

# Make Ahead Cozy Winter Dinners

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We all have those mornings where we start out feeling overwhelmed as we look at our list for the day wondering how we will make time for cooking for the family.

Making ahead is all part of planning ahead to avoid that panic. I admit that every Sunday morning I draw up a rough menu plan for the week ahead working around whatever is on the calendar for that day. With a menu plan, I know what I am making every day and if there is a particularly busy looking day, it's an easy dinner or a make ahead dinner. Taking a bit of time the night before or in the morning ensures a cozy winter dinner. Menu planning ahead also sets up a grocery list because you know exactly what's on the menu every night.

Since Sunday is menu planning day for me, that's often when I would start out roasting two chickens. It's just as easy to roast two as it is one and having extra sets you up for other easy make ahead dishes as well as plenty of additional meat for sandwiches and salads.

**Recipe for two roasted chickens (adapted from Lee Bailey's Country Weekends)**



2- 2 1/2 pound whole chickens  
1 tsp salt  
1 cup unsalted butter  
2 lemons cut in half  
Fresh rosemary

### **Gravy**

1 tbsp butter, softened  
2 tbsp flour  
1 cup chicken stock

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Wash chickens thoroughly and pat dry inside and out. Place both chickens breast up in a roasting pan. Put pieces of butter into each cavity, squeeze lemon juice from half a lemon into cavity and stuff rosemary sprigs into each. Squeeze lemon juice from second half of lemon over top of each chicken and put remaining lemon into cavity. Top each chicken with chunks of butter and lots of chopped fresh rosemary.

Put in preheated oven and roast for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, basting with accumulated pan juices every 15 minutes. (This is important to brown the chicken). Test for doneness by pulling leg away from body. If the juice seems clear and leg moves easily, it is done. Remove chicken to warm platter. Cover and let stand.

You can make the gravy at this point by combining soft butter and flour and mash together with a fork to make a paste. Have ready 1 cup chicken stock. Pour off chicken fat from pan and add stock. Swirl around to loosen any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. These are what gives the gravy added flavor. Thicken with butter flour mixture. Simmer very carefully for 15 minutes. If gravy becomes too thick, add more stock. If you suddenly get lumps, don't despair, just keep simmering and stirring and sieve out the lumps at the end. If

there is gravy leftover, it can be used in a shepherd's pie the next day or frozen for the next time you roast chickens. I must admit to doubling the gravy recipe every time because my family loves gravy and it is great to have leftovers for many uses.

Around the roasted chickens, I throw in potatoes (yellow fleshed are very tasty) carrots, and parsnips. Parboil them all first to a tender stage, so they don't take long to roast.. Admittedly, with two roasting chickens there isn't a lot of space for the veggies, so I start roasting them in a separate pan, and after the chickens are done and resting on the counter covered with tea towels (a helpful hint from Jamie Oliver to keep them warm and moist), I toss the partially roasted veg in the roasting pan with chicken drippings to finish them off. Then I make the gravy.

So that's Sunday night taken care of, and Monday night is going to be leftovers of the same if you are okay with that. Many people don't like leftovers. For me, Mondays always seem to be a busy day and to ease into the week ahead just heat through everything and add the gravy.

If you don't want the exact same meal again, there are many options to do with the leftover chicken: Chicken fried rice or make simple Chicken hoisin rolls: Top Boston lettuce leave with slices of chicken, cucumber, chopped basil and shredded carrots, and drizzle with hoisin sauce mixed with sesame oil for a completely different zap of flavor.

Kids love this finger food dinner, and if you have little dishes of the toppings, they can assemble the wraps themselves. Or you can use the leftover chicken, gravy and chopped vegetables and make into a shepherd's pie.

When the carcasses are stripped bare making slow cooker chicken stock is easy. I freeze the stock in one cup containers so every time a recipe calls for chicken stock, I have it on hand. Two roasting chickens make so many meals and no one in my household ever tires of the aroma when roasting or the taste. If I don't have time to make the broth, I freeze the carcasses and make it when I have a snow day.

### **Recipe for Sausage sweet potato green bean tray bake**



One tray bake meals are rising in popularity for obvious reasons. This combination of chunky sausages, sweet potatoes and green beans tossed with olive oil and herbs makes a delicious and easy meal. I use gluten free turkey sausages but any type of sausages would work.

I make this ahead in the morning and just heat it up when it's time for dinner. It such a cozy bake and smells divine while its in the oven.

1 -2 medium sweet potato, peeled and chopped  
1-2 cups green beans, ends removed  
2 bell peppers, chopped (optional)  
4 turkey sausages, cut into 1 inch pieces  
1/2 tsp garlic powder  
1 tbsp dried oregano  
1 tbsp dried parsley  
1 tbsp dried rosemary  
1 tsp paprika  
6 tbsp olive oil  
salt and pepper, to taste (pinch of each)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Line your baking sheet with parchment paper if needed.

Prep your vegetables, and cut up your sausage. Add olive oil, and spices/seasonings and mix until well coated.



Place all the vegetables and sausage onto your baking sheet, and spread out evening to cook.

Cook for 15-20 minutes, then gently mix/flip/stir everything around to bake evenly. Return to the oven for an additional 15-20 minutes or until the sausage is cooked through, and the veggies are tender and crisp on the edges.

The recipe suggests serving it over quinoa or rice but I like it just as it is.

### **Recipe for Roasted Cod and Potatoes (adapted from NYT cooking)**

And for something completely different—cod and potato bake.

I have a fondness for any type of potatoes, but this version is so flavorsome with cod baked on top; it is a simple one dish dinner that can be made ahead and feed your soul and your potato obsessions.

4 or 5 medium yellow potatoes  
6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil or melted butter  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1 lemon halved  
oregano  
paprika  
1 ½ pounds cod or other fillets, about 1 inch thick (skinned) in two or more pieces  
Spinach



Heat oven to 400 degrees. Peel potatoes and cut them into slices about 1/8 inch thick (a mandoline comes in handy). Toss the potatoes with 4 tbsp of the olive oil or butter, a good squeeze of fresh lemon juice and sprinkle liberally with oregano. Season the potatoes liberally, spread them evenly and place the pan in the oven.

Cook for about 40 minutes, checking once or twice until the potatoes are tender and have begun to brown on top. If they are getting too brown, cover lightly with foil. Remove the potatoes from the oven and top with a layer of fresh spinach and top the potatoes with the fish, drizzle with the remaining oil or butter and sprinkle with more salt and pepper and paprika. Bake until the fish is done 10-20 minutes depending on its thickness. A thin bladed knife will pass through easily. Squeeze lemon over all before serving.