

Cooking Corner Tips To Help You

Winning Ways With Easy Dinners

(NAPSA)—If you're looking for ideas that might help remove some of the roadblocks to making dinner time easier for the whole family, you may want to consider some of the award-winning ideas generated in a recent contest sponsored by General Mills' Dinner Made Easy program. The contest attracted a variety of useful suggestions from families trying to make meal time simpler:

Create "dinner time teams."

One dinner time team prepares dinner, while the other team judges the meal based on speed of prep time, how much food is left over and how easy it is to clean up. Winning teams get extra privileges, such as choice of movie rentals. A winning team, for example, might create "taco bar night," using items such as Old El Paso ready-to-use taco meat, refried beans, taco shells and salsa, as well as fresh lettuce, tomato and cheese, so family members can assemble their own meal—ranging from tacos to nachos to taco salad.

Stretch your meals out.

Make a big dinner on Sunday and get creative with leftovers all week long. For example, roasting two chickens can create ingredients for recipes later in the week, such as chicken salad or chicken rice soup.

Buy low, freeze for later.

For fresh vegetables that freeze well, such as onions, celery or bell peppers, save money by buying when the price is low, then chopping and freezing for later use. Or use frozen vegetables.

Rely on organization to minimize clean-up time. Organizing washed utensils in their own section of the dishwasher basket can simplify the task of returning clean utensils to appropriate slots in your silverware holder.

Make meal prep easier with advance steps. Before preparing your meal, gather and measure all ingredients, place appropriate pots and pans on the stove and measure needed spices into a small bowl.

Make dinner time family time. Have everyone come to the kitchen 10 minutes prior to dinner time with washed hands and a specific role.

Organize your meal time tools. Keep utensils and pots or pans that you use for each dinner together in one place, so you'll be all set to grab your ingredients and get cooking.

Picture dinner in advance. Keep your favorite recipes in a small photo album that includes side dishes, beverages and desserts. Before shopping, flip through the album to create dinner menus for the entire week.

Save time with convenient products. Cut prep time by using pre-cut, pre-chopped and pre-prepared ingredients such as shredded cheeses, frozen biscuits or frozen vegetables.

Take time to plan. Set aside 15 minutes for a snack—say peanut butter and celery—and talk about each person's role in preparing the meal.

For more tips and dinner ideas, visit BettyCrocker.com and click on Dinner Made Easy.