

The Protein Meal Prep Plan

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice



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This is the plan I reach for at the height of summer, when the tomatoes are heavy on the vine and the squash seems to multiply overnight. It puts that bounty to work three completely different ways.

The Za'atar Beef Bowls are the pantry adventure of the week. They have an earthy, sesame-flecked spice blend over lemony herbed rice, finished with a double batch of crispy chickpeas (they disappear quickly). The Baja Crispy Beef Tacos skip the cabbage entirely and build their slaw from raw ribboned squash instead, so the same vegetable shows up crisp and bright here after playing roasted and tender elsewhere in the week. And the Zucchini Parmesan Beef and Rice Bake is your no-effort night: assembled entirely on prep day, it goes straight from refrigerator to oven, with a can of cannellini beans tucked invisibly into the sauce for a fiber boost you'll never taste.

Every meal this week clears at least 35 grams of protein and 7 grams of fiber per serving (based on 5 servings). The tomatoes, squash, and a different legume in each dinner do that work for you.



SWAPS, SKIPS, AND TIPS

SWAP: the ground beef for any ground protein you have. If you choose a leaner ground meat, like chicken, turkey, bison, or venison, note that you'll need to add about 1 tablespoon olive oil per dish to help compensate for the missing fat.

SKIP: If you're short on time the night you make the bowls, skip crisping the chickpeas. Rinse them well and toss them in as-is. You'll trade a little crunch for a few saved minutes, and the bowls are still complete.

TIP: To help bring life back to reheated cooked rice, always add 1 to 2 tablespoons water before warming. And if you've got a grill going this summer, the salsa vegetables in Step 5 char beautifully over open flame; use it instead of the broiler.

Shopping List

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

FRESH PRODUCE

Cherry tomatoes	2 pints
Tomatoes (Roma or vine-ripened)	1 ½ pounds
Zucchini	2 pounds (about 4 medium)
Yellow squash	1 ½ pounds (about 3 small)
White onion	1
Jalapenos (or serranos)	2
Garlic	12 cloves
Lemons	3
Limes	3
Fresh mint	1 bunch (¼ cup chopped)
Fresh dill	1 bunch (¼ cup chopped)
Fresh parsley	1 bunch (¼ cup chopped)
Fresh cilantro	1 bunch (¾ cup chopped)
Fresh basil	1 small bunch (½ cup leaves)

MEAT

Ground beef	5 pounds
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DAIRY

Plain full-fat Greek yogurt	1 ½ cups
Monterey Jack cheese, shredded	2 cups (8 ounces)
Mozzarella cheese, shredded	2 cups (8 ounces)
Parmesan cheese, grated	½ cup

PANTRY

Chickpeas	2 (15-ounce) cans
Black beans	1 (15-ounce) can
Cannellini beans	1 (15-ounce) can
Chicken broth	3 ¾ cups
Corn tortillas (6-inch)	12
Long-grain white rice (such as basmati or jasmine)	2 ½ cups
Marinara sauce	32 ounces
Extra-virgin olive oil	(about ¾ cup total this week)

SEASONINGS

Za'atar	4 tablespoons, plus more for serving
Sea salt and ground black pepper (as needed)	

Prep Day Instructions

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

COOK THE GROUND BEEF

5 pounds ground beef
1 tablespoon sea salt

Place a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the ground beef and salt and cook, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon, until no pink remains, about 30 minutes. Set aside to cool for 10 minutes.

Divide the beef evenly into two airtight containers (about 4 cups each), label them “Za’atar bowls,” “Baja Tacos.” Leave the last third of the beef aside for assembly in the “Zucchini Parm Bake” in a bit.

Makes about 12 cups | Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 30 minutes

ROAST THE SUMMER SQUASH

1 pound zucchini and/or yellow squash, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 ½ pounds zucchini and/or yellow squash, sliced into ¼-inch planks
2 pounds tomatoes (Roma is great!), halved
2 pints cherry tomatoes
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons sea salt

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Spread the cubed squash on one half of one sheet pan and the planks on the other half. Drizzle with half of the olive oil, toss to coat, and sprinkle with the salt.

On the second sheet pan, add the cherry tomatoes on one half and the halved roma tomatoes on the other, placed face-down. Toss in the other half of the olive oil and salt.

Roast both trays together for 30 minutes, or until the squash is browned at the edges and the cherry tomatoes have started to burst.

Transfer the squash cubes and cherry tomatoes to an airtight container, label “Za’atar Bowls,” and store in the refrigerator. Set the roasted tomato halves and the planks aside to cool.

Note: the remaining 1 pound of squash stays raw - it becomes the taco slaw on meal day.

Makes about 2 cups cubes + planks for the bake | Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 30 minutes

Prep Day Instructions

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

COOK THE WHITE RICE

2 ½ cups long-grain white rice, rinsed
3 ¾ cups chicken broth
2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon sea salt

Combine all the ingredients in a medium saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to a low simmer and cook for 20 minutes, or until the liquid is absorbed and the rice is fluffy. Let cool a bit, then transfer 3 heaping cups to an airtight container and label “Za’atar Bowls.” Set the remaining 4 heaping cups aside for the bake assembly in Step 6.

Makes about 7 ½ cups | Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 20 minutes

Prep Day Instructions

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

MAKE THE CHARRED-TOMATO SALSA

1 ½ pounds tomatoes, roasted
½ white onion, cut into thick wedges
1 jalapeno (or serrano), stemmed
2 garlic cloves, peeled
2 tablespoons lime juice (from about 1 lime)
½ cup fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems
1 teaspoon sea salt

Transfer everything to a blender, add the lime juice, cilantro, and salt, and pulse to a chunky salsa. Transfer to an airtight container, label “Baja Tacos,” and store in the refrigerator.

Makes about 2 cups | Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 10 minutes

ASSEMBLE THE ZUCCHINI PARMESAN BAKE

For the bake:

About 4 cups cooked ground beef (from Step 1)
About 4 heaping cups cooked rice (from Step 3)
1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
32 ounces marinara sauce
Roasted squash planks (from Step 2)
2 cups shredded mozzarella (8 ounces)
½ cup grated Parmesan

In a large bowl, whisk together all the sauce ingredients. Add the beef, rice, and beans and stir to combine, then spread the mixture evenly in a 9 x 13-inch casserole dish. Shingle the roasted squash planks over the top and cover with the mozzarella and parmesan.

Cover the casserole dish tightly with aluminum foil, label, and store in the refrigerator.

Makes 1 (9x13-inch) bake | Prep: 15 minutes

Prep Day Instructions

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

MAKE THE LEMON-YOGURT SAUCE

1 cup plain full-fat Greek yogurt
2 tablespoons lemon juice (from about 1 lemon)
1 garlic clove, grated
½ teaspoon sea salt

Whisk everything together in a medium bowl. Transfer to an airtight container, label “Za’atar Bowls,” and store in the refrigerator.

Makes about 1 cup | Prep: 5 minutes

MAKE THE LIME CREMA

½ cup plain full-fat Greek yogurt
1 tablespoon lime juice (from about ½ lime)
Pinch of sea salt

Whisk everything together in a small bowl. Transfer to an airtight container, label “Baja Tacos,” and store in the refrigerator.

Makes about ½ cup | Prep: 5 minutes

DIETARY SUBSTITUTIONS

- **GLUTEN-FREE:** This plan is naturally gluten-free as written. Just double-check the labels on your corn tortillas, broth, and za’atar.
- **LOWER-CARB:** Swap the white rice for cauliflower rice in the bowls and the bake, and use low-carb tortillas for the tacos.
- **LOWER-FAT:** Opt for ground turkey or ground chicken instead of ground beef, reduce the cheese in the bake by half, and use reduced-fat Greek yogurt in both sauces.
- **GRAIN-FREE:** Use cauliflower rice in the bowls and bake, and opt for a grain-free (think: cassava flour) tortilla for the tacos.
- **DAIRY-FREE:** Use dairy-free yogurt for the lemon-yogurt sauce and lime crema. Use dairy-free cheese in the bake and tacos, or omit and finish the bake with a sprinkle of nutritional yeast.
- **VEGETARIAN:** Swap the ground beef for plant-based crumbles and use vegetable broth.

Za'atar Beef Bowls

with Blistered Tomatoes and Lemon-Yogurt Sauce

Serves 4 to 6 • Prep Time: 10 minutes • Cook Time: 15 minutes



Ingredients

About 4 cups cooked ground beef (from prep day)
4 tablespoons za'atar, plus more for serving
2 teaspoons ground cumin
4 garlic cloves, grated
1 teaspoon salt, more to taste
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas, drained, rinsed, and patted dry
3 heaping cups cooked white rice (from prep day)
Zest of 1 lemon, plus 1 lemon cut into wedges for serving
¼ cup chopped fresh mint
¼ cup chopped fresh dill
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
Roasted squash (from prep day)
Blistered cherry tomatoes (from prep day)
Lemon-yogurt sauce (from prep day)

Directions

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chickpeas and a pinch of salt and cook, shaking occasionally, until golden and crispy, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
2. In the same skillet, warm the beef with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil, the za'atar, cumin, and garlic, about 5 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, warm the rice with a splash of water, then toss with the lemon zest and half of the herbs.
4. Warm the squash and blistered tomatoes (a quick pass in the skillet or microwave).
5. Build bowls: herbed lemon rice, za'atar beef, roasted squash, blistered tomatoes, and crispy chickpeas. Drizzle with the lemon-yogurt sauce, shower with the remaining mint, dill, and parsley, sprinkle with za'atar, and serve with lemon wedges.

Protein: 45.2g • Net Carbs: 46.6g • Fat: 36.3g • Fiber: 8.1g • Calories: 716 (based on 5 servings)

Baja Crispy Beef Tacos

with Charred-Tomato Salsa

Serves 4 to 6 • Prep Time: 15 minutes • Cook Time: 20 minutes



Ingredients

For the Tacos:

About 4 cups cooked ground beef (from Prep Day)
2 tablespoons taco seasoning
1 teaspoon salt
12 (6-inch) corn tortillas
2 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese (8 ounces)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed, for crisping
Charred-tomato salsa (from Prep Day)
Lime crema (from Prep Day)

For the Summer Squash Slaw:

1 pound zucchini and/or yellow squash, ribboned or julienned
½ white onion, very thinly sliced
1 jalapeno or serrano, thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, grated
½ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
2 tablespoons lime juice
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

For the Cumin Lime Black Beans:

1 (15-ounce can black beans (with their liquid)
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon lime juice
sea salt to taste

Directions

1. Toss all the slaw ingredients together in a large bowl and set aside.
2. Spray the tortillas with oil on both sides, spread out across two rimmed baking sheets. Layer each tortilla with 2 tablespoons cheese and 2 tablespoons ground beef. Sprinkle the top of each with about ¼ tsp taco seasoning. Bake at 375F for 5 minutes, fold the tacos in half, then bake for 6 minutes, flip each over and bake for an additional 4 minutes.
3. Warm the black beans with the cumin, lime juice, and salt in a small saucepan.
4. Serve the tacos topped with slaw, charred-tomato salsa, and lime crema, with the beans alongside.

Protein: 51.8g • Net Carbs: 38.7g • Fat: 48.1g • Fiber: 11.3g • Calories: 830 (based on 5 servings)

Zucchini Parmesan

Beef and Rice Bake

Serves 4 to 6 • Prep Time: 5 minutes • Cook Time: 35 minutes



Ingredients

Assembled Zucchini Parmesan Bake (from Prep Day)

½ cup fresh basil leaves

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. About 15 minutes before preheating the oven, remove the casserole from the refrigerator and set it on the counter to take the chill off (to avoid putting a chilled glass or ceramic dish directly into a hot oven). Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. Uncover and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until bubbling at the edges and golden on top.
3. Scatter with the basil, season with black pepper, and serve.

Protein: 52.9g • Net Carbs: 52.2g • Fat: 39.1g • Fiber: 7.0g • Calories: 811 (based on 5 servings)

Full Nutrition Information

Plan 31: Ground Beef + Tomatoes + Summer Squash + White Rice

Za'atar Beef Bowls with Blistered Tomatoes and Lemon-Yogurt Sauce

Per serving	4 Servings	5 Servings	6 Servings
Protein	56.5g	45.2g	37.7g
Net Carbs	58.2g	46.6g	38.8g
Fat	45.4g	36.3g	30.3g
Fiber	10.2g	8.1g	6.8g
Calories	896	716	597

Baja Crispy Beef Tacos with Charred-Tomato Salsa

Per serving	4 Servings	5 Servings	6 Servings
Protein	64.7g	51.8g	43.1g
Net Carbs	48.3g	38.7g	32.2g
Fat	60.2g	48.1g	40.1g
Fiber	14.2g	11.3g	9.4g
Calories	1038	830	692

Zucchini Parmesan Beef and Rice Bake

Per serving	4 Servings	5 Servings	6 Servings
Protein	66.1g	52.9g	44.1g
Net Carbs	65.2g	52.2g	43.5g
Fat	48.9g	39.1g	32.6g
Fiber	8.8g	7g	5.9g
Calories	1014	811	676