

Life Skills and Hobbies

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Preface

This is a Quarto book.

To learn more about Quarto books visit <https://quarto.org/docs/books>.

Part I

Cooking

1 Basics of Nutrition

1.1 1. Macronutrients — The Body's Primary Fuel and Building Blocks

Macronutrients are nutrients needed in large amounts and provide energy (calories):

Macronutrient	Main Functions	Calories per gram	Found In
Carbohydrates	Main source of energy	4 kcal	Grains, fruits, legumes, vegetables
Proteins	Builds and repairs tissue; enzymes, hormones	4 kcal	Meat, dairy, legumes, eggs, tofu
Fats	Energy storage, hormones, cell membranes	9 kcal	Oils, nuts, seeds, avocado, fish
Water	Hydration, transport, temperature regulation	0	All foods and fluids
Fiber (carb)	Digestive health, blood sugar regulation	0 (indigestible)	Whole grains, vegetables, legumes

Approximate daily recommendations (based on a 2000 kcal diet):

- Carbs: 45–65% of daily calories → ~225–325 g
- Protein: 10–35% → ~50–175 g (average need: ~0.8–1.2 g/kg body weight)
- Fat: 20–35% → ~44–78 g

1.2 2. Micronutrients — The Small Players with Big Roles

Micronutrients are nutrients needed in small amounts, but are essential for health, growth, and cellular function. They don't provide energy, but they enable your body to function.

Vitamins (organic compounds): Support immunity, energy metabolism, skin, vision, nerve function, blood health, and more.

Minerals (inorganic elements): Support bone structure, nerve transmission, fluid balance, oxygen transport, and enzyme activity.

Examples with daily needs and common sources:

Micronutrient	Daily Dose	Common Sources	Function
Vitamin A	700–900 µg	Carrots, liver, sweet potato	Vision, skin, immune system
Vitamin C	75–90 mg	Citrus, peppers, broccoli	Antioxidant, collagen synthesis
Vitamin D	15–20 µg (600–800 IU)	Sunlight, fatty fish, fortified milk	Bone health, calcium absorption
Vitamin B12	2.4 µg	Meat, fish, dairy, eggs	Nerve function, red blood cells
Iron	8–18 mg	Red meat, spinach, legumes	Oxygen transport
Calcium	1000–1200 mg	Dairy, tofu, leafy greens	Bones, muscle contraction
Magnesium	310–420 mg	Nuts, whole grains, leafy greens	Muscle and nerve function
Zinc	8–11 mg	Meat, legumes, seeds	Immune function, wound healing
Iodine	150 µg	Iodized salt, seafood, dairy	Thyroid hormone production

These values vary slightly depending on age, sex, and life stage.

1.3 3. Food Groups — How Nutrients Appear in Real Foods

Food groups are practical categories of whole foods that provide a variety of macro- and micronutrients.

Food Group	Main Nutrients Provided
Fruits	Carbohydrates, fiber, vitamin C, potassium
Vegetables	Fiber, vitamins A/K/C, magnesium, antioxidants
Grains	Carbohydrates, B-vitamins, fiber (whole grains)
Protein Foods	Protein, iron, B12, zinc, fats (animal or plant)

Food Group	Main Nutrients Provided
Dairy	Protein, calcium, vitamin D, B12
Fats & Oils	Fats (esp. unsaturated), vitamin E

A balanced diet combines all food groups, ensuring you get:

- All macronutrients for energy and structure
- All micronutrients for regulation and support

1.4 4. What a Healthy Diet Looks Like (In Practice)

- Half your plate = vegetables and fruits
 - One quarter = whole grains (rice, oats, bread)
 - One quarter = protein foods (legumes, meat, tofu, eggs)
 - A small amount of healthy fats (olive oil, nuts, seeds)
 - Plenty of water
 - Some dairy or dairy alternatives
 - Variety over time ensures full nutrient coverage
-

2 Meal Plan

2.1 Balanced 3-Week Dinner Plan (Final 24 Meals)

Week 1

Day	Meal No.	Meal Name
Monday	1	Chickpea Coconut Curry
Tuesday	4	Creamy Mushroom Soup
Wednesday	6	Chicken & Tomato Skillet with Rice
Thursday	10	Pasta with Mushrooms & Garlic
Friday	12	Tomato-Cucumber Salad (Egg-Free)
Saturday	21	Spaghetti Bolognese
Sunday	5	Egg Fried Rice with Vegetables
Flex/Extra	19	Classic Tomato Soup

Week 2

Day	Meal No.	Meal Name
Monday	3	Chicken & Vegetable Rice Bowl
Tuesday	7	Lentil Soup
Wednesday	2	Pasta with Garlic, Olive Oil & Veggies
Thursday	13	Mushroom & Cabbage Stir-Fry with Rice
Friday	17	Tuna Pasta
Saturday	20	Wrap with Vegetables & Yogurt Sauce
Sunday	14	Pea & Potato Masala
Flex/Extra	22	Ground Beef & Potato Hash

Week 3

Day	Meal No.	Meal Name
Monday	15	Chicken Rice Porridge (Congee Style)
Tuesday	8	Couscous Salad with Roasted Veggies
Wednesday	23	Beef-Stuffed Bell Peppers (Stovetop)
Thursday	9	Shakshuka (Eggs in Tomato Sauce)
Friday	11	Red Bean Chili
Saturday	24	Vegetable & Chickpea Stew
Sunday	16	Garlic Chicken with Potatoes & Greens
Flex/Extra	18	Tuna Pasta (Olive Oil or Tomato Base)

2.2 24-Meal Dinner Plan with Full Recipes

(For compact kitchens, beginner-friendly cooking, and balanced variety)

Meal 1 – Chickpea Coconut Curry

A warming, gently spiced curry with chickpeas and creamy coconut milk. Great with rice.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 can chickpeas (drained and rinsed)
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp curry powder
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (optional)
- 1 can (400 ml) coconut milk
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt to taste
- Optional: fresh ginger, chili flakes
- Cooked rice for serving

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pot over medium heat. Sauté chopped onion until soft (3–4 minutes).
2. Add garlic (and ginger or chili if using), stir for 30 seconds.
3. Add curry powder and tomato paste, stir to toast the spices briefly.
4. Pour in coconut milk, stir, then add chickpeas and a pinch of salt.
5. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook uncovered for 10–15 minutes until slightly thickened.

6. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve hot over rice.

Meal 2 – Pasta with Garlic, Olive Oil, and Veggies

A quick, bright pasta dish using simple ingredients and minimal prep. Perfect for a weeknight.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150g pasta (e.g. spaghetti, fusilli)
- 1 handful spinach (fresh or frozen)
- 1 small handful cherry tomatoes, halved (or 1 chopped tomato)
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: chili flakes, grated cheese

Instructions

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Cook pasta until al dente. Reserve some pasta water before draining.
2. While pasta cooks, heat olive oil in a pan over medium-low heat.
3. Add sliced garlic and sauté until fragrant but not browned (1–2 minutes).
4. Add cherry tomatoes and cook until softened (2–3 minutes). Add spinach and cook until wilted.
5. Add the drained pasta to the pan and toss everything together. Add a splash of pasta water to loosen if needed.
6. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with chili flakes or grated cheese if desired.

Meal 3 – Chicken & Vegetable Rice Bowl

Simple and satisfying. Stir-fried chicken and vegetables served over rice.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 small chicken breast, cut into bite-sized strips
- 1 bell pepper, sliced
- ½ onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, minced

- 1–2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Cooked rice for serving
- Optional: sesame seeds, chili flakes

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a frying pan or wok over medium-high heat.
2. Add chicken, season lightly with salt, and cook until golden and fully cooked (4–6 minutes). Remove and set aside.
3. In the same pan, add onion and bell pepper. Stir-fry for 3–4 minutes until slightly softened.
4. Add garlic and return the chicken to the pan. Stir in soy sauce. Cook for 1–2 more minutes.
5. Serve over a bowl of rice. Add optional toppings if you like.

Here are the full recipe descriptions for meals **4 to 6**, following your exact markdown formatting preferences.

Meal 4 – Creamy Mushroom Soup

A cozy, earthy soup made with mushrooms and potatoes. Optional cream adds richness, but it's delicious even without.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 200–250g mushrooms, sliced
- 1 small potato, peeled and diced
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp butter or oil
- 500 ml water or broth
- 2–3 tbsp cream or milk (optional)
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: thyme or parsley

Instructions

1. Heat butter or oil in a pot over medium heat.
2. Add chopped onion and garlic, sauté 2–3 minutes.
3. Add mushrooms and cook until browned and reduced in size (6–8 minutes).
4. Add diced potato and pour in water or broth. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes until potatoes are soft.
6. Optionally blend some or all of the soup for a smoother texture.
7. Stir in cream or milk at the end if using. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Meal 5 – Egg Fried Rice with Vegetables

A quick one-pan meal using leftover rice, scrambled eggs, and vegetables.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1–1½ cups cooked rice (cold or leftover works best)
- 2 eggs
- 1 small carrot, diced or grated
- ½ cup frozen mixed vegetables (e.g. peas, corn)
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1–2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: spring onion, sesame oil

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a wide pan or wok over medium heat.
2. Add garlic and diced carrot. Sauté 2–3 minutes until beginning to soften.
3. Push the vegetables to one side. Crack in the eggs and scramble them in the pan.
4. Add the rice and frozen vegetables. Stir everything together.
5. Add soy sauce and cook for 3–5 minutes, stirring often, until everything is hot and slightly crisped.
6. Taste and adjust seasoning. Garnish with spring onion or a drizzle of sesame oil if desired.

You're thinking **exactly right** — and yes, **Option A (Chicken and Tomato Skillet with Rice)** is a great replacement, both **logistically and culinarily**.

You're spot on that:

- The ingredients (chicken, onion, garlic, canned tomatoes, rice, olive oil, paprika or herbs) are already used in other meals in **Shopping Block 1 and 2**, so:
 - You **won't need to buy anything new**
 - You'll **use up existing ingredients** more efficiently
 - You avoid regenerating shopping lists, keeping everything in sync

This makes the substitution **seamless** and improves the overall balance of the meal plan.

Now here's your new **Meal 6**, formatted just like the others:

Meal 6 – Chicken and Tomato Skillet with Rice

A simple, rustic stovetop chicken dish with soft stewed tomatoes and garlic. Rich but light, and very beginner-friendly.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 small chicken breast, cut into chunks or strips
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (or ½ can diced tomatoes)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp paprika or dried herbs (thyme, oregano)
- Salt and pepper
- Cooked rice for serving
- Optional: chili flakes or a splash of vinegar

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté for 3–4 minutes until soft.
2. Add garlic and stir for another 30 seconds.
3. Add the chicken, season with salt, pepper, and paprika or herbs. Sauté for 5–7 minutes until lightly browned.
4. Stir in tomato paste (or canned tomatoes) and a splash of water if needed to make a light sauce.
5. Reduce heat and simmer for 5–10 minutes until chicken is cooked through and the sauce is slightly thickened.
6. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve hot over rice.

Alternatively:

Chicken & Vegetable Stir-Fry with Rice

Overview: A quick, colorful and satisfying one-pan meal with tender chicken pieces, crisp sautéed vegetables, and fragrant soy-garlic sauce. Serve with freshly cooked or leftover rice.

Main Ingredients (*1–2 servings*):

- 150–200 g chicken breast or thigh, sliced thin
- 1 small bell pepper (any color), sliced
- 1 small zucchini or a handful of green beans, sliced
- 1 small carrot, julienned or thinly sliced
- 1 small onion or 2 spring onions, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 tsp grated fresh ginger (optional)
- 1–2 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil or neutral oil
- Optional: chili flakes or a dash of vinegar for tang

Starch:

- ½–1 cup cooked rice (fresh or leftover)

Optional Toppings:

- Sesame seeds
- Extra spring onion greens
- A few drops of toasted sesame oil

Instructions:

1. **Prep ingredients:** Slice all vegetables and chicken thinly for quick cooking. Have rice ready.
2. **Cook chicken:** Heat oil in a large pan or wok over medium-high. Add chicken and sear until golden and just cooked through. Remove and set aside.
3. **Sauté vegetables:** Add a touch more oil if needed. Stir-fry onion and carrot for 1–2 minutes, then add bell pepper, zucchini (or green beans), garlic, and ginger. Stir-fry until crisp-tender.
4. **Combine & season:** Return chicken to the pan. Add soy sauce (and chili or vinegar if using). Toss well to coat.
5. **Serve:** Spoon the stir-fry over hot rice and sprinkle with toppings if desired.

Tips:

- You can use any mix of vegetables: cabbage, mushrooms, broccoli, or snap peas also work well.

- Stir-fry is flexible: double the veggies for a lighter version, or use tofu instead of chicken for a meatless night.

Meal 7 – Lentil Soup

A hearty, protein-rich soup made with red lentils, warm spices, and optionally a touch of lemon. Great for cold days and easy to batch.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup red lentils (rinsed)
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 small carrot, diced (optional)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground cumin
- Salt and pepper
- 3–4 cups water or vegetable broth
- Optional: lemon juice for serving

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pot over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic for 2–3 minutes.
2. Add cumin and stir for 30 seconds to bloom the spice. Add carrot if using.
3. Add rinsed lentils and $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 cups water or broth. Bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat and simmer for 20–25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lentils have broken down and soup has thickened.
5. Taste and adjust seasoning. Add lemon juice before serving if desired.
6. Optionally blend a portion of the soup for a smoother texture.

Meal 8 – Couscous Salad with Roasted Vegetables

A light yet satisfying warm salad with fluffy couscous, sweet roasted vegetables, and a lemony dressing.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- ½ cup couscous
- 1 small zucchini, diced
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- ½ onion, sliced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: herbs (parsley, mint), garlic, chili flakes

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 200°C. Place chopped zucchini, bell pepper, and onion on a baking tray. Toss with 1 tbsp olive oil, salt, and pepper. Roast for 20–25 minutes until soft and browned.
2. Meanwhile, place couscous in a bowl with a pinch of salt. Pour over ½ cup boiling water. Cover and let sit for 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork.
3. Combine roasted vegetables with couscous.
4. Drizzle with remaining olive oil and lemon juice. Add chopped herbs or chili if desired. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Meal 9 – Shakshuka

A North African and Middle Eastern dish of eggs poached in a spiced tomato sauce. Perfect for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 2 eggs
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 cup diced tomatoes (canned or fresh)
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (optional)
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: chili flakes, parsley, bread for serving

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic until soft (3–4 minutes).
2. Stir in tomato paste (if using), paprika, and cumin. Cook 1 minute.
3. Add diced tomatoes and a pinch of salt. Simmer uncovered for 10–15 minutes until thickened.
4. Make small wells in the sauce and crack in the eggs. Cover and cook 5–8 minutes until eggs are set to your liking.
5. Season with pepper. Garnish with parsley or chili flakes. Serve with bread.

Meal 10 – Pasta with Mushrooms and Garlic

A simple and comforting pasta dish with savory mushrooms and aromatic garlic, finished with optional herbs or cheese.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150g pasta (e.g. linguine, spaghetti, or fusilli)
- 200g mushrooms, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced or thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp olive oil or butter
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: chopped parsley, grated cheese

Instructions

1. Cook pasta in salted water until al dente. Reserve some pasta water before draining.
2. While pasta cooks, heat olive oil or butter in a frying pan over medium heat.
3. Add mushrooms and sauté for 6–8 minutes until browned and reduced in size.
4. Add garlic and cook another 1–2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Add cooked pasta to the pan. Toss to coat, adding a splash of pasta water if needed.
6. Serve with chopped parsley or cheese if desired.

Meal 11 – Red Bean Chili

A rich, filling stew of beans, tomatoes, and warm spices. Great with rice, bread, or on its own.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 can red beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 cup diced tomatoes (canned or fresh)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp chili powder or flakes (optional)
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: fresh herbs, yogurt for serving

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic for 2–3 minutes.
2. Add tomato paste, cumin, paprika, and chili. Stir and cook 1 minute.
3. Add diced tomatoes and beans. Stir well.
4. Simmer uncovered for 15–20 minutes until thickened.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Serve hot, with optional toppings or bread.

Meal 12 – Tomato-Cucumber Salad with Bread or Cheese

A light and refreshing salad, perfect as a side dish or light meal when paired with bread or cheese.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1–2 tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cucumber, sliced
- 1–2 tsp olive oil
- 1 tsp vinegar or lemon juice
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: feta or soft cheese, bread, fresh herbs

Instructions

1. Combine chopped tomatoes and cucumber in a bowl.
2. Drizzle with olive oil and vinegar or lemon juice.
3. Season with salt and pepper. Toss gently.
4. Serve as is, or with crumbled cheese and a slice of bread. Add herbs like parsley or mint if available.

Meal 13 – Mushroom & Cabbage Stir-Fry with Rice

A simple, savory vegetable stir-fry featuring tender mushrooms and softened cabbage, balanced with soy sauce and served over rice.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150–200g mushrooms, sliced
- 1–2 cups cabbage, thinly sliced
- ½ onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Cooked rice for serving
- Optional: chili flakes, sesame seeds, a splash of vinegar

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a large frying pan or wok over medium-high heat.
2. Add sliced onion and mushrooms. Stir-fry for 5–7 minutes until mushrooms are browned and reduced.
3. Add garlic and sliced cabbage. Stir well and cook for another 4–5 minutes until the cabbage softens but still retains some bite.
4. Stir in soy sauce and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add chili flakes if desired.
5. Serve hot over a bowl of rice. Optionally garnish with sesame seeds or a light splash of vinegar for contrast.

Ready to continue with confirmation step for meals 16 to 18?

Meal 14 – Pea & Potato Masala

A simple, warm Indian-inspired dish with soft potatoes, sweet peas, and gentle spice. Can be served on its own or with flatbread, rice, or yogurt.

Ingredients (1–2 servings):

- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup frozen green peas (or more to taste)
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp cooking oil (sunflower or olive oil is fine)
- 1 tsp curry powder (or a blend of turmeric + cumin)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt (adjust to taste)
- Optional: chili flakes or fresh chili
- Optional: a small knob of butter or squeeze of lemon at the end

Instructions

1. **Prep the potatoes:** Peel and dice the potatoes into small cubes (~1.5 cm). This helps them cook faster and blend nicely with the peas.
2. **Start the base:** Heat oil in a medium saucepan or deep frying pan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and cook for 3–4 minutes until soft and slightly golden. Add minced garlic and stir for 30 seconds until fragrant.
3. **Add the spices:** Sprinkle in curry powder (or turmeric + cumin). Stir into the onion/garlic base for 30–60 seconds — this blooms the spices and builds flavor.
4. **Add potatoes and water:** Add the diced potatoes and just enough water to **almost cover them** (about $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 cup). Add salt. Stir to coat everything in the spiced oil.
5. **Simmer:** Cover the pan with a lid and **simmer gently** for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are nearly tender. If the water is evaporating too fast, add a splash more.
6. **Add the peas:** Stir in the frozen peas. Continue simmering (uncovered) for another 5–7 minutes, until everything is soft and coated in a lightly thickened sauce.
7. **Final touches:** Taste and adjust salt. Add chili for heat, lemon for brightness, or a small spoon of butter for richness, depending on your mood.

Serving Ideas

- Eat it as-is with a spoon
- Pair with flatbread, toast, or plain rice
- Add a spoonful of plain yogurt for contrast

15. Chicken Rice Porridge (Congee Style)

A warm, comforting dish made by slowly simmering rice into a porridge texture, with tender chicken and ginger.

Ingredients (1–2 servings):

- ½ cup rice (uncooked)
- 4 cups water (or light chicken broth)
- 1 small chicken breast (raw)
- 1 thumb-sized piece fresh ginger, peeled and sliced
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp soy sauce (optional)
- Spring onion or sesame oil (optional)

Instructions

1. **Combine rice, water, and raw chicken** in a pot. Add sliced ginger and salt. (Yes — the chicken goes in raw. It will gently cook in the porridge as it simmers.)
2. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer uncovered or partly covered for **40–60 minutes**, stirring occasionally.
3. After 20–30 minutes, remove the chicken breast. Let it cool slightly and **shred it with a fork**.
4. Return shredded chicken to the pot. Continue simmering until the rice has broken down into a thick, creamy consistency (like soft oatmeal). If it gets too thick, add more water a bit at a time.
5. Season with soy sauce or extra salt to taste. Garnish with chopped spring onion or a drizzle of sesame oil if desired.

Texture and Flavor Notes:

- It should be soft, almost soup-like, but still spoonable.
- The ginger adds fragrance and warmth.
- It's comforting, minimal, and forgiving — you can't really overcook it.

What is “Congee,” really?

Congee (or rice porridge) is a dish where **rice is cooked in a large amount of water for a long time** — it breaks down into a thick, porridge-like texture. It’s not regular steamed rice with some toppings.

So the **key technique** is to simmer rice with extra water from the beginning and cook it well beyond the usual point, until the grains are very soft or partly dissolved.

16. Garlic Chicken with Potatoes & Greens

Ingredients (1–2 servings):

- 1 small chicken breast or thigh (cut into chunks or strips)
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 150–200g frozen spinach or other greens
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup water or light broth
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: lemon juice, paprika, fresh herbs

Instructions

1. Brown the chicken

- Heat 1 tbsp oil in a wide pan over medium-high heat.
- Add chicken, season with salt and pepper, and brown on both sides (about 4–6 minutes total).
- Add garlic and cook another 30 seconds.
- Remove chicken and set aside.

2. Sauté the potatoes

- Add the remaining 1 tbsp oil to the pan.
- Add diced potatoes and cook uncovered for 5–7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly golden.

3. Steam until tender

- Add ½ cup water (or broth).
- Cover the pan with a lid and let the potatoes steam for about 8–10 minutes, until fork-tender.
- Remove the lid and let excess liquid evaporate if needed.

4. Finish with spinach and chicken

- Return the browned chicken to the pan.
- Add the frozen spinach on top.
- Stir, then cook uncovered for another 3–5 minutes until everything is heated through and well combined.

5. Final touches (optional)

- Add a squeeze of lemon juice or a drizzle of olive oil.
- Season with additional pepper or herbs if desired.

Result: Golden potatoes, flavorful browned chicken, and greens that don't overpower the texture. Light but satisfying, and no watery mess.

Meal 17 – Tuna Pasta (Olive Oil or Tomato Base)

A fast pantry-friendly pasta dish with tuna and your choice of a light olive oil base or simple tomato sauce.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150g pasta (e.g. fusilli, penne)
- 1 can tuna in oil or water, drained
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Optional base:
 - Tomato version: $\frac{1}{2}$ can diced tomatoes or 1–2 tbsp tomato paste
 - Olive oil version: extra olive oil + chili flakes, parsley, lemon
- Salt and pepper

Instructions

1. Cook pasta in salted water until al dente. Reserve a splash of pasta water before draining.
2. Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a pan. Sauté onion for 3–4 minutes, then add garlic.
3. Add tuna and stir to break it apart.
4. For tomato version: stir in diced tomatoes or tomato paste. Simmer for 5–7 minutes.
For olive oil version: skip tomatoes and add chili flakes or herbs to the tuna.
5. Add cooked pasta to the pan. Toss everything together, adding reserved water if needed.
6. Season with salt and pepper. Serve warm, with lemon juice or grated cheese if desired.

Alternative: with **cherry tomatoes**

Meal 17 – Tuna Pasta (Cherry Tomato & Tomato Paste Version)

A quick, pantry-friendly pasta dish with tuna, fresh cherry tomatoes, and a touch of tomato paste for a light but flavorful sauce.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150g pasta (e.g. fusilli, penne)
- 1 can tuna in oil or water, drained
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- **8–12 cherry tomatoes**, halved or quartered
- **1 tbsp tomato paste**
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: splash of pasta water, chili flakes, fresh parsley, lemon juice, or grated cheese

Instructions

1. **Cook the Pasta** Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Cook pasta until **al dente**. **Reserve ¼ cup of the pasta water**, then drain the pasta.
2. **Sauté the Aromatics** In a pan, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add chopped onion and sauté for **3–4 minutes**, until soft. Add minced garlic and cook for **30 seconds** more.
3. **Add Cherry Tomatoes** Stir in the halved cherry tomatoes. Cook for **5–7 minutes**, until they soften and start to break down. Use the back of a spoon to gently press some of them, releasing their juices.
4. **Add Tomato Paste** Stir in **1 tbsp tomato paste** and let it cook for **1–2 minutes**, mixing well with the tomatoes. (This enhances the flavor and deepens the sauce.)

5. **Add Tuna** Add the drained tuna and stir to combine. Cook for another **2–3 minutes**, just to heat through. If the sauce seems dry, add a splash of the reserved pasta water.
 6. **Combine with Pasta** Add the drained pasta to the pan and toss everything together. Adjust the consistency with more pasta water if needed.
 7. **Season and Serve** Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm with **lemon juice, chili flakes, fresh herbs, or grated cheese** if desired.
-

(another) alternative Tuna Pasta (Bell Pepper & Cherry Tomato Version)

A vibrant and balanced pasta dish featuring tuna, sweet bell pepper strips, fresh cherry tomatoes, and a touch of tomato paste for richness. A perfect mix of pantry staples and fresh vegetables.

Ingredients (1–2 servings):

- 150g pasta (e.g. fusilli, penne)
- 1 can tuna in oil or water, drained
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ medium bell pepper (red, yellow, or orange), thinly sliced into short strips (about 3–5 cm long)
- 8–12 cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: splash of pasta water, chili flakes, fresh parsley, rosemary, lemon juice, or grated cheese
- Optional: a few olives, finely chopped, stirred in at the end

Instructions:

1. **Cook the Pasta** Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Cook pasta until al dente. Reserve ¼ cup of the pasta water, then drain the pasta.
2. **Sauté the Aromatics** In a large pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and sauté for 3–4 minutes until softened. Add the minced garlic and sauté for 30 seconds until fragrant.
3. **Add the Bell Pepper Strips** Add the sliced bell pepper to the pan. Sauté for 4–6 minutes, stirring occasionally, until slightly softened but still colorful and crisp-tender.
4. **Add Cherry Tomatoes** Stir in the halved cherry tomatoes. Cook for 3–5 minutes, letting them soften and release their juices. Lightly press some with the back of a spoon to help form the sauce.

5. **Add Tomato Paste** Stir in the tomato paste and cook for 1–2 minutes, mixing thoroughly to blend the flavors and thicken the sauce slightly.
6. **Add Tuna** Stir in the drained tuna and heat through for 1–2 minutes. If the mixture looks dry, add a splash of the reserved pasta water.
7. **Combine with Pasta** Add the drained pasta and toss everything to coat. Adjust the texture with more pasta water as needed.
8. **Season and Serve** Season with salt and pepper to taste. Optionally finish with chopped herbs (parsley or rosemary), a few chopped olives, chili flakes, lemon juice, or grated cheese.

Meal 18 – Vegetable & Chickpea Stew (Moroccan-Inspired)

A warmly spiced vegetable and chickpea stew, inspired by Moroccan flavors. Nourishing and full of color.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 small carrot, diced
- 1 small zucchini or bell pepper, diced
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup water or broth
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: fresh parsley or lemon juice

Instructions

1. Heat olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and garlic, sauté 2–3 minutes.
2. Stir in tomato paste and all the spices. Cook 1 minute.
3. Add carrot and zucchini (or pepper), chickpeas, and 1 cup water or broth. Stir and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 20–25 minutes, until vegetables are tender and stew has thickened.
5. Season to taste. Serve warm, optionally garnished with parsley or a squeeze of lemon.

Meal 19 – Classic Tomato Soup

A smooth and comforting soup made from simple ingredients. Great with toast or a side salad.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 can diced tomatoes (400g)
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (optional, for depth)
- 1 tbsp olive oil or butter
- 1 cup water or broth
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: cream or milk (2–3 tbsp), fresh basil, croutons

Instructions

1. Heat olive oil or butter in a pot over medium heat. Sauté onion for 3–4 minutes, then add garlic.
2. Stir in tomato paste (if using), then add canned tomatoes and water or broth.
3. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10–15 minutes.
4. Blend the soup using a stick blender (or carefully transfer to a blender).
5. Return to the pot, stir in cream or milk if using, and adjust seasoning.
6. Serve hot, optionally topped with fresh herbs or croutons.

Meal 20 – Wrap with Vegetables & Yogurt Sauce

A light and refreshing wrap filled with sautéed vegetables and a tangy yogurt dressing.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1–2 flatbreads or tortillas
- 1 small zucchini or bell pepper, sliced
- ½ onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 small tomato, diced
- 2–3 tbsp plain yogurt
- ½ tsp lemon juice

- 1 tsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: chili flakes, fresh herbs

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan and sauté onion, garlic, and zucchini or pepper until softened (5–7 minutes). Season with salt and pepper.
2. In a small bowl, mix yogurt with lemon juice, a pinch of salt, and optional chili or herbs.
3. Warm the flatbread briefly in a dry pan.
4. Fill each wrap with cooked vegetables, fresh tomato, and a spoonful of yogurt sauce.
5. Fold and serve immediately.

Meal 21 – Spaghetti Bolognese

A classic Italian meat sauce served with spaghetti. Rich, savory, and satisfying.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 150g spaghetti
- 200g ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 cup diced tomatoes (or passata)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: dried oregano or basil, grated cheese

Instructions

1. Cook spaghetti in salted water until al dente. Drain and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a saucepan. Sauté onion for 3–4 minutes, then add garlic and cook another 30 seconds.
3. Add ground beef and cook until browned, breaking it up with a spoon.
4. Stir in tomato paste, then add diced tomatoes. Add salt, pepper, and herbs if using.
5. Simmer sauce on low heat for 15–20 minutes until thickened.
6. Serve the sauce over spaghetti and top with cheese if desired.

Meal 22 – Ground Beef & Potato Hash

A hearty, rustic skillet dish with ground beef, diced potatoes, and basic seasoning. Simple and filling.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 200g ground beef
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- ½ onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: paprika, herbs, chili flakes

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add diced potatoes and cook for 8–10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until golden and partly tender.
2. Add chopped onion and garlic. Cook another 2–3 minutes.
3. Add ground beef and break it apart with a spoon. Season with salt, pepper, and any optional spices.
4. Cook everything together for another 8–10 minutes until the beef is browned and the potatoes are fully soft.
5. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve hot, optionally with a spoon of yogurt or a fried egg on top.

Meal 23 – Beef-Stuffed Bell Peppers (Stovetop Method)

Sweet bell peppers filled with a flavorful ground beef and rice mixture, simmered until tender.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 2 bell peppers, halved and deseeded
- 150g ground beef
- ½ cup cooked rice
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- ½ cup water or broth

- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: dried herbs, paprika

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan. Sauté onion and garlic for 2–3 minutes. Add ground beef and cook until browned.
2. Stir in tomato paste, cooked rice, salt, pepper, and any herbs or paprika. Mix well and remove from heat.
3. Fill each bell pepper half with the beef-rice mixture.
4. Place the filled peppers in a lidded pan. Add ½ cup water or broth to the bottom of the pan.
5. Cover and simmer gently for 25–30 minutes, until the peppers are tender and the filling is hot.
6. Serve warm with a spoonful of yogurt or tomato sauce if desired.

Meal 24 – Vegetable & Chickpea Stew with Warm Spices

A cozy stew of chickpeas and vegetables, seasoned with cinnamon and cumin. Great on its own or with bread.

Ingredients (1–2 servings)

- 1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 small carrot, chopped
- 1 small zucchini or bell pepper, chopped
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- ½ tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 cup water or broth
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: fresh herbs, lemon juice

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and garlic, sauté for 2–3 minutes.
2. Stir in tomato paste, cumin, and cinnamon. Cook briefly to release aroma.
3. Add carrot, zucchini or bell pepper, chickpeas, and water or broth. Stir well.
4. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 20–25 minutes until vegetables are soft and the stew is thickened.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Add lemon juice or herbs before serving if desired.

That completes the full set of 24 meals with your requested formatting and recipe detail. Let me know if you'd like a final copyable block, a review of a specific recipe, or help with reorganizing the full document.

Extra - Fish

25. Pan-Fried Fish with Rice & Yogurt Sauce

Crispy fillets with a cool herb-yogurt dip and rice on the side.

Ingredients

- 1–2 frozen white fish fillets (e.g. cod, pollock)
- Rice
- Yogurt, lemon juice, garlic
- Olive oil or butter
- Salt, pepper, flour (for coating)
- Optional: dill, parsley, cucumber

Instructions

1. Thaw fish if frozen. Pat dry, season with salt/pepper.
2. Lightly dust with flour (optional for crisping).
3. Pan-fry in oil/butter ~3–4 min per side.
4. Mix yogurt with garlic, lemon, herbs.
5. Serve fish over rice with yogurt sauce.

26. Tomato-Fish Stew (Moroccan Style)

A lightly spiced stew with tomato, bell pepper, and fish chunks.

Ingredients

- Frozen white fish (200–300g), cut into chunks
- 1 can diced tomatoes

- 1 bell pepper, onion, garlic
- Olive oil
- Spices: cumin, paprika, chili flakes (optional)
- Salt, pepper
- Rice or couscous

Instructions

1. Sauté onion, garlic, and bell pepper.
2. Add tomatoes, spices, and simmer 5–10 min.
3. Add fish chunks and simmer gently until cooked (~8 min).
4. Serve with rice or couscous.

Perfect — here’s your new section titled “**Optional Slow Cook / Weekend Meals**” containing all 6 dried-legume-based classics. This section is formatted consistently with your main meal list and ready to be copied into your document.

2.3 Optional Slow Cook / Weekend Meals

1. Red Lentil Soup (Middle Eastern Style)

A silky, spiced soup with cumin and lemon — fast and comforting.

Ingredients

- 1 cup red lentils (no soaking)
- 1 onion, 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tsp cumin, ½ tsp turmeric
- 1 small carrot (optional)
- Olive oil, salt, pepper
- Juice of ½ lemon

Instructions

1. Sauté onion and garlic. Add spices, lentils, carrot, and 4 cups water.
2. Simmer ~25 min until soft. Blend half if desired.
3. Season with salt and lemon. Serve warm.

Freezing: Yes — ideal for freezing in portions.

2. Indian Chana Masala (Chickpea Curry)

A richly spiced tomato-based curry with soft chickpeas.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried chickpeas (soaked overnight, then boiled ~90 min)
- 1 onion, 2 garlic cloves, 1 tsp ginger
- 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp garam masala, ½ tsp turmeric
- 1 can diced tomatoes (or 2–3 fresh)
- Chili, salt, lemon juice, oil

Instructions

1. Sauté onion, garlic, ginger. Add spices, tomatoes, and chickpeas.
2. Simmer until thickened (15–20 min). Season with salt and lemon.

Freezing: Excellent — sauce thickens beautifully on reheat.

3. Chili con Carne (with Dried Kidney Beans)

A warming beef and bean stew perfect for batch cooking.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried kidney beans (soaked, then boiled ~60–75 min)
- 250g ground beef
- 1 onion, 2 garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste, 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp paprika, chili to taste
- Oil, salt, pepper
- Optional: oregano, cocoa, dark chocolate

Instructions

1. Brown beef with onion and garlic. Add tomato paste, spices.
2. Add tomatoes and water, simmer.
3. Add cooked beans and simmer 20–30 min more.

Freezing: Yes — a freezer classic.

4. Greek Fasolada (White Bean Soup)

A rustic olive-oil-rich bean soup from Greek cuisine.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried white beans (soaked overnight, boiled 60–90 min)
- 1 onion, 2 carrots, celery (optional)
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1–2 tbsp tomato paste
- ¼ cup olive oil
- Salt, pepper, thyme or bay leaf

Instructions

1. Sauté veg in olive oil. Add tomato paste and stir.
2. Add beans and 3–4 cups water. Simmer 30+ min.
3. Adjust salt. Serve with bread.

Freezing: Very good — stir well after thawing.

5. Mujaddara (Lentils with Rice & Caramelized Onion)

Earthy, humble, and deeply satisfying.

Ingredients

- ¾ cup green or brown lentils (no soak)
- ¾ cup rice
- 2 large onions
- Olive oil, salt, pepper
- Optional: cumin

Instructions

1. Boil lentils 15 min, then add rice. Simmer together.
2. Caramelize onions in oil until dark and sweet.
3. Combine everything. Season generously.

Freezing: Okay, but best fresh. Keeps 3–4 days in fridge.

6. Spanish Chickpea & Spinach Stew (Espinacas con Garbanzos)

Smoky, tangy, and rich with paprika and greens.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried chickpeas (soaked and boiled ~90 min)
- 1 onion, 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 200g frozen spinach (or fresh)
- Olive oil, salt, pepper
- Optional: sherry vinegar or lemon juice

Instructions

1. Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil. Add tomato paste and paprika.
2. Stir in chickpeas and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. Simmer 10 min.
3. Add spinach and cook until combined. Finish with acid.

Freezing: Yes — holds texture and flavor well.

2.4 Shopping Blocks

1. Shopping Block 1

Meal No.	Meal Name
1	Chickpea Coconut Curry
4	Creamy Mushroom Soup
6	Chicken & Vegetable Stir-Fry with Rice

2. Shopping Block 2

Meal No.	Meal Name
10	Pasta with Mushrooms & Garlic
12	Tomato-Cucumber Salad (Egg-Free)
21	Spaghetti Bolognese

3. Shopping Block 3

Meal No.	Meal Name
5	Egg Fried Rice with Vegetables
19	Classic Tomato Soup
3	Chicken & Vegetable Rice Bowl

4. Shopping Block 4

Meal No.	Meal Name
7	Lentil Soup
2	Pasta with Garlic, Olive Oil & Veggies
13	Mushroom & Cabbage Stir-Fry with Rice

5. Shopping Block 5

Meal No.	Meal Name
17	Tuna Pasta
20	Wrap with Vegetables & Yogurt Sauce
14	Pea & Potato Masala

6. Shopping Block 6

Meal No.	Meal Name
22	Ground Beef & Potato Hash
15	Chicken Rice Porridge (Congee Style)
8	Couscous Salad with Roasted Veggies

7. Shopping Block 7

Meal No.	Meal Name
23	Beef-Stuffed Bell Peppers (Stovetop)
9	Shakshuka (Eggs in Tomato Sauce)
11	Red Bean Chili

8. Shopping Block 8

Meal No.	Meal Name
24	Vegetable & Chickpea Stew
16	Garlic Chicken with Potatoes & Greens
18	Tuna Pasta (Olive Oil or Tomato Base)

Shopping Block 1 – Ingredient List

Chickpea Coconut Curry, Creamy Mushroom Soup, Chicken & Tomato Skillet with Rice

Staples

- Coconut milk
- Diced tomatoes
- Curry powder
- Fresh ginger
- Garlic
- Milk or cream
- Oil
- Onion
- Salt
- Soy sauce

Fresh

- Bell pepper
- Mushrooms
- Potato

Pantry

- Chickpeas
- Rice

Protein

- Chicken breast

Optional

- Butter or oil
- Thyme

Shopping Block 2 – Ingredient List

Pasta with Mushrooms & Garlic, Tomato-Cucumber Salad, Spaghetti Bolognese

Staples

- Garlic
- Olive oil
- Onion
- Oregano
- Salt
- Vinegar or lemon juice

Fresh

- Cucumber
- Mushrooms
- Tomato
- Parsley

Pantry

- Diced tomatoes or passata
- Pasta
- Tomato paste

Protein

- Ground beef

Optional

- Cheese (optional)

Shopping Block 3 – Ingredient List

Egg Fried Rice, Classic Tomato Soup, Chicken & Vegetable Rice Bowl

Staples

- Garlic
- Oil
- Olive oil or butter
- Onion
- Salt
- Soy sauce

Fresh

- Bell pepper
- Carrot
- Eggs

Pantry

- Diced tomatoes
- Frozen vegetables
- Rice

Protein

- Chicken breast

Optional

- Herbs
- Milk or cream (optional)

Shopping Block 4 – Ingredient List

Lentil Soup, Pasta with Garlic & Veggies, Mushroom & Cabbage Stir-Fry

Staples

- Garlic
- Oil
- Olive oil
- Onion
- Salt
- Soy sauce

Fresh

- Cabbage
- Carrot
- Cherry tomatoes
- Mushrooms
- Spinach

Pantry

- Pasta
- Red lentils

- Rice

Optional

- Chili flakes (optional)
- Cumin

Shopping Block 5 – Ingredient List

Tuna Pasta, Wraps with Vegetables & Yogurt Sauce, Pea & Potato Masala

Staples

- Curry powder
- Garlic
- Lemon juice
- Oil
- Olive oil
- Salt

Fresh

- Cucumber
- Lettuce
- Onion
- Potatoes
- Tomato

Pantry

- Capers (optional)
- Flatbread or tortilla
- Olives (optional)
- Pasta
- Peas

Protein

- Canned tuna
- Yogurt

Optional

- Tomato (optional)
- Herbs

Shopping Block 6 – Ingredient List

Beef & Potato Hash, Chicken Rice Porridge, Couscous Salad

Staples

- Garlic
- Ginger
- Lemon juice
- Oil
- Olive oil
- Salt
- Soy sauce

Fresh

- Bell pepper
- Onion
- Potatoes
- Zucchini

Pantry

- Couscous
- Rice

Protein

- Chicken breast
- Ground beef

Optional

- Paprika (optional)
- Spring onion (optional)
- Herbs

Shopping Block 7 – Ingredient List

Stuffed Peppers, Shakshuka, Red Bean Chili

Staples

- Garlic
- Oil
- Onion

- Salt

Fresh

- Bell peppers
- Eggs

Pantry

- Cooked rice
- Diced tomatoes
- Red beans
- Tomato paste

Protein

- Ground beef

Optional

- Chili powder
- Cumin
- Paprika
- Pepper

Shopping Block 8 – Ingredient List

Chickpea Stew, Garlic Chicken with Greens, Tuna Pasta

Staples

- Garlic
- Oil
- Olive oil
- Salt

Fresh

- Carrot
- Frozen spinach
- Onion
- Potatoes

Pantry

- Capers (optional)

- Chickpeas
- Cinnamon
- Cumin
- Olives (optional)
- Paprika
- Pasta
- Raisins (optional)
- Tomato paste
- Tomatoes (optional)

Protein

- Chicken breast
- Tuna

2.5 Price Estimates

Shopping Block 1

Coconut curry, mushroom soup, chicken stir-fry

- **Estimated cost:** €16 – €21
- Includes: coconut milk, chickpeas, diced tomatoes, mushrooms, chicken, bell pepper, basic spices

Shopping Block 2

Pasta with mushrooms, salad, spaghetti Bolognese

- **Estimated cost:** €18 – €24
- Includes: pasta, beef, diced tomatoes, mushrooms, cucumber, cheese, herbs

Shopping Block 3

Egg fried rice, tomato soup, chicken rice bowl

- **Estimated cost:** €15 – €20
- Includes: chicken, eggs, carrots, bell pepper, canned tomatoes, frozen veg

Shopping Block 4

Lentil soup, pasta aglio e olio, cabbage stir-fry

- **Estimated cost:** €13 – €18
- Includes: lentils, spinach, cherry tomatoes, cabbage, pasta, mushrooms

Shopping Block 5

Tuna pasta, veggie wraps, pea & potato masala

- **Estimated cost:** €14 – €19
- Includes: canned tuna, yogurt, lettuce, flatbread, curry spices, peas, potatoes

Shopping Block 6

Beef hash, couscous salad, chicken congee

- **Estimated cost:** €17 – €22
- Includes: ground beef, chicken breast, couscous, zucchini, lemon, ginger

Shopping Block 7

Stuffed peppers, shakshuka, chili

- **Estimated cost:** €16 – €21
- Includes: ground beef, eggs, bell peppers, canned beans, tomato paste, spices

Shopping Block 8

Chickpea stew, garlic chicken, tuna pasta

- **Estimated cost:** €15 – €20
- Includes: chickpeas, chicken, frozen spinach, tuna, pasta, spices like cumin, paprika, cinnamon

Summary

- **Lowest per-block range:** €13–14
- **Highest per-block range:** €22–24
- **Average per block:** ~€15.50–€20.60
- **Monthly total (4-week scaling):** ~€165–€220

2.6 Breakfast Plan

Let's aim for a **1-week rotation** with 7 types of breakfast, repeatable week to week. Most take **5–10 minutes** to prepare.

Weekly Rotation (can be shuffled by preference)

Day	Breakfast Type
Monday	Oats with fruit and nuts
Tuesday	Wholegrain bread with egg and tomato
Wednesday	Yogurt with granola and honey
Thursday	Peanut butter toast with banana
Friday	Savory oatmeal or cottage cheese + rye
Saturday	Pancakes or crepes with fruit (weekend)
Sunday	Boiled eggs, toast, butter, seasonal fruit

Quick Descriptions

1. Oats with fruit and nuts

- Rolled oats cooked in water or milk
- Add apple or berries, cinnamon, raisins, and a handful of nuts
- Optional: drizzle of honey or yogurt on top

2. Wholegrain bread with egg and tomato

- Boil or pan-fry an egg (optional soft-boiled)
- Serve on buttered toast with sliced tomato and salt/pepper

3. Yogurt with granola and honey

- 3–4 heaping tablespoons of full-fat yogurt
- Top with granola, banana or apple slices, honey

- Optional: flaxseeds, cinnamon

4. **Peanut butter toast with banana**

- Toast with peanut butter
- Banana slices on top + a few oats or seeds if desired

5. **Savory oatmeal or cottage cheese & rye**

- Cook oats with salt, stir in olive oil and black pepper
- Top with cottage cheese or pair with a slice of rye bread
- Optional: cucumber or cherry tomatoes

6. **Pancakes or crepes (weekend special)**

- Quick batter: flour, egg, milk, pinch of salt
- Serve with jam, fruit, yogurt, or melted chocolate
- Optional: freeze leftovers for the next week

7. **Boiled eggs with toast and fruit**

- 1–2 eggs, boiled to your liking
- Buttered bread or crispbread
- Piece of fresh fruit (e.g. orange or pear)

Pantry Staples to Keep On Hand

- Rolled oats
- Peanut butter
- Honey or jam
- Granola (store-bought or homemade)
- Bread (wholegrain, rye, crispbread)
- Eggs
- Plain yogurt
- Milk or plant milk
- Seasonal fruit (apple, banana, berries, etc.)
- Nuts (walnut, almond, sunflower seeds)
- Optional extras: cottage cheese, cinnamon, flaxseed, raisins

Breakfast Instructions

1. Creamy Oats with Fruit and Nuts (Hot, Comforting)

Ingredients

- ½ cup rolled oats
- 1 cup milk (or water, or half-half)
- Pinch of salt
- 1 apple (or banana, berries), handful of walnuts or almonds
- Optional: cinnamon, raisins, honey

Instructions

1. In a small pot, bring the milk (or water) to a gentle boil.
2. Stir in oats and a pinch of salt.
3. Lower heat and simmer gently 5–7 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Serve in a bowl, topped with chopped fruit and nuts.
5. Optional: add honey or cinnamon to taste.

Tip: Use a **non-stick pot** and keep stirring near the end to avoid burning.

2. Egg and Tomato on Toast (Savory & Quick)

Ingredients

- 1–2 slices wholegrain bread
- 1 egg (boiled or pan-fried)
- 1 small tomato
- Optional: butter, salt, pepper, olive oil

Instructions

1. Toast the bread.
2. Boil the egg (8–10 minutes) or pan-fry in a little oil.
3. Slice the tomato, season with salt and pepper.
4. Serve the egg on toast with tomato slices on the side or on top.
5. Optionally drizzle with a little olive oil.

3. Yogurt with Granola, Honey, and Fruit (Cool & Crunchy)

Ingredients

- 3–4 heaping tablespoons plain yogurt (full-fat is best)
- ½ cup granola (store-bought or homemade)
- Banana or apple slices
- Optional: honey, cinnamon, sunflower seeds

Instructions

1. Spoon yogurt into a bowl.
2. Add granola on top.
3. Slice fruit and layer it in.
4. Add honey or seeds if you like.

Your Question – Cold Yogurt? Yes, straight from the fridge yogurt is cold and not very enjoyable in winter. **Solutions:**

- Take it out while making tea/toast (~5 minutes helps).
- Or: microwave 2 tbsp milk and stir it into the yogurt to gently warm it.
- Or: keep it in the **fridge door**, where it's slightly warmer.

4. Peanut Butter & Banana Toast (Fast & Energizing)

Ingredients

- 1–2 slices of toast
- Peanut butter
- 1 banana
- Optional: cinnamon, seeds, honey

Instructions

1. Toast bread.
2. Spread with peanut butter.
3. Slice banana on top.
4. Add cinnamon or a light drizzle of honey if desired.

5. Savory Oats or Cottage Cheese with Rye

Version A: Savory Oats

Ingredients

- ½ cup oats
- 1 cup water
- Pinch of salt
- Olive oil, pepper, optional herbs or cheese

Instructions

1. Cook oats as above, but use **water + salt** only (no milk or sweet ingredients).
2. When thickened, stir in a little olive oil, black pepper, maybe grated cheese.
3. Serve warm as a savory porridge.

Version B: Cottage Cheese with Bread or Rye Crispbread

Ingredients

- 3–4 tbsp cottage cheese
- 1–2 slices rye or wholegrain crispbread
- Optional: cucumber, tomato, olive oil, pepper

Instructions

1. Spread cottage cheese on crispbread.
2. Top with fresh veg and season with olive oil + pepper.

6. Pancakes or Crepes (Weekend Slow Morning)

Basic Pancake Batter (2–3 portions)

- 1 cup flour
- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: sugar or vanilla

Instructions

1. Mix flour and salt in a bowl. Add egg and half the milk. Whisk until smooth.
2. Add remaining milk gradually. Let rest 10 min.
3. Heat a pan, grease lightly. Pour thin batter to coat the surface.
4. Flip when edges lift (~1–2 min per side).

5. Serve with jam, honey, yogurt, or fruit.

Storage Tip: Batter lasts 2 days in fridge. Cooked pancakes can be frozen.

7. Boiled Eggs, Toast, and Seasonal Fruit

Ingredients

- 1–2 eggs
- 1 slice of buttered toast
- 1 fruit (e.g. orange, apple, grapes)

Instructions

1. Boil eggs to preference (soft: ~6 min, firm: 9–10 min).
2. Toast bread and butter it.
3. Eat fruit on the side.

2.7 Snacks

- **7 snack options**, one for each day
- Light prep or no prep
- **Instructions included**, just like with breakfast
- All **reasonably healthy and affordable**
- Balanced across **fruit, protein, savory, and sweet** ideas

Weekly Snack Rotation Plan

Day	Snack Idea
Monday	Apple slices with peanut butter
Tuesday	Hard-boiled egg + cherry tomatoes
Wednesday	Cottage cheese with honey and cinnamon
Thursday	Oat energy balls (made in advance)
Friday	Yogurt with berries and oats
Saturday	Cucumber sticks with hummus
Sunday	Banana + a handful of mixed nuts

Monday – Apple Slices with Peanut Butter

- Wash and slice 1 apple into wedges.
- Spread or dip into 1–2 teaspoons of peanut butter.
- Optional: sprinkle with cinnamon or a pinch of salt for extra flavor.
- Tip: If slicing early, add a few drops of lemon juice to prevent browning.

Tuesday – Hard-Boiled Egg + Cherry Tomatoes

- Boil 1–2 eggs:
 - Place in cold water, bring to a boil, then simmer for 8–10 minutes.
 - Cool in cold water, peel when ready.
- Pair with a handful of cherry tomatoes or sliced cucumber.
- Optional: add a pinch of salt or pepper to the egg.

Wednesday – Cottage Cheese with Honey and Cinnamon

- Scoop about 100g of cottage cheese into a bowl.
- Drizzle with 1 tsp of honey and a small pinch of cinnamon.
- Mix lightly.
- Optional: add sliced fruit or a few raisins.

Thursday – Oat Energy Balls (Make Ahead)

Make 6–8 balls to last a few days:

- In a bowl, mix:
 - ½ cup rolled oats
 - 2 tbsp peanut butter
 - 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup
 - Optional: seeds, raisins, cocoa powder
- Mix until sticky. Roll into small balls.
- Store in fridge. Eat 1–2 per snack.

Friday – Yogurt with Berries and Oats

- Scoop 100–150g plain yogurt into a bowl.
- Add a small handful of berries (fresh or thawed frozen).
- Add 1–2 tbsp of oats for texture.
- Optional: a drizzle of honey or chopped nuts.

Saturday – Cucumber Sticks with Hummus

- Slice half a cucumber into sticks.
- Scoop 2–3 tablespoons of hummus into a small bowl or plate.
- Dip and snack.
- Optional: add a sprinkle of paprika or olive oil to the hummus.

Sunday – Banana + Mixed Nuts

- Peel and eat 1 ripe banana.
- Pair with a small handful (about 20–30g) of unsalted nuts: almonds, walnuts, or a mix.
- Optional: sprinkle the banana with cinnamon or cocoa powder.

Snack Shopping Checklist (1 Week)

Fruit & Vegetables

- 2 apples
- 1 banana
- 1 cucumber
- 1 small pack of cherry tomatoes
- 1–2 lemons (optional, for apple slices)
- 1 small pack of berries (fresh or frozen)

Dairy & Eggs

- 100g cottage cheese
- 150g plain yogurt (or larger if used for breakfast too)
- 2 eggs

Pantry & Dry Goods

- Rolled oats (for energy balls and yogurt topping)
- Peanut butter (natural, unsweetened if possible)
- Honey or maple syrup
- Mixed nuts (almonds, walnuts, etc.)
- Raisins or dried fruit (optional)
- Cinnamon
- Salt and pepper

Prepared or Packaged

- Hummus (store-bought or homemade)

Optional for Variety

- Cocoa powder (for energy balls)
- Seeds (e.g. sunflower or chia)
- Whole-grain crispbread (as a swap for cucumber + hummus day)

3 Simple Baking

Understanding Bread, Dough, and Cake Without an Oven

3.1 I. Breads and Bread Types: Foundations of Baking

What is Bread?

Bread is one of the oldest and most fundamental prepared foods in human history. At its simplest, it is made from **flour and water**, transformed through **leavening** and **heat** into a soft, airy, or chewy structure. The choice of flour, leavening, and technique defines the texture, taste, and cultural style of the bread.

In its leanest form, bread contains:

- Flour (from wheat, rye, spelt, etc.)
- Water
- Salt
- A leavening agent (yeast or sourdough)

Optional enrichments (milk, eggs, sugar, butter) shift the result toward pastries or sweet breads.

How Bread is Made

Understanding how bread is made helps demystify the process. Here's a breakdown of the main steps, with notes on their purpose:

1. **Mixing Ingredients** Combine flour, water, salt, and yeast (or sourdough). This begins gluten formation and hydrates the starches.
2. **Kneading** Kneading develops **gluten**, a stretchy protein network that makes the dough elastic. This elasticity is crucial for holding the gas that makes bread rise.
3. **First Rise (Bulk Fermentation)** The yeast (or sourdough) consumes sugars in the flour and releases **carbon dioxide (CO₂)**. The dough expands, developing both structure and flavor.

4. **Shaping and Second Rise** The dough is gently deflated and shaped into loaves or rolls. It rests again to allow a final rise before baking.
5. **Baking or Cooking** Heat causes one last burst of CO₂ release. Proteins and starches set, and the crust browns through the Maillard reaction.
6. **Cooling** Bread should cool completely to allow the crumb (interior) to finish setting and moisture to redistribute.

What is Gluten?

Gluten is a network of proteins (mainly gliadin and glutenin) formed when flour is mixed with water. In bread, gluten:

- Traps CO₂ gas from yeast fermentation
- Gives dough its elasticity and stretch
- Helps bread rise and form an open crumb

More kneading leads to stronger gluten and more structure. Without gluten, bread would be flat and dense.

Bread Types and Grains

Bread can be made from many grains, each producing different textures and flavors.

Wheat (Weizen): High gluten, soft, airy structure. Common in baguettes, toast bread, and rolls.

Rye (Roggen): Low gluten, denser texture. Earthy, sour flavor. Often used with sourdough for structure.

Spelt (Dinkel): An ancient wheat relative with moderate gluten. Slightly nutty, softer, and often easier to digest.

Bread Labels in Germany

Label	Meaning
Vollkornbrot	Whole grain bread (at least 90% whole flour)
Mehrkornbrot	Multigrain bread (2+ grains, not always whole)
Dinkelbrot	Spelt bread (check for “Vollkorn” for whole grain)
Roggenmischbrot	Rye-wheat mix bread (51–89% rye flour)

Leavening Agents: Yeast and Sourdough

Yeast Yeast is a single-celled fungus (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*). In bread, it feeds on sugars in the flour, producing carbon dioxide that makes the dough rise. It also contributes to mild, pleasant flavors.

Sourdough Sourdough is a natural starter containing wild yeast and lactic acid bacteria. It ferments slowly and gives bread a distinctive tang and improved digestibility. Sourdough also keeps bread fresher longer due to its acidity.

Enriched Doughs vs. Simple Bread Dough

Lean dough contains only flour, water, salt, and yeast or sourdough. It produces chewy, crisp breads like ciabatta, Vollkornbrot, and baguettes.

Enriched dough includes eggs, butter, sugar, or milk. It produces soft, sweet, or tender breads like brioche, challah, and Hefezopf. These rise more slowly due to the added fats and sugars and spoil faster.

Cakes and Batters: Baking Soda and Powder

Unlike breads, cakes and pies use **chemical leavening** instead of biological fermentation.

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) reacts with acidic ingredients like yogurt, banana, or lemon juice to release CO₂ quickly. **Baking powder** contains both baking soda and a dry acid and activates with moisture and heat.

These leavening agents make batter rise quickly during cooking. The structure is created not by gluten, but by a delicate matrix of eggs, flour, and air.

Dough Type	Leavening	Texture	Examples
Bread Dough	Yeast/Sourdough	Chewy, elastic	Baguette, Vollkornbrot
Enriched Dough	Yeast	Soft, rich	Brioche, Zopf
Cake/Pie Batter	Baking soda/powder	Crumbly, tender	Cake, muffins

3.2 II. Recipes for Stovetop and Rice Cooker Baking

All recipes are adapted for setups without an oven and are beginner-friendly.

Chapati (Roti)

Unleavened flatbread; quick and excellent with soups, dips, or spreads.

Ingredients (makes 4):

- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- ½ cup warm water
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp oil (optional)

Instructions:

1. Mix flour and salt in a bowl. Gradually add warm water while mixing with your hand or spoon until a rough dough forms. It should be soft but not sticky.
2. Knead the dough for 5–7 minutes on a clean surface until smooth and elastic.
3. Cover and let rest for 15–30 minutes to relax the gluten.
4. Divide dough into 4 equal pieces. Roll each into a ball, then flatten and roll out into thin circles (~15–18 cm in diameter).
5. Heat a dry skillet over medium-high heat. Place one chapati in the hot pan.
6. Cook 30 seconds or until light bubbles form, flip, cook another 30 seconds. Flip again and press gently with a spatula to encourage puffing.
7. Transfer to a clean cloth and optionally brush with oil or ghee. Repeat with remaining dough.

Banana Oat Pancakes

Flourless, naturally sweet, and perfect for breakfast or snack.

Ingredients (makes 4 small pancakes):

- 1 ripe banana
- 1 egg
- ½ cup rolled oats
- ½ tsp baking powder
- Pinch of cinnamon or vanilla (optional)
- Butter or oil for the pan

Instructions:

1. Mash the banana thoroughly in a bowl until smooth.
2. Add egg and whisk together until well combined.
3. Stir in oats, baking powder, and optional spices. Let sit 5 minutes to thicken slightly.
4. Heat a non-stick or lightly oiled pan over medium-low heat.

5. Spoon batter into pan to form small pancakes (~2 tablespoons each). Flatten slightly with the back of the spoon.
6. Cook for 2–3 minutes or until edges look dry and the bottom is golden. Flip carefully and cook another 2–3 minutes.
7. Serve warm with yogurt, nut butter, or fresh fruit.

Simple Yeasted Skillet Bread

A basic yeast bread cooked entirely in a covered pan.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour (wheat or spelt)
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp dry yeast
- ½ cup warm water (adjust as needed)
- 1 tsp oil (optional)

Instructions:

1. Mix flour, salt, and yeast in a bowl. Add warm water gradually and stir until a sticky, shaggy dough forms.
2. Knead for 8–10 minutes on a lightly floured surface until dough is smooth and elastic. It should stretch without tearing.
3. Shape into a ball and place in a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with a towel and let rise for 1 hour or until doubled in size.
4. Lightly flour your hands and deflate the dough. Shape into a thick disc (~12–15 cm diameter).
5. Preheat a pan over low heat and lightly oil it.
6. Place dough in pan, cover with lid or foil. Cook on very low heat for 10–12 minutes. The bottom should be firm and golden.
7. Flip the bread carefully, then cook uncovered for 8–10 minutes more. Tap the top — it should sound hollow when done.
8. Let cool on a rack or towel for at least 10 minutes before slicing.

Rice Cooker Banana Cake

A moist, sliceable cake made without an oven.

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe bananas
- 1 egg

- 2 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp oil or melted butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour (all-purpose or spelt)
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: vanilla, chopped nuts, or chocolate chips

Instructions:

1. Grease the rice cooker bowl with butter or oil.
2. In a mixing bowl, mash the bananas until very smooth.
3. Add egg, sugar, oil, and vanilla (if using). Mix well with a fork or whisk.
4. In a separate bowl, mix flour, baking powder, and salt.
5. Add dry ingredients to wet mixture. Stir gently until just combined. Do not overmix.
6. Pour batter into the rice cooker bowl and smooth the top.
7. Close the lid and press “cook.” If it switches to “warm” after a few minutes, wait 2 minutes, then press “cook” again.
8. Repeat as needed until the total cooking time reaches about 40–50 minutes.
9. Check doneness with a toothpick or fork — it should come out clean or with only a few crumbs.
10. Let cake cool slightly, then remove carefully and slice.

Cocoa-Banana Rice Cooker Cake

A chocolate variation of the banana cake.

Additional ingredients:

- 2 tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
- Optional: chocolate chips or chopped nuts

Instructions:

1. Follow the same base recipe as above.
2. Add cocoa powder with the dry ingredients in step 4.
3. Fold in chocolate chips or nuts before pouring into rice cooker.

The result is a soft, moist, gently sweet cake with a satisfying cocoa flavor — a stovetop-friendly comfort dessert.

3.3 III. Bread Storage and Shelf Life

Room Temperature (1–3 days)

- Store in a paper bag, cloth, or bread box.
- Avoid plastic bags; they trap moisture and promote mold.

Refrigeration (3–7 days)

- Not ideal, as it accelerates staling.
- Use only for very moist breads in hot weather.
- Wrap in a towel and store in a plastic bag to minimize drying.

Freezing (Best for long-term)

- Slice before freezing.
- Wrap slices in parchment or foil, then place in freezer bag.
- Defrost at room temperature or toast directly from frozen.

Closing Thoughts

This chapter has explored the fundamental concepts behind bread, leavening, and baking without an oven, while also equipping you with concrete, easy-to-follow recipes adapted for stovetop and rice cooker use.

Whether you make a rustic skillet bread, a soft rice cooker banana cake, or a quick pan-fried chapati, each of these recipes is a window into traditional techniques made accessible. As you repeat them, you'll gain not only confidence but also an intuitive understanding of how flour, water, and air become something greater than the sum of their parts.

4 Cooking Improvement

1. Learn Baking Fundamentals

- **Bread:** start with basic yeast breads (e.g. no-knead loaf, focaccia, pita), then sourdough
- **Pastry:** learn shortcrust (for quiches or tarts), then puff pastry and laminated doughs
- **Cakes & Cookies:** understanding ratios, creaming method, folding, etc.
- **Why:** mastering baking gives you control over nutrition, cost, and creativity — and it's meditative

2. Master Oven Techniques

- **Roasting:** vegetables, whole chickens, tray bakes
- **Baking:** casseroles, gratins, lasagna
- **Slow roasting & braising:** tougher cuts of meat become tender and rich
- **Broiling/grilling:** finish dishes with a crisp, browned top

3. Knife Skills & Prep Efficiency

- Learn proper chopping techniques (julienne, dice, chiffonade)
- Practice mise en place — prepping ingredients before cooking
- Why: this saves time and makes everything smoother and more fun

4. Cooking Animal Proteins Well

- Learn how to pan-sear steak, roast chicken, poach fish, make stock from bones
- Understand doneness, resting times, seasoning, and cuts of meat
- Why: mastering meat gives flexibility, depth, and confidence

5. Sauce Making & Seasoning Mastery

- Learn base sauces: béchamel, tomato, pan sauces, vinaigrettes, tahini-based, yogurt-based
- Understand how to balance salt, acid, fat, and sweetness
- Why: sauces elevate basic ingredients and give your cooking identity

6. Develop Intuition for Flavor Profiles

- Practice cooking **without recipes**, combining ingredients based on flavor families:
 - Mediterranean (olive oil, lemon, garlic, parsley)
 - Indian (cumin, turmeric, tomato, ginger)
 - East Asian (soy sauce, ginger, sesame oil, vinegar)
- Learn to taste and adjust throughout cooking

7. Meal Planning & Batch Cooking at a Higher Level

- Incorporate **seasonality** (e.g., roasted squash in autumn, asparagus in spring)
- Learn **fermentation & preservation** (pickles, kimchi, sourdough starter)
- Use your oven, stovetop, and freezer in harmony for multi-day meal flows

8. Plating, Texture, & Presentation

- Explore contrast in texture: crispy vs soft, smooth vs chunky
- Use color and shape to create balanced, beautiful plates
- Learn to plate with intention (restaurant-style or rustic harmony)

Bonus: Cooking as a Practice, Not Just a Chore

- Let yourself experiment once a week
- Read cookbooks like essays (try Samin Nosrat's *Salt Fat Acid Heat*)
- Cook for others — hospitality is a skill and a joy

Of course — here is the **clean version** of the cooking roadmap without emojis, icons, or headings. It's structured as a numbered list using plain text and indentation for clarity.

Roadmap

1. Phase 1 – Structured Simplicity

Goal: Build consistency, confidence, and rhythm in daily cooking Duration: 1–3 months

Focus areas:

- Create a rotating meal plan (you’ve done this)
- Practice basic stovetop skills: sautéing, boiling, seasoning
- Use canned/frozen staples with fresh produce
- Learn 2–3 one-pot meals (soups, curries, stir-fries)
- Batch-cook rice and legumes
- Understand basic pantry setup

Milestone: You can feed yourself well for a week, with variety and little stress.

2. Phase 2 – Control and Confidence

Goal: Level up technique, knife skills, and flavor intuition Duration: 2–4 months

Focus areas:

- Learn to chop efficiently and safely (e.g. julienne, dice)
- Practice mise en place and timing
- Cook without recipes using learned flavor profiles
- Master legumes from dry (soaking, boiling, freezing)
- Explore sauces (tomato-based, yogurt-based, tahini, vinaigrettes)
- Build your spice intuition (cumin, turmeric, smoked paprika, etc.)
- Cook a few meals for friends or guests

Milestone: You can cook flexibly based on what you have, and understand taste as you go.

3. Phase 3 – The Whole Kitchen

Goal: Use your entire kitchen to its potential, especially the oven Duration: 3–6 months

Focus areas:

- Roast vegetables and meat (chicken, fish, tray bakes)
- Start baking: flatbread, focaccia, biscuits
- Try braising (beans, meat) and sheet-pan meals

- Explore fermentation (simple pickles, yogurt, sauerkraut)
- Make your own stock or broth
- Learn to manage leftovers creatively (soups, grain bowls, salads)

Milestone: You're comfortable managing multiple pots, oven timers, and even planning for leftovers.

4. Phase 4 – Craft and Expression

Goal: Cook with fluency, experiment with purpose, and develop personal style Duration: Ongoing

Focus areas:

- Learn sourdough or enriched doughs (if interested in baking)
- Try complex dishes: risotto, lasagna, paella, tagine
- Explore global cuisines more deeply
- Develop a few signature dishes
- Plate food intentionally (balance, contrast, color)
- Think in seasonal terms (what's fresh now?)
- Host dinner nights — create flow, joy, and beauty

Milestone: You don't just cook to eat — you cook to live, to share, and to explore.

5 Non-thermal Food Preparation

- The **principles behind non-thermal food preparation methods**
- A structured **learning roadmap** for gradually mastering them

5.1 1. Principles Behind Non-Thermal Food Preparation

While thermal cooking uses heat to transform food, non-thermal methods rely on natural processes like fermentation, acidification, drying, and salting. These approaches are often older, slower, and more intuitive, but deeply transformative and culturally rooted.

A. Preservation-Based Methods

These aim to extend shelf life while enhancing flavor, nutrition, or digestibility.

Fermentation

Principle: Controlled microbial transformation of food.

- Microbes (bacteria, yeasts) convert sugars or starches into acids, alcohols, or gases
- Preserves by lowering pH and outcompeting harmful bacteria
- Examples: sauerkraut, kimchi, yogurt, miso, sourdough, kombucha

Curing and Salting

Principle: High salt (or sugar) content draws out moisture and inhibits microbial activity.

- Examples: gravlax, salted meats, preserved lemons

Drying and Dehydration

Principle: Removing water to stop microbial growth and enzyme activity.

- Done through air, sun, smoke, or freeze-drying
- Examples: dried fruits, jerky, herbs, pasta

Pickling (Acid Preservation)

Principle: Immersion in acid (usually vinegar or lactic acid from fermentation) to prevent spoilage.

- Examples: vinegar pickles, pickled onions, preserved beets

B. Structure-Transforming Methods

These don't primarily preserve food, but change its flavor, texture, or bioavailability without cooking.

Marination

Principle: Soaking in acidic, salty, or enzymatic liquids to break down proteins or starches and infuse flavor.

- Examples: ceviche, marinated cheese, tofu

Mechanical Processing

Principle: Physical transformation of texture or form (without cooking).

- Grinding, blending, pounding, emulsifying
- Examples: hummus, pesto, tartare, nut butters

Freezing

Principle: Inhibits microbial and enzymatic activity by drastically lowering temperature.

- Used for preservation or as a serving form
- Examples: frozen vegetables, ice cream, sashimi

5.2 2. Roadmap for Learning Non-Thermal Food Techniques

A gradual learning path designed to build skill, confidence, and a connection to traditional food practices.

Stage 1: Foundational Ferments and Pickles

Simple, safe, and forgiving methods that require no special equipment.

Learn:

- Lacto-fermentation (salt + water)
- Brining vs. vinegar pickling
- Basic hygiene and timing

Recipes:

1. Sauerkraut (fermented cabbage)
2. Fermented cucumbers (classic brine pickles)
3. Quick-pickled carrots or onions (vinegar-based)

Tools:

- Mason jars or fermentation weights (optional)
- Just a knife, bowl, and clean hands

Stage 2: Flavor Expansion and Control

More complex combinations of vegetables, spices, and fermentation conditions.

Learn:

- Temperature control
- Spice layering and fermentation time adjustment

Recipes: 4. Kimchi (spicy fermented cabbage) 5. Pickled turnips or red onions (Middle Eastern and Mediterranean styles) 6. Yogurt (warm fermentation with bacterial starter)

Stage 3: Grain, Legume, and Dairy Ferments

Intermediate stage involving proteins and controlled warm environments.

Learn:

- Managing starters (sourdough, kefir grains)
- Balancing salt, air, and time

Recipes: 7. Sourdough starter and bread 8. Labneh (strained yogurt) or kefir 9. Preserved lemons (Moroccan-style)

Stage 4: Animal Products, Drying, and Curing

Involves food safety knowledge, but yields deeply flavorful results.

Learn:

- Salt ratios, curing times, and drying methods
- Texture and flavor transformation through time and air

Recipes: 10. Gravlax (cured salmon) 11. Simple herb or tomato drying 12. Fruit leather or sun-dried fruits

Stage 5: Mastery and Experimentation

Blend techniques, invent new combinations, or explore cultural variations.

Ideas:

- Combine spices and fermentation (e.g., turmeric sauerkraut)
- Wild fermentation (fruit-based meads, tepache)
- Fermenting legumes or experimenting with seasonal vegetables

5.3 Final Thoughts

Non-thermal techniques reconnect you with:

- Slowness and intuition
- Ancestral knowledge
- Microbial transformation
- Seasonal rhythms

They don't just preserve food. They preserve **meaning**, **story**, and a sense of place.

Would you like this roadmap and summary as a printable guide or a structured learning checklist with notes and tracking space?