



How to Stretch Your Budget



STRETCH A WHOLE CHICKEN

Ranch-Smart Meals from One Bird

INTRODUCTION

Out here, we don't waste much, especially not good food.

A whole chicken isn't just dinner. It's **several meals**, a pot of soup, a pan of comfort food, and a jar or two of rich bone broth tucked into the freezer for later. That's how ranch kitchens have always worked: cook once, eat well all week.

This book shows you how to:

- Start with **one whole chicken**
- Turn it into **multiple family meals**
- Stretch your grocery dollar without stretching your patience

We'll also show you how **bake-ahead chicken breasts** can become your secret weapon for fast casseroles, skillet meals, and busy nights when the fence still isn't fixed and everyone's hungry. Let's get cooking!

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WHOLE ROASTED CHICKEN

The foundation for a week of meals

Ingredients

- 1 whole Carson Valley Meats chicken (4–5 lb)
- 2 tbsp olive oil or melted butter
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp black pepper



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Pat chicken dry and place in a roasting pan.
3. Rub with oil or butter and season all over.
4. Roast 60–75 minutes until internal temp reaches 165°F.
5. Rest 10–15 minutes before carving.

Protein Math

- ~330–350g protein per bird
- Serves 4

Stretch Tip

One whole chicken can become:

- Roast chicken dinner
- Soup
- Pot pie
- Bone broth

That's **4 meals from one purchase!**

HOW TO USE THE CHICKEN

- Serve legs, thighs and wings for your first meal
- Set aside:
 - **2–3 cups chopped or shredded meat** for pot pie
 - **2 cups shredded meat** for soup
- Save the carcass for broth

RANCH CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

This is usually the day-after-roast meal around here. Soup stretches leftover meat with broth and vegetables.

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 8 cups chicken stock (or the bone broth you've made from the carcass!)
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 celery stalks, sliced
- 1 small onion, diced
- Egg noodles or rice, already cooked
- Salt & pepper

Method

1. Simmer vegetables in stock until tender.
2. Add chicken and noodles or rice.
3. Cook until noodles are done. Season to taste.



RANCH CHICKEN POT PIE

Comfort food that earns its keep.

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked chicken, chopped
- 4 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- ⅓ cup flour
- 2 cups chicken stock
- ½ cup half and half or cream
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- Salt & pepper
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 refrigerated pie crust



Method

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Spray a 9" pie pan with cooking spray, set aside.
3. Sauté vegetables in butter until tender.
4. Stir in flour and cook 1–2 minutes.
5. Slowly whisk in stock and milk until thickened. Do not let it boil.
6. Add chicken, peas, and seasoning.
7. Pour into the baking dish, top with the crust. Crimp the edges and cut slits in the top so steam can vent.
8. Bake 30–35 minutes until bubbly and golden.
9. Let the pie rest for 10-15 minutes before serving.

To Make Ahead & Freeze

1. Prepare the chicken pot pie filling completely.
2. Transfer filling to a freezer-safe pie dish or foil pan.
3. Top with the **unbaked pie crust** and crimp edges.
4. Cover tightly with plastic wrap, then foil.
5. Label and freeze for up to **3 months**.

To Cook

1. Thaw the pot pie **overnight in the refrigerator**.
2. Preheat oven to **400°F**.
3. Remove plastic wrap and foil.
4. Place pie on a baking sheet.
5. Bake **35–45 minutes**, until filling is bubbly and crust is golden.
6. If crust browns too quickly, tent loosely with foil.

BONE BROTH / CHICKEN STOCK

Nothing gets wasted.

Ingredients

- 1 leftover chicken carcass
- 1 onion
- 3 carrots, chopped
- 5 stalks celery, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled
- 8 fresh thyme sprigs
- 3 or 4 bay leaves
- 2 tbs apple cider vinegar (breaks down bones to release nutrients)
- Salt & pepper

Method

1. Cover carcass with water.
2. Liberally sprinkle salt and pepper over the carcass.
3. Bring to a boil, then skim foam and any impurities off the top.
4. Reduce heat and simmer for up to 4 hours.
5. Add the veggies, garlic and bay leaves, and simmer for at least another 2 hours.
6. Strain and cool.
7. Fill one-quart mason jars with 3 cups of stock each, leaving enough room for the liquid to expand in the freezer. Store for up to 3 months.



COST-STRETCH CALLOUT

Bone broth replaces store-bought stock for:

- Soups
- Rice
- Gravies
- Casseroles

BAKE-AHEAD CHICKEN FOR SHREDDING

When life is busy, this is your shortcut!

Ingredients

- 4 lbs chicken breasts*, skin removed
- 1 tbs olive oil or melted butter
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground pepper
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp smoked paprika

Method

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Season chicken by tossing with oil or butter and spices.
3. Place in a metal roasting pan. (Glass doesn't like the high temperature!)
4. Bake 15–18 minutes until 165°F. (Be sure to use a cooking thermometer as baking time depends on how thick the breasts are.)
5. Rest the chicken for 10 minutes, then shred



*You can use chicken thighs for a moist and flavorful alternative. Bake at 400° for 20-25 minutes, or until internal temperature reaches 165°F (for better texture and flavor, cook to 175°F-195°F).

Pro-Tip: How to shred chicken

- Forks: place a cooked chicken breast on a cutting board. Use two large forks to separate the meat.
- Mixer: Place the cooked chicken in your stand mixer. Use the paddle attachment. Lock the head of the mixer in place. Turn on the mixer and shred to your desired consistency. Add some of the cooking liquid to keep it moist!
- Portion into 2-cup freezer packs.

PROTEIN MATH

- 4 lbs raw breasts = **~12 cups cooked**
- Total protein: **~300g**
- 2-cup freezer packs (~56g protein each)

SHREDDED CHICKEN CASSEROLES

All of these recipes start with **2–4 cups of shredded chicken**, pulled straight from the freezer.

Included favorites:

- [Texan Ranch Chicken Casserole](#)
- [Chicken Parmesan Bake](#)
- [Pesto Tortellini Bake](#)
- [Buffalo Chicken & Roasted Potato Casserole](#)
- [Classic Chicken Cobbler](#)
- [Simple Homemade Biscuit Dough](#)

Each one:

- Feeds 4-6
- Freezes beautifully
- Turns pre-cooked chicken into a full meal

PROTEIN CHECK

2 cups cooked shredded chicken = ~56 grams of protein

For a casserole serving:

- 2 cups chicken ÷ 6 servings = 9–10g protein per serving
- PLUS:
 - Cheese
 - Milk/cream
 - Beans or grains (if used)

That's a balanced, satisfying dinner, especially when paired with vegetables and sides.

TEXAN RANCH CHICKEN CASSEROLE

One chicken packet. One pan. One solid dinner.

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 (10 oz) can cream of chicken soup
- 1 (10 oz) can cream of celery soup
- 1 (10 oz) can diced tomatoes with green chiles
- 1 tbsp taco seasoning
- 12 small corn tortillas
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese



Cooking Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **350°F**. Grease a 9×13 baking dish.
2. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Sauté onion, celery, and bell pepper for 4–5 minutes until softened.
3. Stir in soups, tomatoes, taco seasoning, and shredded chicken. Remove from heat.
4. Layer half the tortillas in the baking dish. Top with half the chicken mixture and half the cheese.
5. Repeat layers.
6. Bake **30–35 minutes**, uncovered, until bubbly and heated through.
7. Rest 5 minutes before serving.

Protein Math

- ~56g protein total
- Serves 6–8

Freezer Tip

Assemble, cover tightly, and freeze. Bake from thawed at 350°F for 30–35 minutes.

CHICKEN PARMESAN BAKE

Comfort food without the fuss

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 3 cups marinara sauce
- 8 oz rotini pasta, cooked
- 1 14.5 oz can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1½ cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- ¾ cup Italian breadcrumbs
- 2 tbsp melted butter or olive oil
- ½ tsp dried basil
- ½ tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper



Cooking Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **350°F**. Grease an 8×8 or 9×9 baking dish.
2. Spread shredded chicken, tomatoes and cooked pasta evenly in the dish.
3. Pour marinara sauce over the top and mix well.
4. Sprinkle mozzarella evenly on top.
5. In a small bowl, mix breadcrumbs, butter, basil, oregano, salt, and pepper.
6. Sprinkle the breadcrumb mixture over the casserole.
7. Bake **30–35 minutes**, uncovered, until bubbly and lightly browned.
8. Let rest 5 minutes before serving.

Protein Math

- ~56g protein total
- Serves 6–8

Freezer Tip

Assemble fully, cool, wrap well, and freeze up to 3 months.

PESTO TORTELLINI CHICKEN BAKE

Freezer-friendly Italian comfort

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 lb cheese tortellini (fresh or frozen)
- 2 cups alfredo sauce
- ½ cup pesto
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese

Cooking Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **375°F**. Grease a 9×13 baking dish.
2. Cook tortellini according to package directions if using fresh. (Frozen can go in directly.)
3. In a large bowl, combine tortellini, alfredo sauce, pesto, shredded chicken, mozzarella, and parmesan.
4. Transfer mixture to baking dish and spread evenly.
5. Cover loosely with foil and bake **25 minutes**.
6. Remove foil and bake an additional **10 minutes** until bubbly and lightly browned.
7. Rest 5 minutes before serving.



Protein Math

- ~56g protein total
- Serves 6–8

Freezer Tip

Assemble, cover tightly, freeze. Bake from frozen at 375°F for 50 minutes, uncover and bake 10 more minutes.

BUFFALO CHICKEN & POTATO CASSEROLE

Big flavor, smart portions

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 2 lbs potatoes, diced
- ¼ cup hot sauce (Frank's-style works best!)
- 4 tbs butter, melted
- 2 tbs olive oil
- 1 tbsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1½ cups shredded sharp cheddar or Colby-Jack cheese
- ½ cup cooked bacon, crumbled
- ½ cup green onions



Cooking Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**. Grease a 9×13 baking dish.
2. Toss potatoes with melted butter, olive oil, hot sauce, garlic powder, paprika, salt, and pepper.
3. Spread potatoes in a baking dish and bake **35–40 minutes**, stirring once.
4. Reduce oven to **400°F**.
5. Scatter shredded chicken evenly over potatoes.
6. Top with cheese, bacon, and green onions.
7. Bake **15 minutes** until cheese is melted and chicken is heated through.
8. Rest 5 minutes before serving.

Protein Math

- ~56g protein total
- Serves 6–8

CLASSIC CHICKEN COBBLER

Stretch comfort food

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- ½ cup cream or milk
- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1 16-20 oz can refrigerated biscuits or 2 cups biscuit dough* (see recipe below)



Cooking Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **400°F**. Grease a 9×13 baking dish.
2. Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil until soft.
3. Stir in butter, then flour. Cook 1–2 minutes.
4. Slowly whisk in broth and cream until thickened.
5. Stir in chicken and vegetables. Season.
6. Pour mixture into baking dish.
7. Open biscuits and separate. Cut into quarters and scatter biscuit pieces evenly over the hot topping or drop spoonfuls of biscuit dough evenly over the top.
8. Bake **25–30 minutes** until biscuits are golden and filling is bubbly.
9. Rest 5 minutes before serving.

***Prefer biscuits on the side?** Bake refrigerated or homemade biscuits separately and serve with the chicken filling spooned over the top or alongside.

Freezer-Friendly Option

This chicken cobbler freezes **best without the biscuit topping**.

To Freeze:

1. Prepare the chicken filling completely.
2. Let cool to room temperature.
3. Transfer to a freezer-safe baking dish or foil pan.
4. Cover tightly with foil and label.

5. Freeze up to **3 months**.

To Cook:

1. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator.
2. Bake filling at **400°F for 25–30 minutes**, until hot and bubbly.
3. Add biscuit topping and bake an additional **20–25 minutes**,
OR bake biscuits separately and serve on the side.

Why We Do It This Way:

Biscuits bake best fresh. Freezing the filling keeps the texture right and makes this an easy, pull-from-the-freezer dinner.

SIMPLE HOMEMADE BISCUIT DOUGH

If you've got a few extra minutes, this is a classic, no-nonsense biscuit.

Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- 6 tbsp cold butter, cubed
- ¾–1 cup cold milk or buttermilk



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**.
2. Prepare biscuit dough and pat it out to about **¾-inch thick**.
3. Cut biscuits using a cutter or knife.
4. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
5. Bake **12–15 minutes** until golden brown.
6. Serve warm with chicken cobbler filling spooned over or alongside.

Ranch Tip:

Rough, uneven biscuit tops get crisp and golden — that's what you want.