

PLAN
9

Ground Chicken +
Spinach + Quinoa

Plan 9: Introduction

You're in for a treat with this meal plan, where we transform ground chicken, spinach, and quinoa as our core ingredients into a fabulously spiced and wonderfully filling (assembled ahead!) **Deconstructed Stuffed Pepper Casserole**. The quinoa and spinach really work well together here. Not only do they show off their nine essential amino acids, but they also offer a magnesium boost.

Then we dive headfirst into a veggie-packed **Teriyaki Chicken Fried Quinoa** (think: chicken fried rice, but more protein and fiber). We land the plane with our final dish of the week—the most flavorful, creamy **Marry Me Chicken Meatballs**—which happens to be my husband's favorite dish in the whole book. Not that you need another reason to make them, but know that the combination of sun-dried tomatoes and cream provides a perfect combination to help you absorb fat-soluble antioxidants. Get ready for some really good eating!

Swaps, Skips, and Tips

- **SWAP** the ground chicken for ground turkey, beef, or even pork.
- **SKIP** making the teriyaki sauce from scratch and instead use a store-bought option.
- **TIP:** Use frozen spinach in place of fresh. You'll need a 5-ounce package of frozen spinach to get approximately the same amount of a cooked-down 10 ounces of fresh spinach.

SHOPPING LIST

Fresh Produce

Basil leaves	¼ cup
Cilantro	½ cup
Red bell peppers	3
Carrots, julienned	1 cup
Garlic	8 cloves
Red onion	1
Spinach (mature or baby)	1 pound
Lime	1

Frozen Foods

Frozen peas	1 cup
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Meat

Ground chicken, lean	5 pounds
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Dairy/Eggs

Unsalted butter	4 tablespoons (½ stick)
Cheddar cheese, shredded	8 ounces (2 cups)
Parmesan cheese, grated	3¾ ounces (1¼ heaping cups)
Large egg	1
Plain full-fat Greek yogurt	¼ cup
Heavy cream	1 cup

Pantry

Chicken broth	7 cups
Tomato paste	1 (6-ounce) can
Coconut aminos	½ cup
Fish sauce	1 teaspoon
Rice vinegar	1 tablespoon
Toasted sesame oil	2 tablespoons
Sun-dried tomatoes, packed in olive oil	1 (8-ounce) jar
Quinoa	2 cups
Penne pasta	10 ounces
Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed	

Seasonings

Dried oregano	1 teaspoon
Dried red pepper flakes	½ teaspoon
Garlic powder	1 teaspoon
Ground cumin	1 teaspoon
Mild chili powder	2 teaspoons
Onion powder	1 teaspoon
Toasted sesame seeds	1 tablespoon
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, as needed	

PREP DAY INSTRUCTIONS

1 Brown the ground chicken.

- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3½ pounds lean ground chicken
- 1 teaspoon sea salt

Heat a large pot or skillet over medium-high heat. Once the pot is warmed, add the olive oil, ground chicken, and salt. Cook, using a spoon or spatula to break up the meat so that you have an even crumble, for 15 to 20 minutes, until the pink is gone and the meat is cooked through.

Let the chicken cool a bit, then divide evenly into two airtight containers (about 4 cups in each). Label the first container “Teriyaki Chicken Fried Quinoa” and store in the refrigerator. Place the second container in the refrigerator until Step 5.

MAKES about 8 cups
PREP: 5 min • COOK: 20 min

2 Cook the quinoa.

- 2 cups quinoa, rinsed
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon sea salt

Combine all the ingredients in a medium saucepan. Cover and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Give it a stir to release any quinoa adhering to the bottom of the pan, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Simmer for about 15 minutes, or until all the liquid is absorbed and the quinoa has uncurled and is cooked through.

Let cool a bit, then transfer half of the quinoa (about 3 cups) to an airtight container, label “Teriyaki Chicken Fried Quinoa,” and store in the refrigerator. Leave the remainder in the pan and set aside for Step 5.

MAKES 6 cups
PREP: 5 min • COOK: 25 min

3 Make the meatballs.

- 1½ pounds ground chicken
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon oil from sun-dried tomato jar

In a large bowl, mix the chicken, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper together until well combined. Scoop about 1½ tablespoons of the mixture (or use a number 40 scoop) and roll into smooth balls.

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the sun-dried tomato oil to the skillet and tilt to coat the bottom of the pan, then add the meatballs, working in batches if needed. Sear for 4 to 5 minutes, turning them until a brown crust starts to form on all sides. Turn the heat down to medium-low, cover the pan, and let the meatballs continue to cook for 15 minutes, until fully cooked through (a thermometer should read 165°F).

Let the meatballs cool a bit, then transfer to an airtight container, label, and store in the refrigerator.

MAKES 24 meatballs
PREP: 15 min • COOK: 20 min

TIP Wet your hands before you roll the meatballs. Less of the meat mixture will stick to your hands, and you’ll get a smoother finish.

4 Cook the spinach.

- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 10 ounces spinach (about two-thirds of the full pound)
- ½ teaspoon sea salt

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the spinach, cover, and steam for about 3 minutes. Remove the lid, season with the salt, and stir until all the spinach is wilted and reduced to 1 heaping cup. Remove from the heat and aside for step 5.

MAKES 1 heaping cup
PREP: 5 min • COOK: 10 min

5 Prepare the Stuffed Pepper Casserole.

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and diced
- ½ red onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 4 cups cooked ground chicken (from Step 1)
- 3 cups cooked quinoa (from Step 2)
- 1 heaping cup cooked spinach (from Step 4)
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons mild chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese (8 ounces)

Heat the olive oil in a 6- to 7-quart oven-safe pot over medium heat. Add the bell peppers, onion, and garlic and cook, stirring, for 5 to 7 minutes, until the onion is translucent and starting to brown. Turn off the heat.

Add the broth, ground chicken, quinoa, spinach, tomato paste, chili powder, cumin, oregano, salt, and pepper. Stir until the mixture is evenly combined. Sprinkle the top with the shredded cheese, cover, label, and store in the refrigerator.

MAKES 1 (6- to 7-quart) casserole
PREP: 20 min

6 Make the teriyaki sauce.

- ½ cup coconut aminos
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon fish sauce

Combine all the ingredients in a small jar, cover, and give it a good shake. Label and store in the refrigerator.

MAKES about ½ cup
PREP: 5 min

Dietary Substitutions

- **GLUTEN-FREE:** Grab gluten-free pasta for the Marry Me Chicken Meatballs.
- **LOWER-CARB:** Swap the quinoa for cauliflower rice in the Deconstructed Stuffed Pepper Casserole and Chicken Fried Quinoa.
- **LOWER-FAT:** In place of the olive oil measured into the various pans for frying, use a 1- to 2-second spray of olive or avocado oil instead. You can also cut the butter in half in the sauce for the Marry Me Chicken Meatballs and opt for whole milk instead of heavy cream.
- **GRAIN-FREE:** Swap the quinoa for cauliflower rice or even roasted Yukon Gold potatoes in the Deconstructed Stuffed Pepper Casserole and Chicken Fried Quinoa.
- **DAIRY-FREE:** Swap the butter for additional olive oil wherever called for and the cheeses for dairy-free versions. Use a full-fat canned coconut milk as a swap for the heavy cream in the Marry Me Chicken Meatballs. In the Stuffed Pepper Casserole, simply omit the yogurt at serving time.
- **VEGETARIAN:** Swap the ground chicken for plant-based crumbles.

DECONSTRUCTED Stuffed Pepper Casserole

SERVES 4 to 6
PREP: 5 min • COOK: 25 min

Assembled Deconstructed
Stuffed Pepper Casserole
(from prep day)

½ cup fresh cilantro, leaves
and tender stems roughly
chopped

¼ cup plain full-fat Greek
yogurt



1 Preheat the oven to 350°F.

2 Uncover the pot and bake the
casserole for 25 minutes, or until
the cheese has melted completely and
the casserole is warmed through.

3 Sprinkle with the cilantro and serve
with dollops of Greek yogurt.

TIP If you don't enjoy Greek yogurt,
use sour cream for a garnish! My
family sometimes asks for red salsa on
the side, too.

Protein: 47.4g • Net Carbs: 33g
Fat: 34.3g • Fiber: 7g
Calories: 649
(based on 5 servings)



Teriyaki Chicken Fried Quinoa

SERVES 4 to 6
PREP: 5 min • COOK: 20 min

- 1 tablespoon toasted
sesame oil
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup julienned carrots
- ½ red onion, cut into thin
strips
- 3 cups cooked quinoa (from
prep day)
- 4 cups cooked ground
chicken (from prep day)
- ½ cup teriyaki sauce (from
prep day)
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 tablespoon toasted
sesame seeds
- 1 lime, cut into wedges

1 Heat a large nonstick skillet or wok
over medium heat. Add the sesame
oil and crack an egg into it. Scramble
the egg by breaking it up with a spatula
until it's just cooked through, about 5
minutes. Transfer the egg to a bowl.

2 Add the carrots and onion to the
skillet and cook, stirring frequently,
for about 10 minutes, until they just
start to char. Add the quinoa, chicken,
and teriyaki sauce and stir to combine
evenly. Cook, scraping the bottom
every 3 minutes to prevent sticking,
until it's warmed through, about 10
minutes. Add the peas and the egg and
cook for 5 minutes. Serve topped with
the sesame seeds and a lime wedge.

Protein: 35.8g • Net Carbs: 37.6g
Fat: 22.3g • Fiber: 5.5g
Calories: 509
(based on 5 servings)

Marry Me Chicken Meatballs

SERVES 4 to 6

PREP: 10 min • COOK: 20 min

- 10 ounces penne pasta
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, divided
- 1½ teaspoons sea salt, divided
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil, roughly chopped
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1¼ heaping cups grated Parmesan cheese (3¾ ounces), divided
- ½ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 24 cooked chicken meatballs (from prep day)
- 6 ounces spinach (remaining one-third from the original pound; from prep day)
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves

Protein: 40.9g • Net Carbs: 46.3g
Fat: 33.4g • Fiber: 3.5g
Calories: 658
(based on 5 servings)

1 Cook the pasta according to the package instructions. Drain, then stir in 1 tablespoon of the butter and ½ teaspoon of the salt.

2 Melt the remaining 3 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and sun-dried tomatoes and cook, stirring often, for about 5 minutes, until the garlic starts to brown.

3 Add the broth, cream, 1 cup of the Parmesan cheese, the remaining 1 teaspoon salt, and the red pepper flakes. Whisk until all the cheese has melted and the mixture is smooth. Add the meatballs, gently stir in the sauce, and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 10 minutes, or until the meatballs are warmed through. Add the spinach, stir to combine, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes, until the spinach is wilted.

4 Serve the meatballs and sauce over the buttered pasta. Top with the remaining ¼ cup Parmesan cheese and fresh basil.

TIP Any pasta will work here, so feel free to use what you have on hand.



QUINOA IS A
COMPLETE PROTEIN,
WHICH IS RARE
FOR A GRAIN!