The Wandering Hearth

Why Meal Plan?

- ❖ Save time and energy
- ❖ Avoid decision fatigue
- ❖ Be intentional about food

Guiding Principles

- ❖ Know your schedule for the week
- ❖ Shop your kitchen first
- ❖ Use your freezer

Tips:

- ❖ Decide what matters to you. Balance is key to making meal planning a worthwhile practice. What are your food goals right now? Use those intentions to guide how you plan, shop, prepare and enjoy meals. They don't have to be set in stone but they should guide your decisions.
- ❖ Meal plan before going to the store.
- ❖ Identify the best day to shop for groceries in your schedule.
- ❖ Add "free play" blocks to make sure you still go out with friends and plan for date nights.
- ❖ Spread out meal prep over a few days.
- ❖ Plan for spontaneity. Include at least one dinner that can be skipped if your schedule changes.
- ❖ If you're new to meal planning, build capacity over time. Maybe start meal planning breakfast for a few weeks, then add in lunches too.
- ❖ You get to decide if your meals change throughout the week.
- ❖ Don't overthink it!

How to Use the Block Planner

- ❖ Identify commitments on the calendar. Add them to the top of the meal block they impact. Knowing the game plan will help you make smart adjustments to the plan.
- ❖ Shop your kitchen. What do you already have in the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry? What needs to be used up now?
- ❖ Plan meals you and your family enjoy.
- ❖ Consider ways to use a single recipe in different ways and rotate through leftovers so you're not eating the same meals day after day. (See the Kabobs for Days and Cuban Roast Pork posts for more on this concept.)
- ❖ Add planning notes to make cooking easier. This includes when to defrost items, set out the crock pot, prep dry ingredients, etc.

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Block Planner

	Saturday	**Sunday**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
Breakfast							
Lunch							
Dinner							
Notes *Items to prep or defrost; etc.*							

The Meal Prep Work

Template Block Planner

	Saturday	**Sunday**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
Breakfast	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>	*<Notes>* <Breakfast>
Lunch	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>	*<Notes>* <Lunch>
Dinner	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>	*<Notes>* <Dinner>
Notes *Items to prep or defrost; etc.*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*	*<Prep Notes>*

The Meal Prep Work

<Day> <Notes about tasks you need to do that day.>

What's one change you can make for meal planning to be a little easier?

What works for me?

What works for you?

Traffic is lighter for me on Fridays. I get home earlier and can do a few small tasks to meal prep. Nothing crazy, maybe 20 minutes of prep. This sets me up to spend less time in the kitchen over the weekend. That's why I meal plan!

Example: Meal Block Plan

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Eggs, sausage & oven hash browns	Bagels and locks	Leftover hash browns and eggs	*Gwen: Appt* Granola parfaits	Granola parfaits	Granola parfaits	*Gwen: Early Meeting* Granola parfaits
Lunch	*Not home*	*Game @ 1* Nachos	Cashew chicken & rice	Leftover Pasta	***Free play***	Cashew chicken & rice	Cashew chicken & rice
Dinner	*Not home*	Pasta Sunday	***Free play*** *Sushi! Double date with friends*	*Joe: late meeting* Spaghetti squash & meatballs	*Yoga @ 6:30* Salad with potatoes & hard boiled eggs	*Joe: Board meeting* Spaghetti squash & meatballs	*Movie @ 7p* Tuna melts (skip if go out)
Notes	Defrost beef barbacoa for nachos		Prepare fruit topping for granola parfaits	Marinate potatoes; hard boil eggs		Meal plan for next week	Mix dry ingredients for next week bfast

Example: The Meal Prep Work

Friday: Prep double batch of hash browns. Wrap/store in the refrigerator overnight.

Saturday:

- Bake hashbrowns
- Make granola (while hashbrowns bake)
- Marinate chicken for Cashew Chicken
- Set up meatballs and marinara in the Slow Cooker; make spaghetti squash in the Instant Pot

Sunday:
- Make Cashew Chicken and rice in the Rice Cooker
- Assemble Nachos for lunch (enjoy the game!)
- Make Pasta Dinner

During the week, I only have to pack lunches and do minimal prep on Monday and Tuesday.