



POLENTA POTENTIAL!

This meal plan centers around one of the most under-rated, economical, and delicious ingredients out there: ground corn. It comes in a variety of formats: grits, polenta, etc. It can come finely ground or coarsely ground.

You can use corn meal to coat things, but you can also cook it into a creamy base for hearty veggies or let it solidify and bake it into sticks (or a pizza).

These are an assortment of some of my favorite recipes that use polenta, or grits, or whatever you want to call them! They are all perfect for the winter since they are filling and warming.

Macheesmo Meals

Helpful Equipment:

- Tongs
- Baking Sheet
- Deep Fry Thermometer
- 1 1/2 quart baking dish
- Griddle



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

MEAL 1

- Spicy Sauteed Kale
- Creamy Grits

MEAL 2

- Polenta Pizza Pie

MEAL 3

- Weeknight Fish Sticks
- Chopped Kale Salad

EXTRAS!

- Jalapeno Popper Dip
- Stuffed Corn Cakes

#macheesmomeals: If you make anything in the meal plan, I would love it if you snapped a quick photo and shared it on Instagram or Twitter with the hashtag #macheesmomeals ! Thanks!

MEAL 1 | Spicy Sauteed Kale with Creamy Grits

This is a perfect quick winter dinner. In the time it takes to whip up a batch of thick, creamy grits, you can also saute some spicy kale to throw on top and you'll end up with a great meal. The key here is to make more grits than you need and use the leftovers for a polenta pizza for meal two!

Spicy Sauteed kale

Yield: Serves 4 | Time: 20 min.

Ingredients:

- 8 ounces peppered bacon, chopped
- 2 large shallots, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large bunch of kale, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/3 cup water
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

- 1) To start dish, dice bacon and add to a large frying pan over medium-low heat until crispy. Remove bacon and let drain on a few paper towels. Pour out bacon grease, leaving about two tablespoons in the pan.
- 2) Add sliced shallots, minced garlic, and chopped kale. Cook until soften about 4 minutes. Once wilted, stir in red pepper flakes and 1/3 cup water. Cover, reduce heat to low, and steam until tender, 4-5 minutes.
- 3) Stir balsamic vinegar into the wilted veggies and season with salt and pepper. Stir crispy bacon back into the kale. Serve it right away over the creamy grits.



Creamy Parmesan Grits

Yield: 8 Servings | Time: 25 min.

Ingredients:

- NOTE:** If you aren't making the polenta pizza for meal two, you can half this recipe.
- 2 cups coarse ground corn meal
 - 1 quart chicken stocks
 - 1 quart water
 - 1 teaspoon kosher salt
 - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 - 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
 - Ground pepper
 - Olive oil

Directions:

- 1) I like to start this recipe by lining a baking sheet with parchment paper and then drizzling it lightly with olive oil. You'll use this for the pizza in meal two. The parchment paper isn't essential, but if you don't use it, make sure to oil your sheet well.
- 2) Bring water and stock to a slight simmer over medium heat with the salt. Whisk in the corn meal and continue to stir until thick. Turn heat down to low and cook for 10-15 minutes until polenta is very thick.
- 3) Stir butter and Parmesan into the grits before serving. Also season with pepper.
- 4) Before you sit down to eat, pour about half of the grits onto your prepared baking sheet and spread it into an even layer across the entire sheet. It should be about 1/3-inch thick. After dinner, cover the pizza shell with plastic wrap and refrigerate for meal 2.



Plan This Meal!

30 min out - Start grits and rinse and wash kale.

25 min out - Start bacon in skillet.

20 min out - Check on grits and stir frequently.

15 min out - Cook shallot and garlic and kale. Steam the kale as directed.

5 min out - Split grits and use half to spread out on baking sheet for the pizza in meal two.

Divide the grits remaining between plates and top with the sauteed kale mixture. Serve while warm!



Vegetarian?

There is some bacon in the kale dish, but it's easily left out. If you do remove it, add a few tablespoons of olive oil to cook the veggies and kale in. The dish might also need a tiny bit of extra salt.

It's a great vegetarian dish as well though!

MEAL 2 | Polenta Pizza

Assuming you made the polenta pizza shell from meal one than this pizza is really easy to make. If you didn't do that then you'll need to make half of a polenta recipe from meal one, spread it on a baking sheet, and chill it before making the pizza.

Swiss Chard Polenta Pizza

Yield: Serves 4 | Time: 30 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 large prepared polenta pizza shell from meal 1
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 medium yellow onion, diced
- 1 Serrano pepper, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large bunch Swiss or rainbow chard, chopped
- 6 ounces mozzarella cheese, grated
- 2-3 ounces Asiago cheese, crumbled
- Salt and pepper
- Extra olive oil for drizzling

Directions:

- 1) Remove polenta from fridge. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.
- 2) Meanwhile, in a large skillet, add a drizzle of oil and onions. Cook for a few minutes over medium heat until soft. Then add pepper, garlic, and season with salt and pepper.
- 3) Roughly chop chard and rinse well, then add to skillet. Cook until chard is wilted, about five minutes. Stir regularly to prevent garlic from burning. Once the chard is wilted down, remove from heat.
- 4) Bake polenta with nothing on it for 20 minutes to crisp it up.
- 5) Remove polenta, drizzle with olive oil and distribute mozzarella cheese evenly over the surface.
- 6) Then add on your chard and crumbled asiago cheese.
- 7) Add pizza back to the oven and bake for another 10 minutes. The edges should be lightly browned and crispy and cheese should be melted.
- 8) Slice and serve immediately! You probably won't be able to actually pick up a slice. It's a fork-style pizza.



Grits vs. Polenta

There is some confusion on the difference between grits and polenta in the food world. The truth is that they are actually the same thing: ground corn.

But, I like to differentiate them by calling the creamy version grits (unless I'm in Italy) and calling the solidified version polenta (like this pizza).

That just helps me keep it straight in my mind though. You can pretty much interchange them!



MEAL 3 | Weeknight Fish Sticks with Kale Salad

These remind me of the fish sticks I used to eat as a child except about ten times better. They aren't overly salty and have a nice crispy crunch thanks to a light cornmeal coating.

Fish Sticks

Yield: Serves 4 | **Time:** 35 min.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound white fish, like cod
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoon creole or cajun seasoning, divided
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup breadcrumbs + 1 cup cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 quart neutral oil for frying

Jalapeno Tartar Sauce:

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup Greek yogurt
- 1/2 jalapeno, seeded and minced
- 1/2 lemon, juice only
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill, minced

Directions:

- 1) For tartar sauce, mince jalapeno and dill and stir ingredients together. Taste for seasoning and adjust to your liking. Store in the fridge until needed.
- 2) Slice cod (or other white fish) into planks 3-4 inches long and 1/2 inch thick. In a small bowl, toss together flour and 1 tablespoon of Cajun seasoning. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs until smooth, and in a third bowl stir together breadcrumbs with another tablespoon of Cajun seasoning, cornmeal, salt, and pepper.
- 3) Add fish to flour and toss lightly, then add to egg and coat. Finally move to breadcrumbs and press on breadcrumbs. Transfer fish sticks to a baking sheet. Let rest for five minutes before frying (or can be made in advance and store in the fridge).
- 4) Preheat oil to 350 degrees F. Be sure to use a deep fry thermometer to make sure the oil is the right temperature.
- 5) Fry fish sticks for about 5 minutes total until they are a deep golden brown and cooked through. Cooking time will vary depending on the thickness of your fish sticks.
- 6) Remove fish sticks and let drain on a paper towel. Serve while hot with lemons and tartar sauce.

Chopped Kale Salad

Yield: Serves 4 | **Time:** 10 minutes.

Ingredients:

Quick Lemon Dressing

- 1 lemon, juice only
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- Dash of hot sauce
- Salt and pepper

- 4 cups kale, finely chopped
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 3-4 scallions, minced
- 1 avocado, diced
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, slivered

Directions:

- 1) Squeeze lemon juice into a medium bowl, removing seeds. Whisk in vinegar and slowly drizzle in olive oil while whisking to form a dressing. Season dressing with a dash of hot sauce and a pinch of salt and pepper.
- 2) Wash kale well and chop into tiny strips.
- 3) Divide kale between plates and top with cherry tomatoes, avocado, scallions, and slivered Parmesan cheese. Serve with dressing on the side.



Extras! | Jalapeno Popper Dip and Corn Cakes

This is the football season and a good game-day appetizer is always in need. This jalapeno popper dip will disappear from your table! The corn cakes are a little bonus brunch recipe that I love to make for guests. They are easy, but really filling. Perfect on a cold day.

Popper Dip

Yield: 6-8 | **Time:** 50 min.

Ingredients:

- 5-6 jalapeno peppers, minced
- 1 poblano pepper, minced (opt.)
- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 16 oz. cream cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- Tortilla chips, for serving

Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Mince jalapenos and poblano. Leave the seeds in for extra heat.
- 2) Add olive oil to a skillet and saute peppers over medium heat for about 4 minutes until they soften.
- 3) In a large bowl, mix together sauteed peppers with cream cheese, grated cheddar, and mayo. Stir well to combine.
- 4) In a small bowl, mix together bread crumbs, butter, and parmesan cheese.
- 5) In a 1 1/2-2 quart buttered baking dish (or 8x8 dish), scoop in the dip and spread it evenly in the dish. Top with bread crumbs topping.
- 6) Bake for 30 minutes until cheese is melted and topping is browned.
- 7) Serve immediately with tortilla cheese or toasted bread.

Stuffed Corn Cakes

Yield: 6-8 cakes | **Time:** 50 min.

Ingredients:

Corn Cake Mixture:

- 1 1/2 cups fine ground cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups boiling water
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons olive oil plus extra for pan
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 large egg

Filling:

- 4 large strips bacon, diced
- 3-4 scallions, minced
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- Maple Syrup, for serving

Directions:

- 1) Stir together cornmeal and salt. Add boiling water and stir. Let sit for 5-10 minutes so water can absorb.
- 2) Stir in milk, olive oil, and egg into batter. Let rest while you make filling.
- 3) Dice bacon and cook in a medium skillet over medium heat until bacon is very crispy, about 10 minutes. Once crispy, drain bacon and stir together with minced scallions and shredded cheese.
- 4) To make cakes, add a drizzle of oil to a griddle or large skillet over medium heat. Once hot, add 1/4 cup of the cornmeal batter.
- 5) Immediately top batter with a small handful of the bacon filling. Spoon another 1/4 cup of batter over the top of the filling so it mostly covers the filling. It's okay if it doesn't cover everything.
- 6) Let cook for 3-4 minutes or until the edges are firm around the cake.
- 7) Flip cake and cook for another few minutes until they are cooked through.
- 8) Serve cakes immediately with maple syrup or salsa!





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

- Avocados (1)
- Cherry tomatoes (1 cup)
- Dill, fresh (1 Tbsp.)
- Garlic (4 cloves)
- Jalapeno (6)
- Kale (2 bunches)
- Lemons (2)
- Poblano pepper (1) (opt.)
- Scallions (1 bunch)
- Serrano pepper (1)
- Shallots (2)
- Swiss (or rainbow) chard (1 bunch)
- Yellow onion (1/2)

Meat, Poultry, Seafood

- Bacon (12-16 oz.)
- White fish, like cod (1 lb.)

Dairy

- Asiago cheese (3 oz.)
- Butter, unsalted (6 Tbsp.)
- Cheddar cheese (8 oz.)
- Cream cheese (16 oz.)
- Eggs (4 large)
- Greek yogurt (1/4 cup)
- Milk (1/2 cup)
- Mozzarella cheese (6 oz.)
- Parmesan cheese (6-8 oz.)

Spices and Pantry Items

- All-purpose flour (1 cup)
- Apple cider vinegar (2 Tbsp.)
- Balsamic vinegar (1 Tbsp.)
- Black pepper (1 teas.)
- Breadcrumbs (2 cup)
- Chicken stock (1 qt.)
- Cornmeal, coarse or medium (2 cups)
- Cornmeal, fine (2 1/2 cups)
- Creole or Cajun seasoning (2 Tbsp.)
- Hot sauce
- Kosher salt (1 Tbsp.)
- Maple syrup, for serving
- Mayonnaise (1 1/2 cup)
- Neutral oil (1 qt.)
- Olive oil (2/3 cup + a drizzle)
- Red pepper flakes (1/2 teas.)
- Sugar (1 Tbsp.)
- Tortilla chips, for serving