot (1)
- Cucumber (2)
- Fresh berries (1 cup)
- Fresh chives (1/2 cup)
- Fresh sage
- Fresh spinach (1 lb.)
- Garlic bulb (1)
- Lemon (1)
- Pomegranate (1)
- Red bliss potatoes (2 lb.)
- Red onion (1)
- Red pepper (1)
- Russet potatoes (4 large)
- Yellow onions (4)

Meat, Poultry, Seafood

- Bacon (8 oz.)
- Bone-in pork chops (4)
- Hot Italian sausage (8 oz.)

Dairy

- Eggs (4-8)
- Greek yogurt
- Heavy cream or milk (1 cup)
- Parmesan cheese
- Smoked cheddar cheese (6 oz.)
- Unsalted butter (1 cup)

Spices and Pantry Items

- Apple cider vinegar
- Black pepper
- Cayenne pepper
- Cinnamon
- Dried dill
- Dried oregano
- Dried thyme
- Garlic powder
- Granola (2 cups)
- Honey
- Kosher salt
- Olive oil (1/2 cup)
- Onion powder
- Orzo pasta (8 oz.)
- Paprika
- Real maple syrup (4 Tbsp.)
- Sandwich bread (4 slices)
- Slivered almonds (1/3 cup)
- Smoked paprika
- Sugar
- Vegetable stock (1 qt.)