

Cooking, Storing & Heating

Kitchen

I prepared all these meals in a domestic kitchen. Obviously, if I had a very small kitchen, I may only work on one or two recipes at a time.

My kitchen is medium size, but I have a range cooker with plenty rings and ovens. This lets me work on 5 or 6 recipes at a time – much more productive for me but I had to get myself organised!

I have needed to make as much as 40 or 50 meals or soups in a single day although I tend to work in smaller batches now.

In the kitchen, I need enough space to keep fresh and cooked foods separate, and plenty space to portion the meals for freezing.

Kitchen and food safety are obviously very important to me, particularly if I am cooking for an elderly or vulnerable person.

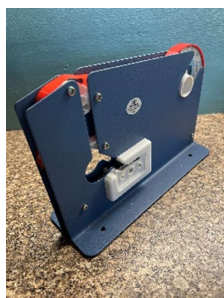
Equipment

There is not that much in the way of special equipment required to make these meals. Basic things such as knives, spatulas, scales, bowls, mixer, hand-blender etc were already in the kitchen.

There were some things that I purchased specifically for making Marion's Meals.

Bagging Machine

This is a bag sealing machine – the sort you get in the butchers - for adding a plastic tape to the bag. This allowed me to prepare spare veg into small batches for freezing.



Food Thermometer

I'm paranoid about food safety and always, always, check the temperature of food that I am reheating so I can provide accurate timing, temperatures and instructions for Marion.

Labelling Machine

This one I didn't buy, I had it left over from a previous business venture. It is so helpful when you've spent a full day cooking and you have 50 meals to label. If my labeller breaks, I will definitely buy another one!

Storing

Freezer space quickly become a problem, so I did purchase a third "under-the-counter" size freezer. I tried to organise stuff by freezer, one each for cooked Main Meals, one for Soups and the third for ingredients, veg and uncooked meats. It didn't last long as I had to use every space!

Some of the serving trays were an awkward size for storing. Whereas I could get 6 plastic tubs per layer in a freezer drawer, I could only get 1 of the 3-cell trays per layer unless I mixed in small foil trays in the same drawer.

This improved when I found a 3-cell container that had a different size.

During the experience of developing and cooking Marion's Meal I did have some mistakes – can I call them "Learning Opportunities"? Mistakes will happen but I try to learn from them. I might add these stories to the website.

Recipes were also tweaked and I discovered that the quantities were not really that important for some recipes. I was happy to just guess or use gut-feel after a while! But not for all recipes.

Cooking

Meals are cooked in batches with somewhere between 4 and 12 portions for a single recipe. This can lead to a "big cook" every few weeks where 6 or 8 recipes are cooked at the same time resulting in 30 or 40 portions being added to the freezer. Each month I may need 60 portions of soups and meals for each "customer" that was dependent on Marion's Meals.

I look to deliver 7 different main meals and 7 different soups every week – and not the same 7 each week.

Packaging

Meals are cooked in batches with meals frozen as single-serve portions;

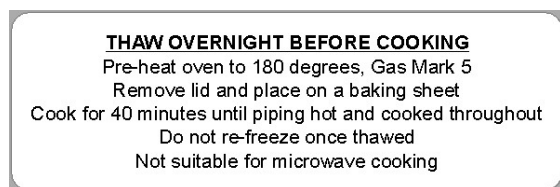
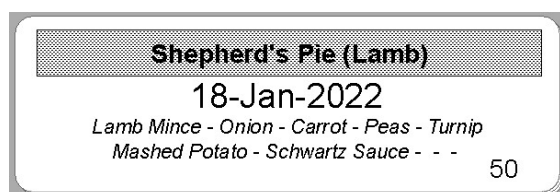
- large plastic containers, (Takeaway style)
- small foil trays,
- large foil trays, or,
- 3-Cell plastic trays

The choice of container tends to depend on whether the meal is re-heated in the microwave or a conventional oven.

Sometimes a “meal” will be a single self-contained container – such as soups or Cottage Pie.

Other times, we bring together multiple containers to build the meal. For example, Beef Olives in the main tray, and a serving of vegetables and potatoes in their own containers.

Every container is labelled with the name of the meal, the ingredients, the packaged date and the heating instructions (if not-standard heating).



The number is a reference to the catalogue entry of the meal, allowing Marion to make a simple list of meals she was requesting. There are alternative versions of some meals, and they have a suffix to the main number.

Storing

Meals are intended to be frozen but can, obviously, be eaten fresh.

Meals that are delivered fresh must be stored in the fridge and consumed within 24 hours of delivery.

Heating

There is no need for a cooker or stove top. Marion has lost confidence for using direct heat from a stove top, and therefore does not have one.

Note: You will see that some dishes can be reheated on the stove-top but this is not detailed in the instructions.

Our options for heating Marion's Meals are microwave or conventional oven.

Microwave is good for soups, potatoes, vegetables and many single-container-meals.

Conventional oven is good for meals that have a mashed potato top that you want to get browned.

Conventional oven is also required for roast potatoes, crumbles and the like.

Re-heating and serving the meals does not require any cooking skills.

The meal can be transferred to a heated plate for serving, but often they can be eaten directly from the container.

The series of recipes does include a few meals just for me – they are maybe a bit too exotic or spicy for Marion! These will feature in the sequel to Marion's Meals.

Most meals are very economical to make, but there are one or two included for special occasions. They rely on more expensive ingredients.