

#75 - The Lazy Genius Stocks the Kitchen

Hey, guys! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode #75 - 75 feels like a thing, right? - The Lazy Genius Stocks the Kitchen. You've seen the lists, y'all. The essentials of what ingredients belong in your kitchen. Real Simple has a list. Martha Stewart has a list. Tons of the cookbooks on your shelves start out with a list of all the foods you should have in your kitchen so that dinner is always close at hand. But if those lists worked, you'd make more dinner more often and be less stressed about it. So today we are going to Lazy Genius your kitchen and figure out what needs to be in it.

So first, we need to really define what it means to stock your kitchen. YOUR kitchen. Because here's what it isn't. Stocking the kitchen isn't have ingredients for every meal at your fingertips. No. Stocking the kitchen is about having ingredients for *your* essential meals at your fingertips. Every list I've ever seen has a jar of roasted red peppers on it. I got paid to write one of those lists years ago, and I put roasted red peppers on it. I get it. But guess what? We don't use roasted red peppers that much, definitely not often enough to keep a jar that I'll open to use one pepper and then the rest get fuzz on them.

When you think about stocking your kitchen, your fridge and freezer and pantry are not going to look like anyone else's. I'm not going to give you a master stocking list because there isn't one. Every person cooks differently and uses different things. So those cans of chunk tuna in olive oil that Jamie Oliver told you to keep around that are super covered in dust and possibly expired? Those don't belong in your kitchen if you don't use them.

So here's our lens, our way of seeing what it means to stock the kitchen. Only stock what works. Only stock what works! Stock what you really like, what you actually use, and what you know how to use. Only stock what works.

So how do you know what works?

You start with your brainless crowdpleasers. I talk about these a lot, especially on Instagram when I'm doing Meal Plan Monday, but I'll break them down for you again. Brainless crowdpleasers are your regular meals, the dinners you run to when you're choosing dinner last minute, the meals you can make without turning your brain on or reading too much, and - here's the crowdpleaser part - they please your crowd. Your crowd could be just you and the new Jack Ryan series on Prime, or your crowd could be you and your spouse and kids. It doesn't necessarily mean crowdpleaser in the entertaining sense. It's not a crowdpleaser for an actual party crowd. It's just what pleases your crowd. And please doesn't mean unbridled enthusiasm. It's okay if everyone isn't jumping up and down, but it does mean that everyone is relatively pleased by the meal. So something you can make that is fairly easy or mindless and food that doesn't lead to a barrage of complaining from your crowd.

So let's start with your brainless crowdpleasers. I encourage you to write them down. Do a quick brainstorm of those recipes. It can be everything from the beef stew with red wine your mom taught you how to make in high school all the way to frozen pizza. And I don't give you that scale to communicate value. Beef stew isn't better than pizza. Pizza isn't better than beef stew. It's all just food. My point though is that brainless crowdpleasers can be as intricate or simple as you want, as long as they're mostly brainless and they please your crowd. So list those out to get started on stocking your kitchen.

Our list includes spaghetti and meatballs, homemade hamburger helper, tomato soup and grilled cheese, Trader Joe's orange mandarin chicken and rice, Japanese curry rice, tikka masala (again on rice), hot dogs and tater tots, Change Your Life Chicken, homemade pizza, yakisoba which is basically a bowl of noodles sometimes with stuff on top, pork and mushroom lettuce wraps, salmon and rice, chicken noodle soup... I could keep going, but that's what I can think of right now. I've built up a decent arsenal of brainless crowdpleasers. My list clocks in at about 25 right now, and I add to it all the time. And if you think about it, that's a month of meals. I could repeat it exactly and never really meal plan again. I don't, but I could and sometimes do lean heavily on those meals and not on new things when weeks are busy or I'm just tired.

But if I look at my list, I see what I need to keep in stock in my kitchen. Canned tomatoes for spaghetti sauce, tikka masala, tomato soup, and pizza. Meatballs in the freezer for spaghetti and the homemade hamburger helper if I don't have any ground beef thawed. Chicken stock or in my case chicken base for flavoring tomato soup, hamburger helper, and chicken noodle soup. I love Better Than Boullion, and I get mine at Costco. I have an episode about shopping at Costco and list that as one of my ride or die purchases there. Other things I stock in my kitchen - carrots. Always carrots. I use them in hamburger helper, tomato soup, curry rice, Change Your Life Chicken, yakisoba bowls, chicken noodle soup, and they're great to roast quickly if I want a side of vegetables. Onions are the same, and I use those in more than I use the carrots. Actual products like the Trader Joe's chicken, curry rice flavor cubes that you can buy at Target now, hot dogs, hot dog buns, tater tots, pepperoni and all kinds of salamis for pizza and fancy grilled cheeses, rice, pasta, yakisoba noodles, salmon in the freezer, and cream for the hamburger helper, if I want my tomato soup to be creamy, tikka masala, sometimes chicken noodle soup, and my coffee and whipped cream because of course. And meat that I know I use a lot that is a little more expensive, I buy when it's on sale to freeze. I don't buy all meat that's on sale because I don't use all cuts of meat as my go-tos. I only stock what I use. Obviously there are other things, but I want you to get a broad idea of how this can work.

I always stock my kitchen based on what I actually make, not on what a professional chef guru tells me. Now, you can get great ideas from other people's lists. Something might inspire you or offer a reminder of something you actually love eating but haven't thought of in awhile, but it doesn't have to. One of my favorite niche cookbooks is called Graze, and I love it mostly for the writing and the mood. It's essentially a cookbook with recipes that are barely recipes because of how simple they are, but the concept is super fun. Just graze. Put out a lot of different kinds of things and enjoy your meal. Now, the author of this book is a food writer, has access to artisan cheeses and meats and breads and all the things, has a partner who likes the process of food as much as she does, and she has no children. I'm not saying any of those things in a disparaging way. It's just important to recognize that the way we eat often heavily depends on the kind of life we live. Her book has a list of foods essential to have in your kitchen, and half of them I never have and rarely do at all. She lists those skinny crunchy breadsticks - I think they're grasini or something? - as one of her most essential ingredients, and not only do I not

have them, I don't even like them. So consider where you're getting your pantry or fridge list from, and take it with a grain of salt. Be inspired, but stock based on what you already make.

So figure out your brainless crowdpleasers, and stock your kitchen to make those. Other stuff you can pick up as you need it. Now the last step in stocking your kitchen is having foods already cooked a little or prepped somehow to make dinner easier. If you follow me on Instagram, you've probably heard me talk about my magic question - What can I do now to make dinner easier later? That one question can change everything. So let's look at the answer based on your brainless crowdpleasers.

Some answers to that question work for everyone - I can choose what's for dinner, I can clean up from breakfast or lunch so that making dinner is easier, that kind of thing. But in terms of prepping ingredients and stocking up on halfway cooked or mostly put together meals, you go to your brainless crowdpleasers to get ideas on what to do. For my list of meals, a ton of them used diced carrots. If I take two minutes to dice up a few carrots, it'll get used. Or if you might worry about wasting diced carrots, you can freeze them if you don't use them, or cut them into sticks first. You can either quickly run a knife through them to dice them up or just eat the sticks as a snack. Same goes for an onion. Not the snacking part, but if you take a minute to dice an onion, especially if you use onion as a base in a lot of your brainless crowdpleasers, it'll get used. Some other answers to the magic question - mix up a marinade for the meat that night or the next night. Rinse off some lettuce for a salad. Grate cheese. Pull out the ingredients for dinner and put them on the counter next to the stove. When my kids were tiny and always wanting to be held, it was hard to cook dinner with one hand. A way I'd help make dinner easier was to do things early that needed two hands. For example, if we were having spaghetti for dinner, I'd fill the pot with water and put it on the burner because you can't carry a heavy pot of water and a toddler at the same time. And it would sit there for an hour or five hours, but it was ready to go even with one hand. I'd open the can of tomatoes, tear open the package of pasta, chop up a couple of garlic cloves, and all the elements of dinner were ready for me, even with one hand. You don't have to take the magic question quite that far, but it's a great thing to ask yourself. We don't always think about ways to make things easier or even think they're worth it. If you don't have a toddler to carry, is it really that big a deal to fill up a pot of water when you get home from work? Maybe not, but if you think about your mentality at that point in the day, you're probably scattered, a little panicked because you don't want to make dinner or don't know what you're having, you're oddly surprised that you have to cook at all because it just keeps happening, and you're at the end of the day and therefore done making decisions. Having one less thing to think about, having even one less decision to make of where the pot is and what you're supposed to do with it does wonders.

So when you take the magic question into stocking your kitchen, you can stock it with elements of meals you already make. For me, that might be marinated meat for stir-fry, frozen tomato soup, pizza dough balls, or anything else that's mostly ready and only needs to be heated up quickly. If you plan your meals a few days in advance, especially from that list of brainless crowdpleasers, if you wanted to, you could go ahead and prep everything at once. Chop all the carrots, assemble the grilled cheese sandwiches so all they need is to be thrown on a griddle with lots of butter, chop up herbs for hamburger helper and pasta sauce and rice bowls. When you work from meals you already make, meal prep isn't as overwhelming because it already makes sense.

I love the idea of meal prep services that give you a list of recipes and a shopping list and then a prep sheet to cook from. I think that's actually a lovely way to do something now to make dinner

easier later, but a lot of times, those services have recipes that are really varied which you probably want to a degree, but that means they require a lot of prepping of a lot of different ingredients, some of which are new to you. But if you apply the same concept to your list of brainless crowdpleasers and plan just from them, you'll have a shorter grocery list, you'll have a good bit of overlap in the ingredients you use because most families cook from a smaller list of ingredients than you realize, and that means your prep takes way less time. If those services suggest weekly prep times of 2-3 hours, yours could almost certainly be done in an hour or less.

Now you don't have to do that. You don't have to prep a week's worth of meals in advance unless it just sounds amazing and works for you. But you can stock your kitchen with stuff you need from recipes you cook. And I don't like to use the word should around here too much, but I really do think you should start asking yourself that magic question. Start asking yourself whenever you have the quickest minute at the most random times, what can I do now to make dinner easier later? Sometimes the answer is obvious and other times it's not. For the times it's not, I have something for you. If you head to the show notes at thelazygeniuscollective.com/lazy/stock, you'll see a place where you can put in your email to get a free download of possible answers to get you started. You can stick it on your fridge, and there's space on there for you to put in your own ideas based on your list of brainless crowdpleasers. So again, go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/lazy/stock to get your list of answers to the magic question.

Your kitchen doesn't have to look like everyone else's. In fact, it shouldn't. You won't get very far with getting dinner on the table if your pantry is full of cans and jars of stuff you don't eat. So make your list of brainless crowdpleasers, and stock your kitchen with the ingredients to make those meals. It's really that simple to stock your kitchen like a lazy genius.

Okay, guys, that's all for today! Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you come back next week where we'll talk about meal planning. For real! It's happening. And if you have your list of brainless crowdpleasers, you'll already be ahead of the game, so high five. If you think about it, share this episode with a friend, and for those of you who share on Instagram and Facebook, it's just so kind, and I'm so grateful. And if you feel like popping over to your Apple podcast app and want to click some stars, that's a huge help, too. Every rating and review makes it easier for this show to pop up for folks who are browsing for a new show to binge. If you're one of those people, welcome. I'm so glad you're here. Alright, guys, I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. See you next week!