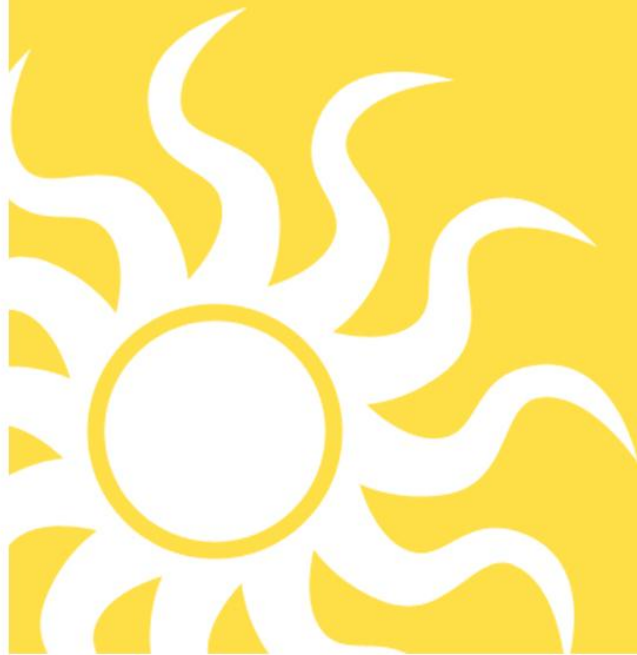


**summer fun**



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## About

Summertime is magical...or at least it can be, with just a little forethought!

I'm so excited to share the next ebook in our free ebook series with you, all about summer fun. This one features more than 40 recipes, crafts, activities and planning tips to help you make the most of your summer.

As The Nester says, you only have [18 summers](#) with these kids under your roof...how will you make the most of each one?

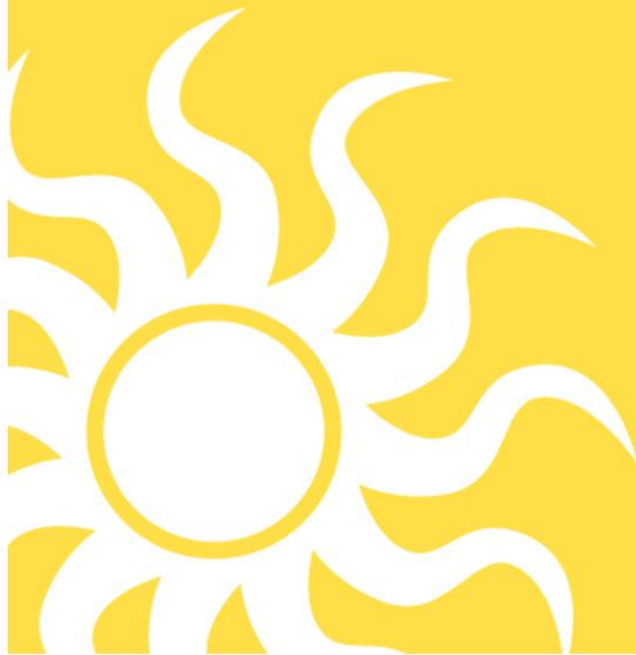
Be sure to visit each of the blogs featured for even more inspiration as well. You'll find their links at the top of each post, and there's a full list at the end for quick reference.

Enjoy!

Mandi

[Life Your Way](#)

# DRINKS



## Blueberry-Banana Green Tea Smoothie

Erin is a Jesus-loving, cloth diapering, natural birthing, (mostly) real-food eating, breastfeeding natural wife and mama to two little redheaded girls (with a 3rd on the way!). She writes for her local newspaper, blogs about her far-from-perfect homemaking at [The Humbled Homemaker](#) and edits ebooks at [Your eBook Resource](#).

Originally posted on [The Humbled Homemaker](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1 cup frozen blueberries
- 1 small-medium frozen banana
- 1-1/2 cups almond milk, separated (or milk of choice)
- 1 bag green tea

### Directions:

Warm (but don't boil) 1 cup milk on stove top

Once warmed, steep green tea for 5 minutes in milk.

Let tea/milk combo cool. (Put in fridge if you want to speed this up!)

Once cooled, pour tea/milk, 1/2 cup milk, blueberries and banana into blender and puree!

## Easy Cold Brew Iced Coffee

Shannon Shaffer is the mom behind [For the Mommas](#), a website dedicated to helping families spend time and money wisely. Shannon understands the need to make every dollar and every moment count. From grocery store deals to time-saving recipes, she encourages her readers to save money on things they need, so they can afford the things they want.

Originally posted on [For the Mommas](#).



### Ingredients:

- 2 cups coarsely ground coffee
- 2 quarts cold water

### Directions:

Cold brewing coffee gives you a sweeter, richer coffee.

Put coffee in a glass or plastic container. Pour water in. Cover the container. Yes, it will look like mud. I promise it, tastes nothing like it looks. Let it sit for at least 10 hours.

Now, the fun part. Drain all coffee from the grounds using a small strainer with a coffee filter or a piece of cheese cloth. Put a bowl under the strainer and slowly pour the coffee through it.

Take your time because it will take a while for the liquid to get thru the grounds. (Don't pour too much in — or you will have a mess on your hands!) When all you have left are grounds, use a spoon to push the liquid thru.

Put this liquid concentrate in a pitcher, cover and keep in the fridge for up to 7 days.

*To make an iced coffee:*

Fill a glass up with ice. Fill the glass halfway with your coffee concentrate. Add your favorite cream, half and half or sweeteners.

## Homemade Ginger Ale

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and the author of [Desserts in Jars](#). She is a contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the [food channel](#) on Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

Originally posted on [Food for My Family](#).



### Ingredients:

- 3 cups fresh ginger root
- 1 tablespoon lime peel
- 6 cups water
- 1-1/2 to 2 cups sugar or sucanat
- club soda
- lime wedges

### Directions:

Peel ginger root and chop into small chunks.

Add ginger root, lime peel and water to a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, turn down to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes. Add in sugar and continue to simmer for 10 minutes or until sugar is dissolved and liquid has reduced down to 3 1/2 cups or so.

Turn off the burner and let the ginger syrup cool. Strain out ginger chunks and then pour cooled syrup into a bottle or other airtight storage container. Store in the refrigerator until ready to use.



*To make ginger ale:*

Pour approximately 3-4 tablespoons ginger syrup over ice. Add 1 cup club soda. Stir lightly to combine and serve with a wedge of lime. Sip and enjoy.

Makes 16-18 servings.

## Peaches 'N Honey Tea & Strawberry Limeade

Kate is a wife and mommy to 3 and is passionate about God, health and food. She has written 7 cookbooks and is planning to release more in 2012. When she's not blogging, she's in the kitchen, sewing, or home schooling her children. You can find her at [Modern Alternative Mama](#) or contributing to [Keeper of the Home](#).

### Peaches 'N Honey Tea:

Originally posted on [Modern Alternative Mama](#).

#### Ingredients:

- 1 or 2 tea bags (black tea)
- 8 ounces water
- 1-1/2 teaspoon peach rooibos tea (opt.)
- 1 tablespoon raw honey
- 2 – 3 peach slices

#### Directions:

Boil water. Add either 1 tea bag + rooibos (or other peach) tea, or 2 tea bags. Steep 3 – 5 minutes. Remove tea. Mix in honey, then pour tea into a blender with peach slices. Blend all together. Serve over ice.

### Strawberry Limeade:

Originally posted on [Modern Alternative Mama](#).

#### Ingredients:

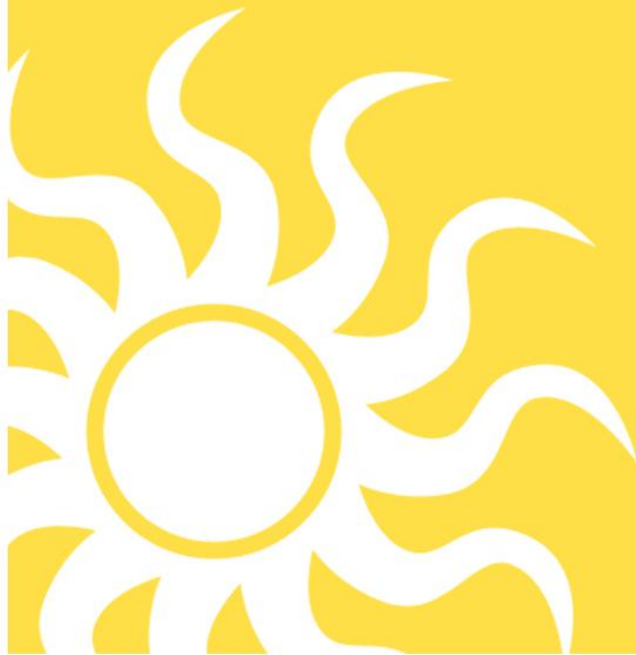
- juice of 2 limes
- 1 c. strawberries, mashed
- 1/4 – 1/2 cup raw honey, to taste
- 6 cup water
- 1 – 2 cup ice (optional)

#### Directions:

Mix the lime juice (fresh squeezed, about 1/4 to 1/3 c.), strawberries, and honey in a blender. Blend until smooth. Add water and ice, if desired. Crushing the ice in the blender will add to the daquiri-like effect, but it's not necessary. Taste and adjust the honey as needed.

Makes 4 – 8 servings.

# RECIPES



## Crunchy Greek Cucumber Salad

Tara Kuczykowski is a married mom of three boys and two girls, ages 4 to 10 years. For the past four years, Tara has been helping families stretch their budgets at the popular money-saving blog, [Deal Seeking Mom](#), and she's now sharing her tips, tricks, recipes and more at [Unsophisticook](#), where she's "keeping it real in the kitchen!"

Originally posted on [Unsophisticook](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup Marzetti Simply Dressed Champagne Salad Dressing
- 2 cucumbers
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh mint, chopped
- 10 radishes, cut into thin rounds
- 8 ounces feta cheese
- salt & pepper, to taste

### Directions:

Wash and peel the cucumbers, slice them lengthwise, and cut into 1/2" half moons. I chose to not peel them entirely, instead taking one-inch strips off all the way around for more color.

Combine cucumbers, red onion, parsley, mint, radishes, and salt and pepper in a large bowl.

Pour Marzetti Simply Dressed Champagne Salad Dressing over top. Toss lightly to combine.

Chill for at least one hour.

Sprinkle with feta cheese and serve.

## Fruity Breakfast Burritos

Tricia Callahan is founder and author of [Once A Month Mom](#) where you can find freezer friendly recipes and menus for a variety of lifestyles (Traditional, Whole Foods, Diet, Gluten Free Dairy Free, Vegetarian and Baby/Toddler). When she isn't using her Type A personality to create once a month cooking menus, she can be found chasing after her two toddlers, hosting dinner parties or engrossed in a good book.

Originally posted on [Once a Month Mom](#).



### Ingredients:

- 10 flour tortillas, small
- 1-1/4 cups vanilla yogurt
- 8 ounces fresh or frozen blueberries
- 8 ounces fresh or frozen raspberries
- 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- spray butter

### Directions:

In a small bowl, mix the sugar and cinnamon well. Pour it out on a large plate. Set aside. Spray one side of each of the tortillas with butter, coating the entire surface. Flip the tortilla over, butter side down, on the cinnamon sugar mixture. Push it in until the entire surface is covered in cinnamon and sugar.

Place the sugar covered tortilla on another plate, cinnamon/sugar side down. Measure 1/8 cup of yogurt and spread across the tortilla a

little left of center. Place fruit on the yogurt strip. Wrap the tortillas tightly from left to right. Place on a cookie sheet to flash freeze. When completely frozen through, place in a zippered freezer bag for storage.

*To serve:*

Take out of the bag and eat immediately.

### Variations:

There are so many variations that you can do with this recipe -- strawberry/kiwi or strawberry/banana or apple cinnamon. The possibilities are endless.

## Italian Spice Rub Grilled Chicken

Jason & Jennifer Bruce are the husband-and-wife design team behind [New Season Design](#), where they work together to help clients put their best foot forward online. Jason is a pastor-turned-graphic designer, and Jennifer is a teacher-turned-blog designer who also blogs at [Saving & Giving](#) to help people save more, spend less, and give generously.

Originally posted on [Saving and Giving](#).



### Ingredients:

- 3 pounds chicken
- 2 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning

### Directions:

Mix the oil, lemon juice, and seasonings in a small bowl.

Dip your finger in the spice rub, and rub it on both sides of each piece of chicken.

Grill.

## Prosciutto Pasta

Shannon Shaffer is the mom behind [For the Mommas](#), a website dedicated to helping families spend time and money wisely. Shannon understands the need to make every dollar and every moment count. From grocery store deals to time-saving recipes, she encourages her readers to save money on things they need, so they can afford the things they want.

Originally posted on [For the Mommas](#).



### Ingredients:

- 8 oz. penne pasta
- 1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large zucchini or 2 medium zucchini (sliced)
- 2 cups halved cherry tomatoes
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3/4 cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, chopped
- 2 tablespoon chopped or dried chives

### Directions:

Cook pasta according to package. Drain, keeping about a 1/2 cup of the pasta cooking water. Return pasta to pot.

While pasta is cooking, heat oil in large pan over medium heat, adding in sliced zucchini. Cook zucchini for about 5 minutes or until golden brown. Stir in halved tomatoes and garlic into pan with zucchini. Cook for 1-2 minutes.

Add cream and prosciutto and simmer for 5-8 minutes until slightly thickened. If necessary, add reserved pasta cooking water.

Toss pasta with mixture. Sprinkle fresh or dried chives on top. Salt & pepper to taste!

# Ranch Cheddar Burgers

Tricia Callahan is founder and author of [Once A Month Mom](#) where you can find freezer friendly recipes and menus for a variety of lifestyles (Traditional, Whole Foods, Diet, Gluten Free Dairy Free, Vegetarian and Baby/Toddler). When she isn't using her Type A personality to create once a month cooking menus, she can be found chasing after her two toddlers, hosting dinner parties or engrossed in a good book.

Originally posted on [Once a Month Mom](#).



## Ingredients:

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 cup shredded or cubed cheddar cheese
- 3 tablespoons [Ranch Dressing Mix](#)

## Directions:

Combine beef, ranch dressing mix and shredded cheddar cheese. Gently shape 6 patties of equal size and thickness. With your thumb, or back of a spoon, make a shallow indentation about 1 inch wide in the center of each patty. This helps the patties to cook evenly.

Grill patties over direct high heat with the lid closed as much as possible, until cooked to medium doneness – 8-10 minutes, turning once. Or cook in fry pan on stove top over med-high heat until done.

If desired, during the last minute of grilling, place a slice of cheese on each patty to melt. Serve warm on hamburger buns with tomatoes, lettuce and ranch dressing.

[To make ahead and freeze, see the freezing instructions here.](#)



## Roasted Parsley and Garlic Fingerling Potatoes

Tara Kuczykowski is a married mom of three boys and two girls, ages 4 to 10 years. For the past four years, Tara has been helping families stretch their budgets at the popular money-saving blog, [Deal Seeking Mom](#), and she's now sharing her tips, tricks, recipes and more at [Unsophisticook](#), where she's "keeping it real in the kitchen!"

Originally posted on [Unsophisticook](#).



### Ingredients:

- 2 pounds fingerling potatoes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons flat leaf parsley, chopped
- salt
- pepper

### Directions:

Whisk together the olive oil, garlic, lemon juice, parsley and salt and pepper to taste.

Toss the fingerling potatoes in the mixture, and spread them out in a single layer on a baking sheet.

Roast at 450 degrees for approximately 30-35 minutes.

## Summer Fruit Salad

Marie LeBaron is a mother of 3 and former kindergarten teacher. Always having a love of crafts, she enjoys getting messy with glue and glitter. She now shares many of her tips and tricks she's learned over the years at [Make and Takes](#).

Originally posted on [Make and Takes](#).



### Ingredients:

- 3-4 types of fruit, cut into bite-size chunks
- 1-2 cups yogurt

### Directions:

Mix the fruit and yogurt together in a bowl.

Hint: After you are done mixing and ready to serve, take a wet paper towel and wipe the insides of the bowl. Wipe just until you hit the fruit and then give it a little mix to fluff it up. Looks good enough to serve!

## Sweet Corn: Hot off the Grill

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and the author of [Desserts in Jars](#). She is a contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the [food channel](#) on Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

*Originally posted on [Food for My Family](#).*



### Ingredients:

- 12 ears fresh sweet corn
- 1 large vessel of water

### Directions:

Remove the outer leaves and silk from the corn. Soak them in water for 10-15 minutes.

Place on a medium hot grill. Turn every three minutes. Corn is done when the kernels have turned from light yellow to gold.

## Tomato Basil Pasta Salad

Katie Kimball is a mother of three from Michigan who spends a ton of time in the kitchen making real food with whole ingredients and then blogs about her successes and failures at [Kitchen Stewardship](#).

Originally posted on [Kitchen Stewardship](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1/4+ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large or 4 small tomatoes (Romas are great, but any tomato works)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 pounds fettuccine, cooked to package directions
- 1/4+ cup fresh basil, sliced thinly
- 1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1-2 cups shredded mozzarella (or any white cheese)
- Parmesan cheese (optional)

### Directions:

Put the water on to boil for the pasta while you warm the olive oil over medium heat in a heavy skillet. Chop the tomatoes and add to the warm oil, reserving about 1/4 to put on the top fresh. Add a bit of salt and pepper to taste.

Mince/crush the garlic and set aside for at least five minutes to allow the allicin to develop for maximum nutrition. (Allicin is an antibacterial agent, best consumed raw, but still has health benefits cooked.) While your pasta is cooking and tomatoes are warming, wash, slice or chop fresh basil until you have at least 1/4 cup. More never hurt!

Your goal is to add the garlic and basil more or less at the end of the cooking so they just get an impression of warmth, but not more than a minute on the heat. I usually add both

just as the timer beeps for the pasta, then drain the pasta and return to the pot. Give the tomato/oil/garlic/basil a good stir and turn off the heat.

Mix the pasta with the tomato mixture, either in one pot or the other or in a large serving bowl. Add shredded cheese immediately and stir well so that it melts.

Top with fresh tomatoes and additional fresh basil for presentation and added flavor. Parmesan cheese is optional but delicious. Sometimes an extra generous drizzle of olive oil makes it just right.

## Tortellini Caprese Skewers

Danielle blogs at [Mostly Food & Crafts](#), where she shares the new recipes she finds to tweak and try out on her family. In addition to her adventures in cooking for her family, she also loves to craft – when she can find the time – both alone and with the kids.

Originally posted on [Mostly Food & Crafts](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1 package of frozen or refrigerated tortellini
- 1/2 cup premade or homemade pesto
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons water
- fresh cut mozzarella (about 66 pieces)
- 2 packs grape or cherry tomatoes
- fresh basil
- wooden skewers

### Directions:

Combine pesto, vinegar and water in a small bowl and whisk together.

Prepare pasta according to package directions and then rinse under cold water.

Drizzle with half the pesto mixture, toss to combine, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until cold (about 30 minutes.)

Assemble by alternating ingredients on the skewer. Drizzle with a little more vinaigrette before serving or use the remainder as a dipping sauce.

## Even More Backyard Barbecue Recipes



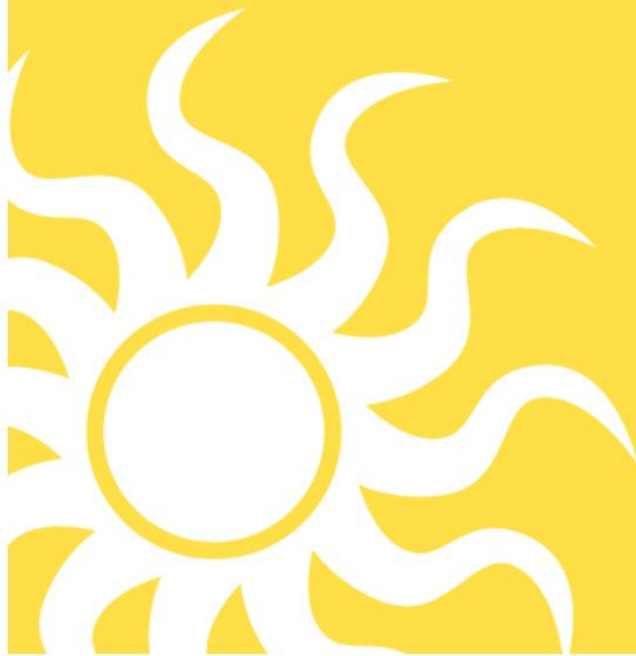
For even more summertime recipes, be sure to download the FREE Backyard Barbecue eBook, featuring more than 30 recipes to help you plan the perfect get-together!

[Click here to download yours.](#)

Be sure to download these free printables as well:

- [Backyard Barbecue Planner](#)
- [Dirty Dozen / Clean Fifteen Cheat Sheet](#)
- [Freezer Storage Cheat Sheet](#)
- [Internal Cooking Temperature Cheat Sheet](#)
- [3×5 Recipe Cards](#) or [4×6 Recipe Cards](#)
- [Shopping List](#) or [Half-Page Shopping List](#)

# DESSERTS





## Banana Split Dessert

Amy is a Tiny Town high school coach's wife and mom of four who is certain that the best things in life aren't things! You can find her embracing the extraordinary in every day at [The Finer Things in Life](#).

Originally posted on [The Finer Things in Life](#).



### Ingredients:

#### *Crust*

- 2 cups crushed graham crackers
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter

#### *Filling*

- 16 ounces cream cheese
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

### Directions:

Mix crust ingredients together. Press into 9×13 pan. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes. Cool completely.

Cream together filling ingredients. Spread over cooled crust.

Layer the following ingredients on top of the cream cheese filling:

- Three sliced bananas.

- 12-ounce can crushed pineapple, well drained
- 12-ounce container whipped topping
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts (pecans or walnuts)
- Chocolate syrup (drizzle over all)
- 4-ounce jar maraschino cherries, halved

Refrigerate several hours. Serve cold.

Nicole is married to a handsome guy and has three little kiddos. She loves sharing her passion for baby-stepping towards a more natural, handmade lifestyle. She is the editor [SimpleHomemade.net](http://SimpleHomemade.net), a blog about natural creativity, and also blogs at [GidgetGoesHome.com](http://GidgetGoesHome.com). She loves to read, sew, surf and watch baseball, and can often be found in the kitchen as well.

## Blueberry Honey Ice Cream

Originally posted on [Simple Homemade](http://SimpleHomemade.net).



### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups fresh blueberries
- 1/2 cup honey
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 cup, minus 1 tablespoon, half and half
- 5 egg yolks
- 1 cup buttermilk, chilled in the freezer for at least 20 minutes
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Directions:

In a small saucepan over medium-low heat, simmer berries, half the honey, and water, breaking up berries as they cook down, about 5 minutes. Puree in a blender, then strain through a sieve into a small bowl. Set aside. In a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, simmer the half and half until very hot but not boiling.

In a small bowl, whisk egg yolks with remaining honey until pale yellow. Slowly pour in half and half, whisking as you go, so as not to cook the eggs.

Return mixture to saucepan and heat over low heat, stirring constantly across the bottom of the pan, until thick and custardy, coating the back of a spoon (170 degrees on a candy thermometer). Do not allow it to curdle.

Strain through a fine sieve into a bowl. Stir in chilled buttermilk, vanilla and berry mixture. Chill for at least 30 minutes.

Process in ice cream maker according to manufacturer's instructions. Ice cream will need to be frozen for at least 2 hours to achieve hard ice cream.

Makes just over one quart.

## Cheesecake-Stuffed Strawberries

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and the author of [Desserts in Jars](#). She is a contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the [food channel](#) on Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

Originally posted on [Food for My Family](#).



### Ingredients:

- 3 pounds strawberries
- 3 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons raw honey
- 1 tablespoon agave syrup
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- natural blue sparkle sugar

### Directions:

Using a knife or strawberry huller, remove stems from strawberries, cutting a small cavity into the center of the berry. Beat together cream cheese, honey, agave and just enough cream to make the mixture smooth. Spoon the cream cheese mixture into a pastry bag fitted with a star tip or into a zip-top bag (cutting off one tip before piping).

Pipe the cream cheese into the center of the strawberries. Sprinkle lightly with sugar. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Makes 12-16 servings.

## Easy Patriotic Trifle

Myra is wife to her childhood sweetheart and mommy to a rambunctious two-year-old named Ridley. She enjoys blogging at [My Blessed Life](http://MyBlessedLife.com) about thrifty home decor, DIY projects, crafts, recipes, and more to inspire you to creatively thrive in your home.

Originally posted on [My Blessed Life](http://MyBlessedLife.com).



### Ingredients:

- 1 cake, torn into pieces {angel food cake works well}
- 1 large box vanilla pudding, prepared
- 1-2 cartons strawberries, washed, drained and sliced
- 1 carton blueberries, washed and drained
- 1 carton whipped topping

### Directions:

Begin the layering process by spooning a little bit of pudding in the bottom of the trifle bowl. Then add a layer of cake chunks, starting around the edge and then filling in the center. Layer about half of the pudding over the cake.

Next, add a layer of strawberries. Around the edge, place the strawberry slices vertically so they show well on the outside of the bowl. Then add a layer of whipped topping.

Then a layer of blueberries. After the blueberries, layer the rest of the cake, strawberries, pudding and whipped topping.

Chill and serve.

## Ice Cream Sandwiches

Stephanie is a stay-at-home mom to two adorable kiddos. She shares her crafty momma projects, kid crafts and learning activities on her blog, [Playing House](#).

Originally posted on [Playing House](#).



### Ingredients:

- graham crackers
- Cool Whip
- sprinkles

### Directions:

Start by breaking the graham crackers in half and lay them out on a cookie sheet covered with wax paper (just for easier clean up).

Then add a spoonful of Cool Whip and top it with the other side of the graham cracker.

Dip the edges in sprinkles.

Set them on the cookie sheet and put them in the freezer for about a half an hour. I recommend letting them sit out for a minute or two before serving just to soften a little.

## Strawberry Crisp

Erin is a Jesus-loving, cloth diapering, natural birthing, (mostly) real-food eating, breastfeeding natural wife and mama to two little redheaded girls (with a 3rd on the way!). She writes for her local newspaper, blogs about her far-from-perfect homemaking at [The Humbled Homemaker](#) and edits ebooks at [Your eBook Resource](#).

Originally posted on [The Humbled Homemaker](#).

### Ingredients:

- 3 pints (6 cups) fresh strawberries
- ½ cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 3 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- Mix berries, sugar, lemon juice and zest, and flour in large bowl. Set aside.
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2/3 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 10 tablespoon cold, unsalted butter (cut into small pieces)

### Directions:

Combine dry ingredients in bowl of food processor (or blender). Add butter and pulse repeatedly for 2-3 seconds at a time, just until mix is clumpy.

In a 9x13 baking dish, spread berry mixture evenly across bottom. Crumble topping over berries evenly. Bake at 400 for 30 minutes or until strawberries are bubbling and topping is crispy. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

\*I've tried cutting the sugar in half and using ½ honey as a sweetener in its place. It tasted great that way as well!



## Vanilla Ice Cream

Jason & Jennifer Bruce are the husband-and-wife design team behind [New Season Design](#), where they work together to help clients put their best foot forward online. Jason is a pastor-turned-graphic designer, and Jennifer is a teacher-turned-blog designer who also blogs at [Saving & Giving](#) to help people save more, spend less, and give generously.

Originally posted on [Saving and Giving](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1 cup whole milk
- 1/2 cup agave nectar (light)
- 2 cups heavy cream (whipping cream)
- 1 tablespoons pure vanilla extract (not artificial)
- a pinch of salt

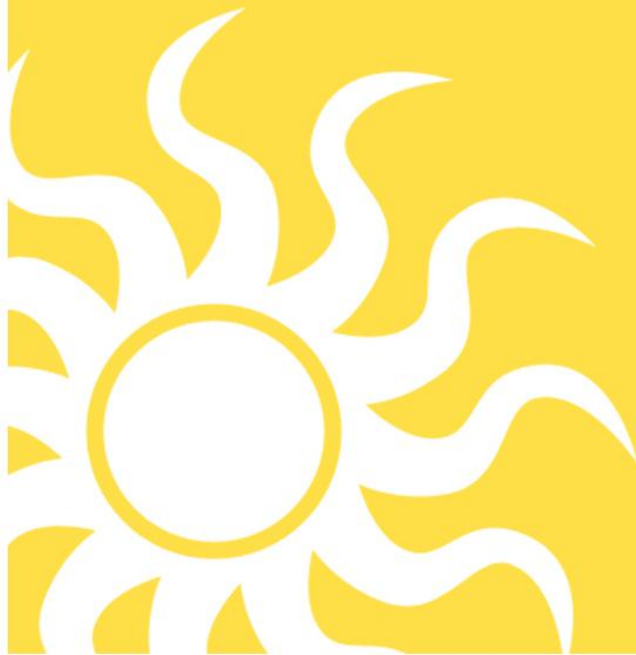
### Directions:

In a mixing bowl (not the freezer container), whisk together the ingredients.

Cover and place in the refrigerator for a couple of hours or overnight. I've skipped this step and popped it straight into the ice cream maker when I was in a hurry. The ice cream is a little thicker when you refrigerate first.

Follow the directions for your ice cream maker.

# ACTIVITIES



# 101 Ways to Embrace Summer

Mandi Ehman lives in wild, wonderful West Virginia with her husband of ten years and four beautiful, spunky little girls. As a full-time work-at-home, homeschooling mom, she runs [Life Your Way](#) and [Jungle Deals & Steals](#) and consults for a variety of websites and brands. Mandi loves coffee, chocolate, easy meals, beautiful things and minimalist spaces!

Originally posted on [Life Your Way](#).



**I've compiled a list of 101 of my favorite ideas here to inspire you to make this summer a memorable one.**

However, the danger of the blogosphere is feeling like you need to do *every* good idea you come across, and I hope this list doesn't make you feel that way. Rather than trying to do everything halfheartedly, pick your favorites and make the most of them!

## Intentional Summer

- [Summer Memory Box](#)
- [Summer Treasure Board](#)
- [Summer Bucket List](#)
- [Summer Chalkboard List](#)
- [Summer in a Jar](#)
- [Stories of Summer Mini Album](#)
- [Summer Tub o' Fun](#)

## DIY Craft Supplies

- [Shiny Syrup Paint](#)
- [DIY Bubbles](#)
- [Giant Bubbles](#)
- [Kool-Aid Playdough](#)
- [Scratch-and-Sniff Paint](#)
- [Colored Cereal Sand](#)
- [Driveway Graffiti](#)
- [Colored Rice](#)
- [Peanut Butter Playdough](#)
- [Homemade Sidewalk Chalk](#)
- [Bath Crayons](#)
- [DIY Window Paint](#)
- [Colored Noodles](#)
- [Cornstarch Sidewalk Paint](#)

## Activities

- [Marble Racetrack](#)
- [Water Bombs](#)
- [Flower Frisbee Toss](#)
- [Tube & Funnel Peg Board](#)
- [Hunt for Ice Treasures](#)

## To Do

- Camp Inside
- [Go on a Nature Walk](#)
- Have a Family Movie Night
- Have a Family Game Night
- [Read Together](#)
- Look at the Stars
- Catch Fireflies
- [Have a Picnic](#)
- Play in the Rain
- Go on a Toad Hunt
- [Plan a Staycation](#)
- Host a Tea Party
- Eat Ice Cream Sundaes for Dinner
- Have a Water Balloon Fight

## Crafts

- [Twirling Paper Lady Bugs](#)
- [Bug Catching Jar](#) (cute kit, but I think you could easily do it without one!)
- [Clothespin Dolls](#)
- [Handmade Paper](#)
- [Egg Carton Insects](#)
- [Hot Rocks](#)
- [Plastic Egg Snake](#)
- [Garden Lanterns](#)
- [Funny Face Pots](#)
- [Homemade Kaleidoscope](#)
- [Pinwheels](#)
- [Biodegradable Bird Feeder](#)

## Places to Go

- Retirement Community (with cookies or crafts or just to say hi!)
- Library (your own or when traveling)
- Children's Museums (buy a reciprocal pass if you plan to visit multiple museums)
- Zoo or Aquarium
- Farmer's Market or Roadside Stand
- U-Pick Farm
- Pool or Splash Park
- Camping or Hiking
- State Fair
- Baseball Game

- Geocaching
- Firehouse

### Things to Learn

- [To Sew](#)
- [To Cook](#)
- [To Speak Another Language](#)
- [To Knit](#)
- [To Can](#)
- [To Garden](#)

### Cool Treats

- [Puddin'head](#)
- [One-Ingredient Banana Ice Cream](#)
- [Hand-Tossed Ice Cream](#)
- [Watermelon Pie](#)
- [Frozen Banana Bites](#)
- [Mix & Match Fruit Smoothies](#)
- [Frozen Grape Pops](#)
- [Frozen Watermelon Pops](#)
- [Striped Popsicles](#)
- [Rainbow Popsicles](#)
- [Easy Yogurt Pops](#)

### Fun Food

- [Homemade Fruit Roll-Ups](#)
- [Fruit Salad in an Ice Cream Cone](#)
- [Sticky-Stacky Sandwiches](#)
- [Apple Sandwiches with Granola and Peanut Butter](#)
- [Rainbow Fruit Kabobs](#)
- [Smore Pops](#)
- [Summer Fruit Salad](#)
- [Muffin Tin Snacks](#)
- [Veggie Flowers](#)
- [Sparkling Strawberry Lemonade](#)
- [Watermelon Waffles](#)
- [Apple Nachos](#)

### More Resources

- Life as Mom's [Summer Survival Guide](#)
- Confident Mom's [Summer Survival Calendar](#)
- Mom Advice's [100 Days of Summer on Pinterest](#)
- Whipup's [Great Outdoors Action Pack for Kids](#)
- HomeSpun Threads' [Summer Soiree](#)
- Rhythm of the Home's [Summer Edition](#)
- Amanda Soule's [The Creative Family](#)
- Jennifer Ward's [I Love Dirt](#)

## 101 MORE Ways to Embrace Summer

Mandi Ehman lives in wild, wonderful West Virginia with her husband of ten years and four beautiful, spunky little girls. As a full-time work-at-home, homeschooling mom, she runs [Life Your Way](#) and [Jungle Deals & Steals](#) and consults for a variety of websites and brands. Mandi loves coffee, chocolate, easy meals, beautiful things and minimalist spaces!

Originally posted on [Life Your Way](#).



I'm adding to the original 101 Ways to Embrace Summer list with 101 more activities, crafts and recipes for your summer fun.

There's no reason to try to accomplish all of these things this summer; just pick and choose a few favorites and start there!

[Click here to share this list on Facebook.](#)

1. [Make a hot air balloon.](#)
2. [Make a butterfly feeder.](#)
3. [Build a drive-thru bike wash.](#)
4. [Set up an outdoor mud kitchen.](#)
5. [Make homemade butter in a jar.](#)
6. [Build a trash bot](#) or [styrofoam monster.](#)
7. [Have a zoo scavenger hunt.](#)
8. [Make electrical wire rings.](#)
9. [Learn to macrame.](#)
10. [And make friendship bracelets.](#)
11. [Make dancing fairy rings.](#)
12. [Make rock art necklaces.](#)

13. [Make an archery set.](#)
14. [Make a pine cone bird feeder.](#)
15. [Decorate flip flops.](#)
16. [Make a beach mobile.](#)
17. [Make a summer reading list.](#)
18. [Make a geoboard.](#)
19. [Make watermelon slushies.](#)
20. [Make a paper plate sundial.](#)
21. [Create a cool-off zone.](#)
22. [Make melted bead bowls.](#)
23. [Or melted bead sun catchers.](#)
24. [Decorate your lawn with flour.](#)
25. [Make bouncy balls.](#)
26. [Play outdoor tic-tac-toe.](#)
27. [Set up a tin foil river.](#)
28. [And make some handmade boats.](#)
29. [Make homemade spray paint.](#)
30. [Make paper plate frisbees.](#)
31. [Set up water gun targets.](#)
32. [Search for icy treasures.](#)
33. [Make tie-dye socks.](#)
34. [Upcycle tin cans into wind chimes.](#)
35. [Have an outdoor movie night.](#)
36. [Make daisy chain necklaces.](#)
37. [Make peg dolls.](#)

38. [Make butterfly sun catchers.](#)
39. [Make magic bean mosaics.](#)
40. [Make a magnifying waterscope.](#)
41. [Build a pizza box solar oven.](#)
42. [Make DIY rain sticks.](#)
43. [Create a rainbow batik print.](#)
44. [Make a lava lamp.](#)
45. [Repurpose a soda bottle into a DIY sprinkler.](#)
46. [Play balloon ping-pong.](#)
47. [Make giant bubbles.](#)
48. [Or bouncing bubbles.](#)
49. [Make water balloon pinatas.](#)
50. [Make chocolate peanut butter pudding cups.](#)
51. [Preserve dead butterflies.](#)
52. [Have a treasure hunt in the sandbox](#) (full post [here](#)).
53. [Make a tabletop fairy garden.](#)
54. [Study how puddles evaporate.](#)
55. [Make miniature marshmallow shooters.](#)
56. [Make paper leis.](#)
57. [Create a raised salt painting.](#)
58. [Make treasure stones.](#)
59. [Sew beach towel tote bags.](#)
60. [Make summer pinwheels.](#)
61. [Make shaped bubble wands from pipe cleaners.](#)
62. [Make rock candy.](#)



63. [Toast campfire s'mores.](#)
64. [Learn to finger knit.](#)
65. [Go fishing with bamboo fishing poles.](#)
66. [Make a jump rope from marker lids.](#)
67. [Build a DIY activity board.](#)
68. [Make fresh strawberry freezer jam.](#)
69. [Make garden hose water guns.](#)
70. [Make an ocean shapes mural.](#)
71. [Grow sunflowers.](#)
72. [Make your own fossils.](#)
73. [Grow a plant buddy.](#)
74. [Make ice cream in a bag.](#)
75. [Have a sponge ball fight.](#)
76. [Make shrinky dinks.](#)
77. [Play with ice.](#)
78. [Learn to weave with branch weaving.](#)
79. [Make campfire cones.](#)
80. [Make plastic spoon puppets.](#)
81. [Write a book together.](#)
82. [Make bubble prints.](#)
83. [Make a soda can bi-plane.](#)
84. [Paint with flyswatters.](#)
85. [Make dancing oobleck.](#)
86. [Grill banana chocolate boats.](#)
87. [Create custom t-shirts with sandpaper prints.](#)

88. [Play velcro catch ball.](#)
89. [Make family stepping stones.](#)
90. [Build toilet paper roll race cars.](#)
91. [Make your own board game \(and gum drop players\).](#)
92. [Play with your shadows.](#)
93. [Build a waterfall water wall.](#)
94. [Make marshmallow animals.](#)
95. [Create permanent sand sculptures with sand clay.](#)
96. [Make ice cube boats.](#)
97. [Make a DIY twister mat on the grass.](#)
98. [Make root beer float popsicles.](#)
99. [Decorate popsicle stick bracelets.](#)
100. [Make a backyard obstacle course.](#)
101. [Make a summer scrapbook.](#)

# Backyard Messy Party

Katie Kimball is a mother of three from Michigan who spends a ton of time in the kitchen making real food with whole ingredients and then blogs about her successes and failures at [Kitchen Stewardship](#).

Originally posted on [Kitchen Stewardship](#).



7 kids. 12 adults. Jello, flour, chocolate syrup, and lots of cream – both whipped and shaving.

The goal? To make a mess.

The end result? More fun than we even expected.

Many of you appreciated the servitude my son showed with his [5th birthday party](#), and rightfully so. If you've got a wild side, you will more than appreciate the party we threw the summer he was two.

My tiny backyard was host to 27 kids ages one through eleven, and amazingly, there was fun to be had for every age group.

I billed it as a "Messy Party" in the invites. Children (and adults too!) were asked to wear clothes or a bathing suit that could get totally sloppy, and parents signed up to bring all the items we would need for the morning. It was a potluck of goop!

We started with body painting as everyone arrived:

Mix flour and water OR the cornstarch "glue" below with food coloring; use Q-tips to apply. Only the blues and reds stained.

## **Goey Glue**

*3 tablespoons cornstarch  
4 tablespoons cold water  
2 cups boiling water*

*Mix the cornstarch and cold water in a small bowl. Pour the cornstarch mixture into the boiling water in a glass measuring cup, stirring constantly. Allow to cool; store in the fridge.*

I opened up the party with some instructions like these:

1. There will be nobody remaining clean at this party.

2. You are not to smile, laugh, or even giggle! (give snake eyes to the kids, then grin)
3. You will be kind. Absolutely no hitting, or eating other people's faces or anything that might be on their face.
4. You are required to have fun.

Then I broke the ice by styling my hair in front of everyone – with shaving cream!

The kids had to do a "treasure hunt" around the yard for dixie cups of colored Jello (hidden in sandwich bags to keep out the bugs). This divided them into teams, used only to rotate evenly through the activities. No spoons, but some great tongue exercises getting the Jello out!

I set up ten stations all the way around the outside of our house, as follows:

1. Bubbles Awaayyy in a kiddie pool with hangers, string, and hula hoops to make huge bubbles.
2. Edible Finger Paint whipped cream colored with food coloring; kids could paint on plates and eat!
3. Wiggly Water water balloons were fun for littles to hold and bigger kids to throw down the hill or play catch with.
4. The Powder Room the swings came off our swingset and mini donuts hung from strings for kiddos to eat.
5. Dino-Flour Dig each child dug for a few M&Ms in oatmeal canisters filled with white flour (it was cheaper back then), and each group unburied a certain number of pennies in a dishpan of flour.
6. Sand castles a simple break for the little ones
7. Take a Dip, Little Squirt! wash off in the kiddie pool with toys for the youngin's, and a target on the fence with squirt guns or bottles for the big kids.
8. Messy Tarp Art partiers squirted "ketchup" and "mustard" and sifted flour over the edge of the deck onto a big tarp (for a later activity). The bottles were filled with inexpensive cornstarch and boiling water solution.
9. Bob-a-Choc fruit doused in chocolate syrup in bowls...but no spoons! The kids couldn't get enough of this bobbing for apples, the messy version.
10. Playdough Station another familiar activity for the littles, and homemade playdough could be tossed after its outdoor adventure.

You bet even the big kids got into this party!

The grand finale, before a messy lunch of tacos, watermelon and popsicles, was a slip and slide with extra shaving cream on our "Artsy Tarp" from number 8 above:

Do you think the other parents realized what they were getting themselves into subjecting their families to a messy party at the Kimballs'? Honestly, I can't believe I did this, looking at these photos. Our neighbors are still asking my son if we're going to have another one!

In spite of all the craziness you witnessed above, my two favorite memories from this adventure encapsulate my son's two-year-old cuteness just perfectly.

I took this picture right about the time I finished up instructions...and noticed my two-year-old son was *nowhere to be seen*. After a minute of frantic searching with other moms helping, the little dear came traipsing around the corner from the front yard, carrying as many cool whip tubs as he could carry (from station number two). When he was helping me mix in the colors the day before, I had told him, "These are for the party."

Just brimming with pride, my son beamed and called to everyone present, "I got the party!" Later, once the realization that he did *not get hit by a car in the front yard on our busy street all alone at only two years old* sank in, this was really, really hilarious.

For weeks, probably months afterward, and even a few times the next summer when he was three, my son would stand on the huge rock in our yard, tell me to sit on the hill (see photo above, again) and play "Messy Party," his best rendition of my silly rule-sharing and instruction-giving.

Disclaimer: This was before my big change to a real food lifestyle, but you know what? My husband is quick to point out that nobody died from the sugar or food coloring or whatnot. I think I'd do it again almost precisely the same (except we'd order pizza instead of juggling tacos with little kids). Real Food needs a vacation sometimes, too!

## Clay Pot Critters

Danielle blogs at [Mostly Food & Crafts](#), where she shares the new recipes she finds to tweak and try out on her family. In addition to her adventures in cooking for her family, she also loves to craft – when she can find the time – both alone and with the kids.

Originally posted on [Mostly Food & Crafts](#).



### Supplies:

- clay pots (any size)
- paint
- pipe cleaners
- googly eyes
- brushes
- foam
- glue

### Directions:

Paint your clay pots

Let it dry and add any designs you want {we went with polka dots}.

For the spider we used the saucer as well. We added a smile and some googly eyes. We then used the pipe cleaners (bent in half and glued in place) for the legs.

For the octopus we added a smile and eyes and then cut the legs out of black foam. We also cut a circle out of the foam the same width as the pot to attach the legs to and then glued that to the pot.

## Corn Starch Painting

Stephanie is a stay-at-home mom to two adorable kiddos. She shares her crafty momma projects, kid crafts and learning activities on her blog, [Playing House](#).

Originally posted on [Playing House](#).



### Supplies:

- Muffin tin
- Corn starch
- Water
- Food coloring
- Paint brushes

### Directions:

Start by adding a few spoonfuls of the cornstarch to the muffin tin. Then add a few drops of food coloring. I recommend taking the muffin tin outside and then adding the water.....just to make sure you don't spill it all through your house.

Add your water once you get outside and then stir up the cornstarch/food coloring mixture.

And paint away.....

## Going Fishin'

Jenae is a former-first grade teacher turned stay-at-home Mama to two boys, ages 4 and 2. She loves sharing fun and educational activities over at her blog [I Can Teach My Child!](#)

Originally posted on [Make and Takes](#).



### Supplies:

- 10 smooth-edged metal lids (like on the ends of juice containers)
- a dowel rod
- a strong magnet (**note:** use extreme caution when using magnets with young children.)
- yarn
- construction paper
- hot glue gun or white craft glue
- optional: a laminator (I have a small one like [this](#))

### Directions:

Trace a fish shape on a piece of construction paper. Make sure the body is big enough to cover the entire metal lid. Use as a template and trace 19 more (for a total of 20). Cut them out. Now would be a good time to laminate.

Glue the metal lid on by sandwiching it between 2 fish. Because I laminated mine, I used hot glue. If you don't have a laminator, simply use white craft glue.

Tie a piece of yarn on the end of the dowel rod.



Tie the other end of the yarn onto the magnet. This is why I chose a horseshoe magnet.

Use a dry-erase marker to add anything that requires automatic recognition. Like numbers, shapes, letters or words...or even algebraic equations!

Set out the fish (onto a blue blanket, of course) and go fishing!

## Ice Cream in a Bag

Amanda is a stay-at-home mom of two who blogs at [OhAmanda.com](http://OhAmanda.com) and [Impress Your Kids](http://Impress Your Kids). In her former life, Amanda was a Children's Pastor — overseeing, organizing and developing ministry for kids in nursery through middle school, but now that she is a mom, her "skills" are used up on her kids! Impress Your Kids is the journey of raising her kids to know and love the things of God.

Originally posted on [Impress Your Kids](http://Impress Your Kids).



### Ingredients:

- 4 quart sized plastic zip bags
- 4 gallon sized plastic zip bags
- 2 cups half & half
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 2 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 cups salt (rock salt is suggested but if you use regular salt, just use a little less)
- 1/2 c sugar
- ice
- gloves (for your sensitive kiddos!)

### Directions:

Whisk sugar, cream, half & half and vanilla together.

Pour 1 cup of liquid into each quart sized bag.

Put sealed quart sized bag inside gallon bag. Add ice—enough to fill gallon bag about halfway. Add salt.

Shake the bags for about 5-10 minutes.

Grab a spoon and eat out of the bag!

## Kids Activity Caddy

Myra is wife to her childhood sweetheart and mommy to a rambunctious two-year-old named Ridley. She enjoys blogging at [My Blessed Life](#) about thrifty home decor, DIY projects, crafts, recipes, and more to inspire you to creatively thrive in your home.

Originally posted on [My Blessed Life](#).



### Supplies:

- 3 clean tin cans {spaghetti sauce cans work well}
- spray paint – red, yellow, blue
- ruler
- hot glue & glue gun
- 9001 glue
- scrapbook paper and cardstock
- ribbon
- jute twine
- scissors
- sharpie

### Directions:

Clean labels off cans. Spray paint cans.

Measure the height of the can and cut scrapbook paper approximately 5 1/5 inches wide to line each can. Use hot glue to secure the scrapbook paper inside.

Hot glue a 2" band of paper on the outside of each can. Hot glue ribbon on the top inside edge of each can to cover rough edges.

Place the cans in a triangular shape and mark where they meet each other. Use 9001 glue to stick them together. Tie the cans together with a few pieces of jute twine.

To finish off this project, add labels to each can. Use a Silhouette machine or scissors to cut out circles from scrapbook paper and card stock. Write whatever you want on your labels and hot glue them in place.

## Red, White & Blue!

[Creative Kristi](#) is your place for finding crafts, tutorials, tech how-tos and free printables. Kristi is a work from home mom of 2, military wife and lover of coffee. She & her family reside in Maine & love to DIY.

Originally posted on [Creative Kristi](#).



### Supplies:

- red, blue & white acrylic craft paint
- paper or canvas
- ruler
- pencil

### Directions:

Measure out the size of paper you wish your flag to be & cut (if using a canvas you can skip this step)

Measure out the blue rectangle for the field of stars in the upper left corner. Fill it in with blue acrylic craft paint. Let dry.

Paint the soles of child's feet with red paint and carefully place them down in rows on the white portion of the paper/canvas, reapplying paint as needed. Let dry.

Paint the child's hand white and place randomly across the blue portion of canvas/paper. Reapply paint as needed. Let dry.

Optional step: seal with a clear sealer to protect.

If you used paper I recommend framing your finished piece so it is easy to hang.

## Sidewalk Simon

[Toddler Approved](#) is a resource for parents and teachers of young children that helps foster a love of learning at an early age. Kristina and E.J. started their collaborating as college lacrosse teammates and now are the crafty moms behind Toddler Approved. They love to find ways to make life a little more fun and creative for their kids (ages 5, 4, 3, and 1).

Originally posted on [Toddler Approved](#).



### Supplies:

- colored sidewalk chalk

### Directions:

Draw a Simon game board on the sidewalk or driveway.

Have your child start by standing in the center of the "game board". Begin by saying a color ("*red*"). The child will jump to that color and then back to the center. Say the first color and add another ("*red, yellow*"). The child will jump to the first color (*red*), next color (*yellow*) and then back to the center. Keep adding one color until you have 6-8 in the sequence.

The round "ends" when the child completes the entire sequence, can no longer remember the pattern, or misses a color block. Then it's your turn to jump as your child dictates the sequence.

Not only was this a fun and active way to practice saying and recognizing the colors of the rainbow, but a great memory building activity as well.

## S'mores Necklace

Amanda is a stay-at-home mom of two who blogs at [OhAmanda.com](http://OhAmanda.com) and [Impress Your Kids](http://Impress Your Kids). In her former life, Amanda was a Children's Pastor — overseeing, organizing and developing ministry for kids in nursery through middle school, but now that she is a mom, her "skills" are used up on her kids! Impress Your Kids is the journey of raising her kids to know and love the things of God.



Originally posted on [Impress Your Kids](http://Impress Your Kids).

### Supplies:

- dark brown craft foam
- light brown craft foam
- paper clips
- string for necklace
- scissors
- foam marshmallows

### Directions:

Cut out 2 identical squares of the light brown foam. These are your graham crackers! Cut out a smaller square from the dark brown foam. This is the chocolate!

Flatten out a paper clip leaving the smaller end intact.

Stack your chocolate on top of one graham cracker. Then poke your paperclip through the bottom!

Fold down the paperclip to be flush with the craft foam.

Then slide on your marshmallow (through the equator, not the north/south poles!) and your final piece of graham cracker!

Now twist that paper clip into a little circle and add a string!

## Swimming Pool Scrabble

[Toddler Approved](#) is a resource for parents and teachers of young children that helps foster a love of learning at an early age. Kristina and E.J. started their collaborating as college lacrosse teammates and now are the crafty moms behind Toddler Approved. They love to find ways to make life a little more fun and creative for their kids (ages 5, 4, 3, and 1).

Originally posted on [Toddler Approved](#).



### Supplies:

- sponges
- scissors
- permanent marker

### Directions:

Cut sponges in half. Write letters on each sponge (we only put letters on one side, but you can easily make these "tiles" double sided to give you more spelling options).

Throw the "scrabble sponges" in the pool, then swim to collect all of the pieces. Both of my children are still learning to swim - so instead of making it a competition, we worked together to collect all of the pieces, or would take turns swimming out to grab a letter.

Once collected - play an age appropriate game of scrabble. With my 3 year old, we worked on putting the letters in alphabetical order, and finding the letters that made up his name - with my 5 year old, we'd see how many simple words we could form using the letters she had collected.

Throw them back in and start over again.



## Vacation Trip Tracker for Kids

Tricia Callahan is founder and author of [Once A Month Mom](#) where you can find freezer friendly recipes and menus for a variety of lifestyles (Traditional, Whole Foods, Diet, Gluten Free Dairy Free, Vegetarian and Baby/Toddler). When she isn't using her Type A personality to create once a month cooking menus, she can be found chasing after her two toddlers, hosting dinner parties or engrossed in a good book.

Originally posted on [Once A Month Mom](#).



### Supplies:

- [30-36 inches black velcro \(hook\)](#)
- [2 velcro dots \(loop\)](#)
- light-weight toy car
- push pins
- foam sheets (at least one color for each state)
- scissors
- letter stickers (or markers for writing)
- brown paper bags for each child (one for each state, or two for each state if doing on the return trip as well)
- stapler
- prizes for each kid (same number as brown bags)

### Directions:

Using [these states template](#) as your guide, cut out foam states for each state you will be traveling from, through and to. Use these foam cutouts to trace the shape of the state onto your brown paper bags. Place a letter sticker for each state on the foam cut out and on the brown bag. (We did this so that the kids could know what letter each state started with). Place your gifts inside each of your brown bags and staple or tape shut. (You may also want to write the child's name on their bags if you have multiple children).

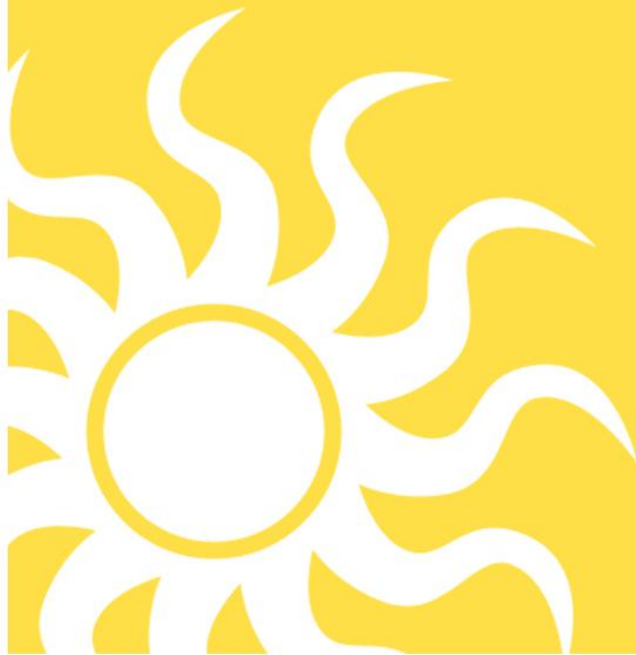
Locate a light-weight toy car, like a matchbox, and affix two velcro dots on the underside.

Using sewing push pins, secure your black velcro strip to a relatively undisturbed area of your car. (We found that the car ceiling above the driver and passenger seats worked best. (I did not use sticky back velcro as I was concerned that there could be leftover residue on

the fabric of our car when we were through. Next, place your states in the order you will travel through them along your velcro "road". Place the car at the starting state.

As we traveled to each state, so did the toy car. When the car reached a new state the kids were each given their brown bag with the indicated state on it. They didn't know states, but they can definitely locate shapes, so as we were headed into each state (if they were awake) we would have them look for the indicated shape. When they found the shape along the road we would cheer and gifts were passed out.

# PLANNING



## Gear Up for Summer

Jessica Fisher has learned to reconcile a tight budget with her love for great food. As a busy mom of six voracious eaters, she regularly shares healthy, delicious and budget-friendly recipes at [GoodCheapEats](#). She also writes about parenting at [LifeasMOM](#).

Originally posted on [Life As Mom](#).



Summer [vacation started on Friday](#). What this means at our house is that we shift to a more relaxed mode of living. The kids still have some schoolwork (math and reading) and daily chores each day, but overall, they are free to play, read, draw, and otherwise explore their options and let creative boredom be their guide. What this means for me is that I can focus on enrichment learning and reorganizing.

Our change of schedule has been energizing for me. I know, sounds weird. But, the previous "routine," if we could call it that, was *dragging*. I was simply going through the motions of chores, meals, and school work.

This past weekend, I spent some time thinking through a summer routine — and I'm excited for the change of pace. Out with the old and in with the new! I started scheming about outings, learning activities, books to read, and movies to see. Even [my meal planning is getting a summer makeover!](#)

On Sunday night we went out for pizza and then walked along a beautiful paved walkway overlooking flower fields and the ocean. I tested everyone on their skipping and galloping. Yes, yes, I did. I was the crazy lady leading a pack of kids.

The weather was perfect — and we parents sighed collectively, "Summer is here!"

Back at the ranch, I scoured my storage cupboards, closets, and Wal-Mart for some tools to add to my bag of tricks this summer. I still have some things to do or to locate, but I'm getting organized for a summertime groove.

Here's how I'm gearing up for summer:

### **1. Create a Summer Fun Planner**

I flipped through [the Summer Survival Guide](#) on my computer and printed out the forms and activity sheets that we are going to need in the next 10 weeks. I printed the daily to do lists as well as a weekly meal plan on cardstock and laminated those pages. In that way, I can reuse the same sheet every day and week and use less paper. I also printed out weekly and monthly calendars as well as reading lists for both me and the kids.

I compiled all these into a fun binder that everyone can access. I could have incorporated them into [my household notebook](#), but I want this to be accessible by everybody in the family, so I think a binder works best. Plus, they can pull activity sheets at will.

My kids love to contribute to the summer plans, so I also printed out several copies of the "Summer To Do" lists so that each kid could start his own list.

### **2. Build an "I'm Bored" Box**

Next, I ventured out into the storage garage to my craft cabinet and dug out all these cool things that I've been "meaning" to do with the kids, but never have.

All sorts of cool stuff lurked in there like shadow paper, puzzle books, activity books, and lots of sticker paper. I'm sure I'll stumble across more things, so I'm gathering all my loot in a Sterilite tote for easy access as well as making a mental note of what things we can do, so that I can be more intentional about *doing* them.

I bet you have a bunch of cool stuff hiding in a cupboard, too.

### **3. Check the Activity Bags**

Have bag, will travel, right? We've found that [if we have items packed and ready to go](#), the battle is half won in terms of getting out the door.

After several months in hibernation, [our activity bags needed rejuvenation](#). My kids' interests and ages have changed over the last year, so I needed to replenish and adjust the contents of our park and play bags as well as replenish the picnic bag. Plus, I've found that we rarely need bug spray here; last year's bottles are still full. But, I do need to restock our supply of sunscreen. So, my eyes are peeled for a good sale.

### **4. Stock up on Summer Gear**

As our kids get older, I'm realizing that different gadgets, tools, and accessories are helpful to our family, especially during summer.

Our [famous fanny packs](#) come to mind as do clip-on water bottle holders. Walkie-talkies help us when we're hiking or sprawled out across a park. Timers keep my gamers (a little) more under control. Head lamps and light sticks are also a cool addition to our stash for nighttime adventures.

Making sure we have these things at hand is really helpful.

### **5. Do a Clothes, Shoes, & Hats Check**

They're just growing like weeds! No one in our family has a very extensive wardrobe, but there are so core items that we rely on during summer: sweatshirts and easy slip on shoes.

Nights — and days — get cool here, so we like to keep sweatshirts in the car at all times. Easier said than done! My teenage boy has now ventured into the men's department. And did you know that no one carries hoodies anymore? I found zero sweatshirts in my searching. Now to scour some online sales.

I also checked everyone's feet for sandal/croc access and made sure that everyone had what he needed in terms of summertime footwear. My big boy is outgrowing shoes faster than you can say BigFoot.

My little people are really thankful for their new cool shoes. Crocs sent us a couple pairs of [their new Chameleons](#) — and they are super cool! They change color in the sun, something that FishBoy7 and FishChick4 think is pretty cool. Watch for a sale — your kids will love these.

And now that all my kids are old enough to keep hats on their heads, every boy has a new Padres cap and the girls have floppy pink sunhats.

### **6. Buy Health & Safety Supplies**

I don't know about you, but our family gets a summer cold every year. I'm hoping I can prevent it this year. I loaded us up with a supply of multi-vitamins to fill in the gaps as well as a box of EmergenC, my favorite source of vitamin C, besides fresh fruit and vegetables.

I've also replenished our bandaid supply and am keeping my eye open for sales on other first aid items. I can't guarantee that no one will get sick or hurt, but I can do my best to offset the effects.

The above action items really did not take that much time. But, I know that it is going to be a busy ten weeks. Even though we don't have massive amounts of schoolwork, everyone is keeping up with his studies in math and literature. We also have weekly field trips planned as well as The Cookbook to finish. (With all the recipes to test and test again, it *really* is a family affair.)

Gearing up for summer is a great way to make the summer with my family more enjoyable. I am hopeful that a little preplanning will go a long way.

**Get your own copy of [the Summer Survival Guide](#) in the FishMama shop!**

# Planning for Our Summer Fun

Jessica Fisher has learned to reconcile a tight budget with her love for great food. As a busy mom of six voracious eaters, she regularly shares healthy, delicious and budget-friendly recipes at [GoodCheapEats](#). She also writes about parenting at [LifeasMOM](#).

Originally posted on [Life As Mom](#).

To be totally honest, I'm really looking forward to some intentional down time and a chance to get *caught up* on stuff this summer. I also realize that though my children are on vacation, they still need me. So, it's not really a time to "clock out".

But, kid duty doesn't have to be draining. In fact, some of [my favorite ways to recharge](#) include my people. A break from the norm can be more refreshing than just "checking out".

So I've spent some time this weekend to plan for our summer vacation. Here are some of the things that I've done to prepare:

## 1. Plan a month-long meal plan.

I love to have a month's worth of meals thought out and planned for. It doesn't take much longer to plan for a month than it does for a week and it helps me think about the month as a whole and to plan ahead for special events. Check out these links for inspiration:

- [Our June Meal Plan](#)
- [Summer Lunch Ideas for Kids](#)
- [Easy Theme Night Dinners for Summer](#)
- [Eat Well and Spend Less in Summer](#)

## 2. Plan a weekly schedule for you and the kids.

While [hockey season](#) was a lot of work, the built-in schedule gave our family rhythm and measurable benchmarks throughout the spring season. The last few weeks that have been tough have been characterized by a lack of rhythm. Hmmmm..... connection?

I mapped out a schedule for our summer weeks, including some anchors to mark sections of the day as well as of the week. For instance, I'm going to try to serve meals at the same time each day as well as head to the pool on a regular basis. If I make the time now, it's more likely to happen. And having those things to "count on" each day will help my kids, too.

Here's how I envision it:

- weekly trips for [library](#), outings, and errands
- daily trips to the pool
- bi-weekly sessions for [intentional learning and exploring](#)
- daily anchors for breakfast, lunch, and dinner
- [daily family read-aloud](#)
- pockets of [time for Mom to work](#)
- weekly and daily [chores for us all](#)

I don't kid myself that these will work out exactly as I plan, but *if you don't have a target, you'll certainly never hit it.*

### **3. Plan for fun.**

Aside from date night and a work night, I've left our evenings free for fun activities as a family. I've done the same for weekends, envisioning time to explore our community, have a game night, or just shoot baskets with the neighbors.

Here are some of the things that I'm hoping for our family this summer, my "bucket list", if you will:

- bonfires at the beach
- canning jam and pickles
- [camping](#)
- [a staycation](#) at a local resort
- working through the [Summer Survival Guide](#) activities with my girls
- lots of [homemade ice cream](#)
- daily [read aloud in chapter books](#)
- [picnics at the park and beach](#)

In all honesty, we may not do half of the things I've dreamed up here. But, if I don't brainstorm now, we're even less likely to do a small fraction of the things that we could do. I'm not set on filling our days and making them busy. Rather, I want to be intentional about how we spend our free time.

I want to know we were happy and productive over the summer. The two really do go hand in hand.

**Pick up a copy of [the Summer Survival Guide](#) for even more ideas for summer fun.**



## Strategies to Avoid Pre-Vacation Stress

Mandi Ehman lives in wild, wonderful West Virginia with her husband of ten years and four beautiful, spunky little girls. As a full-time work-at-home, homeschooling mom, she runs [Life Your Way](#) and [Jungle Deals & Steals](#) and consults for a variety of websites and brands. Mandi loves coffee, chocolate, easy meals, beautiful things and minimalist spaces!

Originally posted on [Life Your Way](#).



Before I share my pre-vacation strategies with you, I have a confession. The night before we left for our recent beach vacation, I posted this on Facebook: “It never fails...no matter how I try to plan ahead, I end up wishing we were NOT going on vacation the night before vacation. Thankful that tomorrow we’ll actually be on vacation and all this packing and cleaning will be behind me!”

That said, I know these strategies work because the one time I haven’t felt that way was before our trip to Disney last fall. I was so prepared and organized that when we woke up to 5” of snow on the ground — and it was still falling — we were able to walk out the door hours earlier than we had planned!

The key? Starting early.

I don’t mean start stressing earlier, because that wouldn’t be any fun. But start gathering your thoughts — creating packing lists, making notes about things you need to remember to take or do, etc. — as well as the actual things you need to pack a week or two in advance.

Here are the rest of my no-fail packing strategies:

### **Create a Packing Zone**

I typically designate the kitchen counter or guest bed as a “packing zone”, but any flat surface will do. The idea behind a packing zone is that you can start adding things as part of

your daily routine so that there's no big mad dash to gather everything from across the whole house.

Start by adding activities, snacks and other items that you've purchased especially for your trip. Then add the items that you can live without for a week or so.

I typically do laundry at the beginning of the week and immediately move outfits to the packing zone. Even if we have to wear some of our clothes twice in the week before we leave for vacation, it's worth it to me to know that the clothes are ready to go!

### **Make a Brain Dump List**

While you'll need a master packing list (here's a [printable packing list](#) just for you!), I also recommend keeping a notepad or piece of scrap paper somewhere that everyone can get to it. Add *every little thing* that pops in your head to this list so that you can double check to make sure nothing gets forgotten.

We include items we need to pack as well as things we need to do (like cracking our dishwasher open so it doesn't get mildewy while we're gone) on this list, as well as things that are missing from the items we've already packed like "pink leggings for the baby" or "extra sweater for Mandi".

Everyone in the family adds to it as we remember things that need to be packed or done, even those things that seem obvious.

The last time I skipped this step, we walked out without theme park tickets that we'd purchased ahead of time, and we had to buy a second set when we arrived. Not cool.

### **How to Pack**

My husband has been known to pack everything he needs in one giant trash bag, but honestly, that makes me just nuts!

It really is a lot easier to unpack — both at your destination and when you get home — if you pack more carefully. For example, I pack the girls' clothes either in piles by child or by day, depending on whether we can unpack when we reach our destination or will be living out of a bag. I then use separate open totes for activities and snacks, and toiletries get their own bag as well (which can sometimes be put inside the clothing bag if there's room).

Unpacking is actually my favorite part of vacation — I know, it's a strange thing to enjoy — and there's no doubt that packing carefully makes it an enjoyable rather than stressful process!

Using a packing zone to gather the things you need ahead of time makes packing this way a lot easier, because you can wait until you have everything in front of you before you decide which bags to use.

### **Things to Take**

Use this [printable packing list](#) to organize everything you want to take, but here are the things I always end up giving extra attention to as well:

- Activities for the car/plane
- Travel snacks
- Activities for the destination
- Cash (if using a cash budget, which I highly recommend for vacation so that you don't go overboard)
- [Natural sunscreen](#)
- Phone/computer/device chargers
- A laundry bag for dirty clothes
- Tickets or confirmation letters (I pay extra attention to these now!)

## Stress-Free Vacation Planning: A Budget That Works

Mandi Ehman lives in wild, wonderful West Virginia with her husband of ten years and four beautiful, spunky little girls. As a full-time work-at-home, homeschooling mom, she runs [Life Your Way](#) and [Jungle Deals & Steals](#) and consults for a variety of websites and brands. Mandi loves coffee, chocolate, easy meals, beautiful things and minimalist spaces!

Originally posted on [Life Your Way](#).

When it comes to vacation planning, creating a budget is often the most stressful part. Many people fall into one of two pitfalls:

- *Setting the budget too low and then quickly blowing through it – and more – while feeling guilty the whole time*
- *Not setting a budget at all, only to realize when it's all said and done that the amount they've spent was way more than they intended*

Setting a realistic and achievable budget helps you stretch your money further so that you're able to do more vacation activities without blowing your budget.

Ideally, you have a vacation fund that you've been contributing to all year in preparation for your vacation. If not, sit down and look at your account balances and budget between now and your scheduled vacation and figure out how much you can afford to spend. Take credit cards out of the equation. While it may seem like the debt is worth the time away, your vacation will be much more enjoyable if you don't come back to a stack of bills, and as hard as it may be to skip a vacation this year, there are less expensive alternatives for relaxation and quality family time that won't leave you in debt.

Once you have a number for your overall vacation fund, think about the categories you need to budget for:

- Travel (gas, car rental, plane tickets, tolls, etc.)
- Meals on the road (fast food, drinks, etc., or the cost of packing a cooler full of food, drinks and snacks for the trip)
- Accommodations (hotel, RV park or camping fees, etc.)
- Meals (eating out and/or grocery shopping to stock the fridge and pantry of your hotel room or rental)
- Activities
- Souvenirs
- Extra spending money (going to movies on a rainy day, picking up a special snack, extra activities, etc.)

While it may be tempting to estimate on the low side in order to squeeze more into your plan, being realistic is key. Think through the schedule for your trip or the activities your family is looking forward to and add the cost of each to your budget.

## Things to Do in the Kitchen Before You Leave for Vacation

Mandi Ehman lives in wild, wonderful West Virginia with her husband of ten years and four beautiful, spunky little girls. As a full-time work-at-home, homeschooling mom, she runs [Life Your Way](#) and [Jungle Deals & Steals](#) and consults for a variety of websites and brands. Mandi loves coffee, chocolate, easy meals, beautiful things and minimalist spaces!

*Originally posted on [Life Your Way](#).*

This month's [Eat Well, Spend Less](#) theme is summer menu planning, at home and while traveling.

While the other participating bloggers are talking about [food for airplane travel](#), [hot-weather mealtime solutions](#) and more, I'm going to talk specifically about preparing your kitchen and pantry for your time away...and for your return.

I don't know about you, but I hate coming home to a messy, dirty house, so I usually spend the days leading up to any vacation cleaning, straightening and organizing. Although it adds a little stress on the front end, it makes it a lot less stressful to come home and readjust to life as normal. Since we usually drive to our vacation destinations, this is even more important since we usually walk in the door exhausted as it is!

Along those lines, there's nothing worse than coming home to food that's gone bad or an empty pantry. Who wants to grocery shop or clean out the fridge right when they walk in the door from vacation? Not me, that's for sure. Here's how I avoid both of those scenarios:

### **Freeze or Use Perishables**

A week before you leave for vacation — ideally before you menu plan for the week — take a look through your pantry and fridge, making note of anything that will expire or go bad before you return. Incorporate these things into your menu for the week, using up what you can and freezing anything that can be frozen so that you don't waste food (and money!) while you're gone.

You can also pack some of your perishables, such as apples or other travel-friendly produce, to take with you on your trip. Just be realistic about how much you'll actually use while traveling so that it doesn't go to waste on the road or take up unnecessary space.

### **Freeze a Meal for Your Return**

I'll admit this is something we've just started doing ourselves, but it really does make a huge difference. When planning your menu for the week before you leave for vacation, be sure to include a freezer meal that you can prepare and freeze for your return. Having dinner taken care of all ready will make coming home much less stressful.

A few things to think about when preparing your welcome home meal:

- Consider the time of day you'll get home. If you'll be arriving late in the afternoon, you probably don't want a meal that needs to thaw before cooking or takes several hours to cook unless your house sitter can help with those steps.

- Think about sides. Casseroles that include meat, veggies and starch are a good choice because you don't need to make any sides at all. Similarly, pasta dishes can be served with bread, which you can also buy or make ahead of time and freeze with the meal. Making homemade french fries or another side dish that requires several steps and a good bit of time probably defeats the purpose.

### **Stock Your Pantry**

Avoid having to rush to the grocery store right after you return home by stocking your pantry and freezer before you leave. Of course you'll want to pick up fresh produce, dairy, etc. as soon as possible, but living off your pantry for a day or two can make a huge difference in avoiding the "need a vacation from my vacation" feeling. Since we live 30 minutes from the grocery store, this is especially true for us!

### **Other Tips**

Finally, here are a few other tips we've learned over the years:

- Crack your dishwasher open. Our dishwasher has an extremely tight seal, and the first time we traveled after moving in to this house, we made the mistake of closing our dishwasher with just a couple dishes in it. With the a/c off, our home was toasty warm, and the humidity inside the dishwasher caused mold to begin to grow on those damp dishes. Now, we always leave it cracked when we travel, whether it's empty or not.
- Don't leave produce on the counter. Fruit flies multiply at an alarming rate, so you'll want to be sure that you don't leave any produce out while you're gone or you could come home to a nasty surprise!
- Seal open packages. Similarly, look through your pantry or cabinets for any open packages and make sure they're tightly sealed with chip clips or in zip bags. No one wants to come home to bugs or rodents in their food!
- Vacuum up any crumbs. Check these areas for crumbs and vacuum those up as well.

I don't mind a little stress before we leave for vacation if I know it will pay off while we're away and when we get home, but knowing that I will come home to a messy kitchen or empty pantry can make it harder to really enjoy our time away, so I try to prepare ahead of time to avoid those stresses.

Shaina recently shared her [tips for on-the-go picnics](#) here at Life Your Way and I'm looking forward to discovering more strategies for spending less on food without sacrificing nutrition while traveling!

Be sure to visit [Jessica](#), [Aimee](#), [Shaina](#), [Katie G](#), [Alyssa](#), [Carrie](#), [Katie K](#), and [Tammy](#) for more summer menu planning strategies.

# WAHM Life: Secrets for a Stress-Free, Productive Summer

Perna is a business blogger, social media manager and mom entrepreneur who blogs about living the WAHM life at [The Mom Writes](#), sharing simple, practical and actionable tips to be more intentional, organized and productive as a mom, entrepreneur, wife, home manager and woman.

Originally posted on [The Mom Writes](#).

As I'd mentioned in my [last post](#), with the summer season full on here in India, we've already started thinking about the summer holidays when school will be out for our daughter. In other words, when you have a home-based business, having the kids home from school means cutting down on work time and upping the family time.

Does that *also* mean cutting down on earnings and upping the expenses? *Actually*, no.

If you plan ahead and organize your home and your business, you can have the most stress-free ye productive and profitable summer ever.

Here are 5 simple ways to organize your work from home schedule for your home and business while you go and enjoy the season with the kids:

## 1. Organize Your Home

As work-at-home moms, our home and our families are top priority. Setting up systems in place for [managing your home](#) will help you find the time you need to work on your business when the kids are home from school, all day.

Schedule days for laundry, dusting, decluttering, [menu planning](#) and batch cooking as well as other routine household chores so that you know how your week is planned well in advance. Set up systems or [hire help](#) if need be, for chores that someone else can handle, such as cleaning the house or tending to the garden.

## 2. Organize Kids' Activities

I cannot stress enough the importance of having kids constructively engaged and occupied. Planning goes a long way in helping you and the kids have an enjoyable summer. However, don't over-schedule. That *never* works well for either party. Instead, pick one or two outside-of-home activities that you can take the kids to and create a list of indoor activities that children can do at home, on their own with minimal supervision.

Since our daughter is an only child, we need to identify activities that she can easily do on her own without the need for another child. So, we have picture and simple read-it-yourself books, sticker activity books, splash fests, and other such activities outlined for every day.

Want to be super-organized? Take a large calendar, your Google calendar, the Cozi family calendar or even, an Excel sheet and write down the dates and the various indoor activities that your littles can do while you work on your business. Pencil in snack and nap times as well. Yes, I am a little weird like that.

### **3. Plan Your Business Schedule**

Since you're taking the pains to plan your kids' schedules, why not spend a little time and plan your business schedule? What activities need to be done each week? Note them in your calendar. What meetings or conferences have you lined up for the summer? Arrange for childcare. Organizing your business schedule will help you see at-a-glance how, what and when you can fit in a short break with the family or hosting extended family or even, a play date.

### **4. Automate Marketing and Business Promotion**

Yes, there is no reason you shouldn't be building your business during the summer. Take the time now to [plan your blog calendar](#), write and schedule those posts, newsletters and email marketing campaigns. Then, when you're away on vacation or enjoying those ice-cream parties with the kids, your blog and your marketing will be going on, quietly and effectively.

### **5. Organize Your Social Media**

Social media and networking is key to business development, as a freelancer and work-at-home mom. I get 80% of my business via social networking.

Does that mean I spend every single waking moment on Twitter or Facebook?

*Umm, no!*

Having a well-planned [social media editorial calendar](#) and scheduling important and relevant tweets, posts and updates helps me get the word out *without* getting sucked into it all the time. During the summer, I just spend 10 to 20 minutes every day, responding, asking and engaging with my fans and followers.

**Order a copy of the [Summer Sanity Savers for the Work-at-Home Mom](#) ebook, filled with tips and tools to help you savor the summer season while building your business!**





## Free Printables



Download or print these free printables for even more summer fun:

### Travel Activities

- [Travel Bingo](#)
- [License Plate Hunt](#)

### Intentional Summer

- [Summer Bucket List](#)
- [Summer Reading List](#)
- [Nature Journal](#)

### Vacation Planning

- [Printable Travel Itinerary](#)
- [Printable Packing List](#)

### Other Free eBooks

- [Backyard Barbecue {Classics & Future Favorites}](#)
- [Spring Crafts, Fun & Activities for Families](#)

## Contributors

Visit each of our amazing contributors for even more recipes, activities, crafts and planning tips for the summer!

- Amanda @ [Impress Your Kids](#).
- Amy @ [The Finer Things in Life](#)
- Danielle @ [Mostly Food & Crafts](#)
- Erin @ [The Humbled Homemaker](#)
- Jenae @ [I Can Teach My Child](#)
- Jennifer @ [Saving & Giving](#)
- Jessica @ [LifeasMOM](#)
- Kate @ [Modern Alternative Mama](#)
- Katie @ [Kitchen Stewardship](#)
- Kristi @ [Creative Kristi](#)
- Kristina & E.J. @ [Toddler Approved](#)
- Marie @ [Make and Takes](#)
- Myra @ [My Blessed Life](#)
- Nicole @ [Simple Homemade](#)
- Prerna @ [The Mom Writes](#)
- Shaina @ [Food for My Family](#)
- Shannon @ [For the Mommas](#)
- Stephanie @ [Playing House](#)
- Tara @ [Unsophisticook](#)
- Tricia @ [Once A Month Mom](#)

## About Mandi Ehman and Life Your Way



You might wonder, with a name like [Life Your Way](#), whether I believe in any absolutes. Let me assure you that I do.

I believe in right and wrong, the God of the Bible, the covenant of marriage and the sanctity of life.

However, I also believe there are lots of gray areas where each of us have to make our own decisions. Some of these are a good/better/best kind of thing. But most are simply to-MAY-to versus to-MAH-to.

In this internet age, we're hit with opinions, facts and information from every angle every day — about food, finances, motherhood, success and more. And each day we have to wade through it all and try to decide what's best for ourselves, our family and our children.

Life Your Way has one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

### About Mandi

Almost ten years ago, I married the guy who lived across the street.

We set off on a cross-country adventure, moving 3,000 miles away from our family to a city where we knew no one. We made a lot of stupid decisions and did a lot of growing up, and two years later our oldest daughter was born. In the five years that followed, we had three more babies, moved three times and built our dream home on a little slice of heaven in the middle of nowhere. We made a few more mistakes, and our hearts broke as we said goodbye to three babies that we never got to hold in our arms.

These days, my husband has the privilege of being a stay-at-home dad, and I have the incredible privilege of pursuing my passion — writing, blogging and more — while also being home for all of the milestones I wouldn't want to miss and the boobos that need kissing. We're a homeschooling family, which means we get to spend every day together. And most days we consider that a blessing!

Although it might sometimes seem like I've got it all figured out, let me assure you that I don't. There are probably dirty dishes in my sink right now, and I end up wasting time on Facebook more often than I care to admit. Our marriage is beautiful, but not perfect, and I still get buyer's remorse after a stupid impulse purchase. I'm the spokesperson for [Plan to Eat](#), but sometimes I totally ignore my meal plan and we end up eating out because mama doesn't feel like cooking.

But through it all, we're just a family trying to make the best decisions we can while pursuing our passions and enjoying each other. And here at Life...Your Way, I try to share the things I'm thinking about and the lessons we're learning along the way.