



BEGINNER DINNER!



I've been getting a lot of great feedback on these plans, but the main complaint is that some of the recipes have been a bit too complicated. I try to walk the line between giving interesting recipes and also realistic recipes.

This week and next week I'm doing two meal plans that are for beginner cooks! If you cook rarely, these are great starter recipes. They are almost fail proof honestly! That's not to say they aren't delicious. The curry chicken salad, for example, I ate for three days in a row because I was obsessed with it!

Beginner doesn't have to mean not interesting. These meals should inspire you and absolutely give you the confidence to keep on cooking!

Helpful Equipment:

- Salad Spinner
- Cast Iron Skillet (12-inch is nice)
- Non-stick Skillet
- Baking Sheet
- Small Food Processor



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

MEAL 1

- Artichoke Spinach Penne

MEAL 2

- Roasted Cauliflower Salad
- Pan Seared Curry Chicken

MEAL 3

- Curry Chicken Salad
- Salt and Pepper Bread

BRUNCH!

- Croissant Breakfast Sandwich
- Pomegranate Parfaits

MEAL 1 | Artichoke Spinach Penne

Pasta is the quintessential fast and easy dinner. It's been my experience that it's also one of the first things that people learn how to cook because it's fast, filling, and cheap. This pasta dish is no harder than tossing in a store-bought sauce, but has much better flavors and lots of good veggies. If you're new to artichokes, this dish is worth a shot.

Spinach and Artichoke Penne

Yield: 4-6 Servings | **Time:** 35 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound penne pasta, cooked and rinsed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 red onion, diced
- 8 ounces marinated artichokes, drained and chopped
- 1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes (in oil), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bunch spinach, washed well
- 1 cup grated pecorino cheese
- Salt and pepper

Cooking Spinach

For dishes like this I like to use the larger adult spinach. Of course, you could use one of the 5 ounce boxes of cleaned baby spinach, but you'll save some money by using the larger bunch spinach.

To prepare the spinach, chop the stems off of the spinach and rinse it really well in a colander. Since the goal is to wilt this spinach, there's no need to dry it even. Just toss it straight into the skillet after you rinse it.

Directions:

- 1) Cook penne according to package. This should involve boiling it in a few quarts of water along with a big pinch of salt. Boil it until it is just cooked, then drain it and rinse it quickly with cold water to stop the cooking (or it will become sticky).
- 2) In a large skillet, add a drizzle of olive oil and the diced red onion over medium-high heat. Cook for a few minutes until onion softens. Season with a pinch of salt.
- 3) Add artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, and garlic and continue to cook for another minute or two.
- 4) Chop thick stems off of spinach and rinse it well. Add washed spinach to the skillet and cook until spinach is wilted, just a minute or two.
- 5) Stir in penne and season with salt and pepper. Stir well to combine. If you don't have a large enough skillet to fit everything, you can also add the veggie mixture to the pot with the drained penne.
- 6) Serve penne warm with grated pecorino cheese.



Plan This Meal!

35 minutes ahead - Drain artichokes and sun-dried tomatoes and dice all ingredients.

20 minutes ahead - Cook penne pasta.

15 minutes ahead - Start cooking onions in skillet.

5 minutes ahead - Toss everything together in the large skillet and serve!

Adding Protein

If you think this meal might need some extra protein, I would go with about a pound of chicken sausage (any variety will work). You can dice it up and brown the chicken before you cook the red onion in the skillet.

Proceed with the recipe once the chicken is cooked and it will add some extra flavor and protein to the dish. If you do this, the meal will easily feed 6 or you'll have plenty of lunch leftovers.

MEAL 2 | Roasted Cauliflower and Curry Chicken

Roasted cauliflower is an unbelievably under-rated dish in American kitchens. It's so easy to make and tastes fantastic. It's filling and goes with a ton of things, but pairs particularly well with this curried chicken. While curry may seem like an advanced flavor profile, this chicken is a simple marinade and easy to master thanks to a special ingredient I break-out below.

Seared Curry Chicken

Yield: 8 Servings | Time: 30 min.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup mango chutney
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 8 (4-oz) chicken cutlets

Directions:

- 1) Mash mango chutney with a fork in a medium bowl. Stir in olive oil, curry powder, and salt and mix well to combine. Add in chicken cutlets and coat well.
- 2) Marinate chicken for at least 15 minutes, but you could easily make this well in advance.
- 3) Preheat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Once hot, add chicken cutlets in two batches and sear chicken for about four minutes per side until the chicken is cooked through.
- 4) Serve the chicken with the cauliflower and save four cutlets for meal 3, the Mango chicken curry salad.



A Veggie Option

Honestly, the rice and cauliflower salad situation is almost enough for a meal on it's own. If you want to add a protein to the mix though either tofu or tempeh would work great as a substitute for the chicken.

Roasted Cauliflower with Rice

Yield: 6 Servings | Time: 50 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups brown rice, cooked
- 1 large cauliflower head, cut into florets
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1 lime, juice only
- Greek yogurt (garnish, opt.)

Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 500 degrees Fahrenheit. Cut florets off of cauliflower and toss liberally with olive oil, salt, and curry powder. Add the cauliflower to a baking sheet in a single layer.
- 2) Cover with foil and bake at 500 degrees F. for 15 minutes.
- 3) Remove foil and continue to bake, stirring every 8-10 minutes, until the cauliflower is well-browned, about 30-35 minutes.
- 4) Meanwhile, cook rice in a large pot of boiling water. Taste frequently until the rice is cooked through and soft with the slightest bite to it. Then drain the rice, return to the hot pot but off the heat, cover, and let the rice steam for five minutes.
- 5) When cauliflower is done roasting, toss it with the rice and sprinkle with lime juice. Taste the salad and adjust seasoning to your liking.

Serve salad with the chicken and a dollop of Greek yogurt.



Plan This Meal!

In Advance - If possible, in advance, marinate the chicken. Also, prep cauliflower and toss with spices.

50 minutes ahead - Start roasting cauliflower.

30 minutes ahead - Start cooking rice.

20 minutes ahead - Start searing chicken cutlets.

5 minutes ahead - Toss cauliflower with rice and serve with chicken cutlets.

Ingredient Breakout: Mango Chutney

Jarred mango chutney is a great ingredient to have in your back pocket and while you can make it from scratch, it takes at least an hour and many ingredients. A good jarred version, like Pataks, is almost certainly available in your local grocery store (check the ethnic aisle) and can be used for tons of stuff. In this meal plan, I use mango chutney to marinate the chicken, but also as a quick salad dressing in meal three!



MEAL 3 | Mango Chicken Curry Salad

This is my favorite meal in this plan because the flavors are so interesting and fresh. Meanwhile, you can toss it together in literally 15 minutes if you've already cooked the curry chicken from meal two.

Chicken Curry Salad

Yield: Serves 4 | Time: 15 min.

Ingredients:

- 4 (4-oz.) chicken cutlets, cooked
- 5 ounces arugula
- 1/2 red onion, sliced thin
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds
- 1/2 cup yogurt
- Cumin seeds, garnish

Mango Curry Dressing:

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup mango chutney
- 1/2 lemon, juice only
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

- 1) Combine the dressing ingredients in a small food processor and pulse until well combined. Some chunks are okay. If you don't have a food processor you can just mash the mango chutney with a fork and whisk the ingredients together.
- 2) Add arugula to a medium bowl and toss with about half of the dressing. It should be very lightly dressed.
- 3) Divide arugula between plates and top with sliced chicken, sliced onion, cherry tomatoes, pomegranate seeds, yogurt and cumin seeds. Serve with extra dressing on the side.



Salt and Pepper Bread

Yield: Serves 4 | Time: 15 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 small loaf French bread
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons black pepper

Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Cut bread in half horizontally. Melt butter and brush each half of bread with butter.
- 2) Sprinkle bread with salt and pepper. Use a liberal hand!
- 3) Bake bread for 6-7 minutes until the edges are getting crusty. Remove, slice and serve!



Plan This Meal!

In advance - Cook the chicken in advance to make this meal super-fast.

15 minutes left - Make mango chutney dressing. Bake bread.

10 minutes left - Slice and chop the onion, tomatoes, and chicken. Prepare pomegranate seeds.

5 minutes left - Toss arugula with dressing and serve up all the salads!



Preparing Pomegranate

These days you can find pomegranate seeds sold individually but it'll be a lot cheaper to harvest them yourself from the strange fruits.

To do this, just cut a large pomegranate into quarters and then submerge one quarter in cold water. With the pomegranate underwater, break up the flesh and seeds will sink. Then you can drain off the water and any white pith and you'll have just clean seeds.

One large pomegranate will give you more than enough seeds for these salads.

Two Easy Breakfasts | Croissant Sandwich and Parfaits

Everybody has their go-to easy breakfasts, but these are two very quick breakfasts that you might be able to add into your rotation. The croissant sandwich is really filling and almost a treat while the pomegranate parfaits are a great use of any extra seeds you have from meal 3.

Croissant Sandwiches

Yield: 4 sandwiches | Time: 20 min.

Ingredients:

- 4 croissants, from bakery
- 1/2 red onion, sliced thin
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 tomato, sliced (opt.)
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese, grated
- Bean sprouts
- 6 eggs, scrambled
- 2 tablespoon butter
- Salt and pepper



Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2) Slice croissants in half carefully and lay them on a baking sheet, cut side down. Toast in the oven for 5 minutes at 400 degrees.
- 3) Remove croissants from oven. Top with sliced avocado, red onion, and tomato on bottom half of croissant. Sprinkle grated cheese on top half of croissant.
- 4) Return to oven for 3-4 minutes.
- 5) Add a small dab of butter to a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Once melted and bubbling, crack in four eggs. Cook for about 90 seconds while scrambling lightly or you can lightly fry the eggs and not break the yolks for a runny yolk sandwich.
- 6) Remove croissants from oven. Divide the eggs to each croissant bottom. Top with sprouts and a pinch of salt and pepper. Add cheesy top of croissant and serve immediately!

Pomegranate Parfaits

Yield: 2 Parfaits | Time: 10 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/3 cup granola
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons pomegranate juice
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds (1 large pomegranate)

Directions:

- 1) In a small bowl, stir together Greek yogurt, honey, and pomegranate juice.
- 2) In two small cups, add 1/3 cup granola to each cup.
- 3) Top granola with 1/4 cup of pomegranate yogurt and sprinkle with fresh seeds.
- 4) Repeat layers of granola, yogurt, and seeds.

Serve immediately or chill and serve later.





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. This meal plan specifically uses a lot of holiday spices so it's a great chance to check on your pantry and trade out any old ones since ground spices get stale after a year or so.

Fresh Produce

- Arugula (5 oz.)
- Avocado (1)
- Bean sprouts (garnish)
- Cauliflower (1 head)
- Cherry tomatoes (1 pint)
- Garlic (2 cloves)
- Lemon (1/2)
- Lime (1)
- Pomegranate (2 large)
- Red onion (1 1/2)
- Spinach (1 bunch)
- Tomato (1)

Meat, Poultry, Seafood

- Chicken cutlets (8-4 oz. cutlets)

Dairy

- Butter (4 Tbsp.)
- Cheddar cheese (1/2 cup)
- Eggs (6)
- Greek yogurt (1 cup + 1/2 cup + garnish)
- Pecorino cheese (4 oz.)

Spices and Pantry Items

- Artichokes, marinated (8 oz.)
- Black pepper
- Brown rice (1 1/2 cups)
- Croissants (4)
- Cumin seeds (garnish)
- Curry powder (1 Tbsp. + 1 teas.)
- French bread (1 loaf)
- Granola (1 1/3 cup)
- Kosher salt
- Mango chutney (3/4 cup)
- Olive oil (3/4 cup + 1 Tbsp.)
- Penne pasta (1 lb.)
- Pomegranate juice (splash)
- Sun-dried tomatoes (1/2 cup)