

The Rule of Six and Sixty

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Until only recently, I never understood how people could consider it a bother to prepare dinner. Maybe it's because I'm lucky enough to work from home and don't have the time constraint of a commute, but I've always looked forward to the end of the workday and the ritual of preparing the evening meal. I'm sure it doesn't hurt that I'm only cooking for two people, neither of whom is a fussy eater.

There have been more than a few times lately, though, when it's seemed easier to go out for dinner and leave the cooking and cleanup to someone else. The only problem with that is it didn't take long to feel the bite out of our wallets.

That's when I decided it might be time for a different approach. Instead of attempting, and not always succeeding, to create a gourmet meal every night, maybe I needed to simplify? Maybe I needed to leave those time-and-ingredient-consuming meals for someone else to prepare on the occasional night out?

Any cook worth their salt (and pepper) will tell you that more time, effort and ingredients do not always translate to a better meal.

So I've loosely adopted a workday rule of six or less ingredients prepared in sixty minutes or under. In an attempt to reduce cleanup, I've also tried to adopt a one-pot rule but admit it's not as easy to stick to as the other two.

I should note that the Rule of Six is loosely adapted to include the addition of herbs and spices in the preparation, so you might want to read the instructions before you begin. You should also feel free to adapt the recipes to your liking. Green olives make a nice addition to the braised chicken thigh recipe and I like to add a grating of fresh nutmeg to the sauce for the cauliflower gratin. A little bit of bacon or pancetta is also nice and toasted walnut pieces or pine nuts are a tasty addition to the bulgur hash.

Should you choose to adopt this method, remember the goal is to make your life easier. If you're struggling to create a meal that fits this structure, then it's not working. It shouldn't be difficult, nor should it result in a boring meal.

Since practice makes perfect, I've put together six tried-and-true recipes to get you started. Bon appetit! ☀



EASY BRAISED CHICKEN THIGHS

- 8 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs
- fresh rosemary sprigs
- 3 roughly chopped cloves of garlic
- 1 15-oz can cannellini beans
- 1 lemon
- white wine

Arrange chicken thighs in a 9x12 baking dish and season with coarse salt and freshly ground pepper. Place rosemary sprigs on either end and between rows of chicken thighs. Scatter roughly chopped garlic over

all. Slice the lemon and reserve about a quarter of it to squeeze over the chicken. Tuck the remaining slices in between the thighs. Pour enough white wine to cover the bottom of the pan and one-third of the thighs. Rub extra virgin olive oil over the tops of the thighs and place them in a pre-heated 425° oven. Add drained and rinsed cannellini beans in the last ten minutes of cooking. Try to push the beans into the broth and away from the chicken as much

as possible. Chicken should be brown and crispy when done in approximately 35 to 40 minutes. *Serves 4 with leftovers.*

ROASTED CAULIFLOWER GRATIN

- 1 large head cauliflower
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1 1/4 c milk
- 3/4 c shredded sharp cheddar cheese, packed
- 3 tbsp bread crumbs

Break cauliflower into florets, toss with one tablespoon of oil olive and arrange on a baking sheet to roast at 400° for 10 minutes. Turn the florets and continue to roast for an additional 15 minutes, until tender and slightly browned.

Meanwhile, melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add flour, salt and pepper and whisk together for about one minute to form a thick paste. Slowly add milk a quarter cup at a time, stirring the sauce constantly until thickened. Whisk in the cheddar cheese and stir until melted.

Remove cauliflower from oven and reduce heat to 375°. Place cauliflower florets in a buttered 8x8 baking dish or 2 qt. gratin and pour sauce evenly over the florets. Sprinkle bread crumbs over the top and place the gratin in the oven to bake for 20 to 30 minutes, until browned and bubbly. *Serves 2 as a main meal and 4 as a side dish.*



QUICK RATATOUILLE

- 1 onion
- 1 medium eggplant
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 bell peppers (one red, one green)
- 1 lb. plum tomatoes
- 2 small zucchini

Peel and half the onion and, with cut side down, thinly slice. Heat a large wok over medium high heat for about 10 seconds. Drizzle about 2 tablespoons of olive oil around the sides and heat until almost smoking. Add the onion, stirring occasionally.

Trim the ends of the eggplant and cut in half lengthwise. Cut them lengthwise again into 3 or 4 strips. Cut these across to form generous chunks of eggplant. Add to the onion, along with 2 more tbsp of olive oil and salt and freshly ground pepper.

Lightly crush the garlic cloves with the flat of the knife to loosen and discard the skin. Smash and roughly chop them before adding to the vegetables with 1 tbsp ground coriander and 1 tsp dried Provençal herbs.

Halve and core the peppers. Cut them in thin slices and add to the other vegetables.

Next, halve and cut the plum tomatoes in chunks and stir them into the other vegetables. By now the vegetables should be starting to soften and brown lightly.

Prepare the zucchini by trimming the ends and halving each of them lengthwise. Place them side by side on a cutting board and cut into 3/8" slices. Stir them into the other vegetables and adjust seasoning to taste.

Cover the wok and adjust the heat so that the vegetables don't scorch. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes more, until vegetables are soft but hold their shape. Chopped, fresh basil

can be stirred in before serving. Serve hot or at room temperature. If there are leftovers, you'll find they are even better over the next day or two. *Serves 4.*

COD À LA PORTUGAISE

- 1 medium onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 plum tomatoes
- 1 lb. thick-cut cod fillet
- 1/4 c dry, white wine
- 1 tbsp butter

Peel and chop onion. Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add onion and stir occasionally. Lightly crush the garlic cloves with the flat of the knife to loosen and discard the skin. Smash and roughly chop them before adding to the onions. Halve tomatoes lengthwise and then halve lengthwise again. Cut across to form generous chunks and add to the onion/garlic mixture. Simmer until the tomatoes begin to soften to the point of thickening the pan liquid. Place the cod fillet on top, drizzle white wine over all and cover. Adjust burner to simmer and cook for 8 minutes or until cod is opaque and breaks apart when gently prodded with a fork.

Carefully remove cod from pan and place on a serving plate. With a slotted spoon, remove the tomato/onion/garlic mixture and place it over the fish.

Add the tbsp of butter to the liquid in the pan and swirl it until it melts. The pan juices should slightly thicken with the addition of the butter. Pour the sauce from the pan over the fish and vegetables and serve with a small handful of chopped fresh parsley over all. *Serves 2.*

CHICKEN WITH QUINOA

- 1 whole chicken breast
- 1 medium onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 plum tomatoes
- 1/2 c quinoa, rinsed
- 1/2 c chicken stock

Pat chicken breast dry and cut into 1" cubes. Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large sauté pan until almost smoking. Add the chicken and sauté until lightly browned on all sides. Remove from the pan and set aside.

Peel and chop the onion. Add it, and more olive oil if needed, to the heated pan and stir occasionally. Lightly crush the garlic cloves with the flat of the knife to loosen and discard the skin. Smash and roughly chop them before adding to the onions. By now the onions should be slightly softened.

Halve the tomatoes lengthwise and then cut in half lengthwise again. Cut across to form generous chunks and add to the onion/garlic mixture. Lower heat to gently simmer the mixture for 8 to 10 minutes.

Stir in the quinoa and add the chicken stock. Return the chicken to the pan and stir. Toast 1 tsp of cumin seed and sprinkle it over all. Cover the pan with a tightly fitting lid and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes more or until quinoa has opened and chicken is cooked through.

BULGUR HASH

- 2/3 c bulgur
- 2 lg peeled potatoes, diced
- 1 lg onion, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 tsp tamari
- 1 c grated sharp cheddar

Bring 1 c water to a boil in small saucepan. Stir in 1/4 tsp of salt and bulgur. Return to a boil and reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 10 min. Remove from heat and set aside.

Boil potatoes with 1/2 teaspoon salt for about 8 minutes, until barely tender. Drain and save water.

Preheat oven to 400°. If you're adding nuts to your hash, you can toast them while the oven preheats, but be sure to watch them carefully.

Melt 4 tbsp butter in cast iron frying pan. Sauté onion and garlic until onion is translucent. Season with 1 tsp each of thyme and basil. Add bulgur and potatoes, stirring to coat with butter. Mix 1/2 c reserved potato water with tamari and pour over hash.

Stir in cheese (and nuts), tamp hash down with the back of a spoon.

Cover and bake for 10 min. Uncover and bake another 10 min. Serve hot. *Serves 4 as a main meal and 6 as a side dish.*