

#111 - What I'll Be Cooking This Summer

Hi everyone! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, 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 the second episode in a series where we're getting ready for summer. It's June, so it's pretty much summer now. Last week, I talked about how I'm approaching my summer reading, and today I want to share how I'm approaching summer meals. I did an episode last summer on a food strategy for the summer, and I've done an episode on grilling which obviously feels very summer. I'll put both of those episodes in the show notes so you can listen and get more ideas, but for today, I want to share how I'm personally approaching food this summer.

We'll start with breakfast. We eat all kinds of things for breakfast, usually a combination of cereal, muffins, eggs, bacon, toast, or fruit. It's short order but fun and easy, especially in the summer when we don't have to get to school. So breakfast will be whatever people want from whatever we have. That's how we usually do it, and it works great.

Lunch and dinner is where things might shift a little in the summer. Usually we do sandwiches and fruit and stuff for kid lunches, and then Kaz and I eat leftovers or make a quesadilla or something easy. But in the summer, sometimes it's nice to have the option to flip those, to have a meal I cook for lunch and just throw stuff together at dinner. All of that depends on what we're doing that day, if we're out late into the afternoon at the park or the pool or something, so I like having meals that I cook be flexible for either lunch or dinner.

Which brings me to my summer dinner queue. I've talked about a dinner queue before. It's basically a curated list of meals and recipes that fit your needs. It's a way to limit the Internet to what you'll actually make and eat, and when it's time to choose, you choose from that list, not from everything. I'll have as many of the recipes I can listed in a summer dinner queue post that I'll link in the shownotes, or you can check the blog. But I'll run through a few here to give you an idea of what I'm thinking and why.

I want meals that can be prepped early, cooked completely and reheated, or cooked from start to finish but really fast. Because most summer schedules, especially with kids at home, are really varied and unpredictable for good reason, I want meals that can be on the table without a lot of thought. And that's kind of the goal with summer meals anyway. We all feel a little weird in July when we're desperately craving routine, but summer teaches us to slow down and be flexible. It's a time to play and have fun on purpose. I'm not great at that as a person which is one of the reasons summer is hard, but I also love that my family can experience a different pace than usual and not be at the mercy of my meal plan. There have been many afternoons where we're having fun at the park and I have to cut off the fun because there's no food ready at home. Having a perspective on summer meals that fits your life and then choosing a collection of recipes that fit that perspective will be a huge help as you move through the summer. So I want quick cooking, easily prepped, and maybe easily made completely ahead meals. I'm looking for recipes that use the grill or the instant pot mostly. I mostly use the pressure cooking feature on my Instant Pot, but there are one or two recipes where I'll use the slow-cooker function. I'm not a huge fan of slow-cooker meals, so I don't usually make them. And then for

any recipes that do require the oven or the stovetop, the food needs to be in there for just a couple of minutes. This is not the season for roasting things for 45 minutes.

I have 21 recipes on my summer dinner queue, and I am perfectly happy just rotating through the list a few times. In fact, I could have a rhythm where I plan three weeks of meals at a time and repeat it three times, including the prep and make-ahead plans. Then the grocery lists are already made, I understand the timing of bigger meal prep days, and it's basically a machine that knows how to run itself. Of course there are things that change on occasion where you have dinner out or with friends, but having a baseline plan is more helpful to me than having no plan at all. You might feel differently, but don't feel like your plan has to be set in stone. If a meal gets thrown off, save it for the next night and just scrap something else on your list that's a little more shelf stable and won't spoil. That's another thing I didn't mention about my recipe choices. Most of the meals in my dinner queue are easily moved to other days and don't depend on a ton of fresh produce. I can use the bounty of summer farmers markets to bulk up lunches or to use as sides for dinners, but the main meals are based on food that can be made and frozen or just not made at all.

Again, I'll list these in a blog post with links and stuff, but here are my 21 meals.

1. Burgers and a side. It's on the grill, the side can be corn from the farmers market, tater tots, or carrot sticks and chips. No big thing, but burgers are always a win.
2. Ribs and a side. Same thing. The trick here is to cook the ribs until they're mostly done in the oven in the morning and then finish them off on the grill before dinner so it's fast. Or if I know I'm going to be home all afternoon, I can cook them on the grill from start to finish. I like the flexibility though.
3. Hot dogs and a side. You're getting it, right? Meat on the grill and whatever side I have.
4. BBQ chicken legs and a side. And that's the last of a random grilled meat and a side.
5. Grilled pizza. I tried this for the first time a couple of weeks ago, and it was magical. I used a Neapolitan dough - you can learn more about the differences in pizza dough on an episode I'll link to - but I just stretched it out over a well-oiled grill, closed the grill, let it cook for a couple of minutes, flipped it, put on sauce and cheese and toppings, closed it again for another couple of minutes, and it was incredibly delicious. Crispy and quick and didn't require the oven. We'll do this weekly.
6. Teriyaki pork and pineapple skewers and rice. This is just taking pork tenderloin that you cut into big cubes, season them well, skewer alternately with pineapple chunks, and grill. Flip it a few times and brush on teriyaki sauce every time you flip. Serve that over rice.
7. Greek chicken dinner. This is grilled chicken breast that's been marinated in lemon juice and olive oil and dried oregano mostly. Sometimes I'll add garlic if I remember. Then I either grill skewers or just whole pieces and slice. We eat it with naan bread, tzatziki if I feel like making it, maybe cherry tomatoes, hummus, just whatever we have or feel like making. The kids mostly eat chicken and bread for the record.
8. Shrimp or chicken veggie couscous. This recipe is on my blog, and I'll link to it. It's a simple, fresh almost pasta salad that's one of my favorite things to eat in the summer.
9. Curry rice in the instant pot. It's a brainless crowdpleaser and easy to make without heating up the house.
10. Pork and mushroom lettuce wraps. These are also on the blog, and they take just a few minutes on the stovetop. What I love about this recipe too is that the meat mixture can be completely cooked ahead of time on a meal prep day and just heated up.
11. Pork cutlets and rice. Pork cutlets is a recipe my mother-in-law makes, so it's not written down anywhere. But it's not really a recipe to measure anyway. You just slice a pork

tenderloin into half inch slices, season them with salt and pepper, and then you bread them like you do chicken fingers or fried chicken. First in flour seasoned with salt and pepper, then in egg wash which is just egg thinned out with water, and finally in panko bread crumbs which are a crunchy Japanese bread crumb. Then you fry them in a skillet in shallow oil over medium to medium-high heat, flipping them once to get them golden brown on both sides. They're great with tankatsu sauce which is almost like Japanese ketchup or with actual ketchup and served over rice. We'll usually have carrots or broccoli alongside if vegetables are needed.

12. Chicken fingers and a side. I do the same process with chicken that I do with the pork cutlets, including breading them in panko. I like making chicken fingers even though it's more work, and summer is my favorite time to do it because Kaz is often home since I have chicken hands for a long time and it's a great finger food to eat outside. They're also great put into a salad for lunch the next day.
13. Sloppy joes. That's a great thing to make ahead on a meal prep day and just heat up along with a side. Even if it's not made ahead, it's still quick. I always find great success with Rachel Ray's recipe.
14. Grilled cheese and tomato soup which is a family favorite brainless crowdpleaser. The soup can be made in the instant pot to cut down on heat in the house, and I'm going to try grilled the grilled cheese on a cast iron skillet on the grill this summer. The key to a great grilled cheese is great bread with an open crumb (not too tight so it'll be get crunchy) and lots of butter. Don't blast the heat. Let the crunch develop at a leisurely pace, please.
15. yakisoba. This is a Japanese noodle bowl, and I have a post on my blog. We usually do ground pork, carrots, and a mushrooms, and it's just delightful. I will sometimes sauté up everything but the noodles and then just reheat it in the pan once I cook the noodles at dinner. It's ready in less than ten minutes that way.
16. Hold fast you guys, but we're going to cook change your life chicken on the grill this summer. Basically prepare it the same way on a sheet pan and everything, but put it in a hot grill and close the lid. Check it occasionally, but it turns out. This might be a good time to get an instant read thermometer by the way since you can't guarantee the timing on a grill the same way you can in the oven.
17. Naan pizza. I love naan bread for quick pizza inside. I usually use pepperoni or freezer meatballs as the protein topping, throw on whatever else we have, sprinkle with cheese, and put it under the broiler. It's definitely different than actual pizza, but it's still tasty.
18. Asian chicken and a broccoli. There aren't enough Asian recipes in my summer dinner queue, so we'll do this one often. I make a marinade with orange juice, soy sauce, sriracha, and a little brown sugar and then sauté it in the instant pot and cook it through or just use a skillet if I'm in the kitchen and don't mind standing over the stove. I like the flavor better in a skillet, but the instant pot works fine. We eat it over rice because of course we do, and I often add steamed broccoli.
19. Salmon and rice. Fish cooks so fast, so it's a great summer meal. Again, rice and some kind of quick vegetable that my kids will ignore but at least it's there.
20. Breakfast. It's fun to make pancakes or cinnamon rolls or biscuits and then a whole mess of bacon. My kids are never bummed when that's for dinner, and on days when we know we'll be home or especially when there's a thunderstorm in the forecast, a yummy sticky breakfast makes a great dinner.
21. finally, bowls. I just did an entire series on dinner bowls, and they're such a great summer meal because you can use whatever you have. We'll likely have a dinner bowl day once a week if not more.

And that's what I want to say as we wrap up this episode. Having a summer dinner queue doesn't mean you make everything in order and then repeat. We'll have burgers or hot dogs once a week easily. We'll have grilled pizza once a week for sure. Other stuff gets filled in to create a little more variety even though I'm only working with 21 meals. So as you look at your queue, especially if it's a lot less than 21 things, remember that some of those will be a delight to have once a week and others you might just have once a summer. It's all great. It all counts. And now I don't have to stress out so much about what's for dinner or how I'll meal plan because I have a dinner queue that meets my needs.

Your needs might be different. You might not have a grill. You might still have a 9-5 job and now just have to deal with cooking dinner when it's hotter but have exactly the same schedule. The point is to decide what you need from your summer meals and look specifically for recipes that fit that. If you need some ideas, I'd encourage you to ask other Lazy Geniuses in our Facebook group. Everyone is so helpful to each other, so if you have a specific idea of what you need, ask for recipe ideas in the facebook group. I'll put a link in the show notes for that, too.

Also check the blog for my complete summer dinner queue with as many links as I can offer. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll see you this Thursday live around 12:15pm EST to answer any of your summer food questions. Until then, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next time!