Vegan meal prep for beginners: one week, one shopping trip

By the Vegochef team · Editorial standards · Last checked 27 Oct 2026 · 7 min read

In short: pick three or four recipes for the week, shop once, and spend about two hours cooking building blocks: a grain, a pot of beans or lentils, a tray of roasted vegetables, a protein such as baked tofu, and a sauce. Store them in the fridge for up to 3–4 days and freeze the rest.

Meal prep isn't about eating the same boxed lunch seven days in a row. It's about doing the slow parts of cooking once (washing, chopping, simmering, roasting) so that every meal later in the week takes ten minutes. Here's how to do it on a plant-based diet, even if you've never prepped before.

Step 1: Plan three or four recipes

Choose recipes that share ingredients and keep well. A good beginner mix:

- **One breakfast** you can make in jars: overnight oats.
- **One big-batch main** that tastes even better the next day: a chickpea curry, lentil chilli or bean stew.
- **One mix-and-match bowl:** grain, roasted vegetables, a protein and a sauce, combined differently each day.
- **One fresh lunch** that's assembled on the day: wraps or a salad from prepped parts.

Step 2: Shop once

Write one list from your recipes, then check the fridge and pantry before you go. Our vegan grocery list has the staples worth keeping at home, so each week you only buy the fresh food.

Vegan meal prep ideas

Breakfasts: overnight oats, chia pudding, baked oatmeal squares, tofu scramble wraps, smoothie packs for the freezer.

Bowls: tofu and rice with peanut-lime sauce, lentil and roasted vegetable bowls, chickpea shawarma bowls, quinoa and black bean burrito bowls.

Soups and stews: red lentil dal, chickpea and spinach stew, bean chilli, minestrone, coconut vegetable curry. All freeze well.

Salads that keep: black bean and avocado salad (add the avocado on the day), lentil salad, pesto pasta salad, crunchy slaw with edamame.

Snacks: hummus with cut vegetables, roasted chickpeas, energy balls with oats and nut butter.

Step 3: Cook the building blocks (about two hours)

Work in this order so the oven and hob are busy at the same time:

1. **Start the oven** and roast a tray or two of vegetables: sweet potato, peppers, broccoli, onion and chickpeas, tossed in oil and spices.
2. **Cook a grain**: a big pot of brown rice, quinoa or farro. See how to cook quinoa.
3. **Make the big-batch main**: curry, chilli or stew, simmering while the rest cooks.
4. **Bake a protein**: cubes of firm tofu with soy sauce and a little cornflour, or tempeh, on a second tray. See how to cook tofu and what is tempeh.

5. **Make one or two sauces**: lemon-tahini, peanut-lime or a simple herb dressing.
6. **Prep breakfasts**: overnight oats in jars with plant milk, chia and fruit.
7. **Wash and chop** salad leaves, cucumber and herbs for the fresh lunches.

A sample week from one prep session

MEAL	WHAT YOU PREPPED	HOW YOU EAT IT
Breakfast, Mon–Thu	Overnight oats (4 jars)	Straight from the fridge, add fruit
Lunch, Mon–Tue	Grain, roasted vegetables, baked tofu, sauce	Bowls, warm or cold
Lunch, Wed–Thu	Leftover curry	With rice or bread
Dinner, Mon–Wed	Chickpea curry, rice	Reheat, add fresh coriander
Dinner, Thu–Fri	Frozen portions of curry or chilli	Thaw in the fridge the night before

Fridays and weekends are for fresh cooking, leftovers and eating out.

How long prepped food keeps

- **In the fridge:** cooked leftovers keep for **3–4 days** at 40°F (4°C) or colder, according to USDA food safety guidance.
- **In the freezer:** soups, stews, curries, chilli and cooked grains freeze well. Freeze anything you'll eat after day four.

- **Cool food quickly:** split big pots into shallow containers so they cool fast, and get them into the fridge within two hours of cooking.
- **Reheat until steaming hot** all the way through.
- **Keep dressings separate** until you eat, so salads and bowls don't go soggy.

Make your prep high in protein

- Add a **legume to every meal**: beans in the bowl, lentils in the stew, chickpeas on the roasting tray.
- Bake **tofu or tempeh** as a standard building block.
- Use **soy milk** in overnight oats and **soy yogurt** as a topping.
- Sprinkle **seeds and nuts** on bowls and oats: hemp, pumpkin and peanuts.

Want to know how much protein your week actually gives you? Plan it in Vegochef and the nutrient tracker adds it up, along with 29 vitamins, minerals and lipids.

Common beginner mistakes

- **Prepping too much.** Start with three days of lunches; add more once you know what you'll actually eat.
- **Seven identical meals.** Prep components, not finished dishes, so each day can be a little different.
- **Forgetting the freezer.** Cook double, freeze half, and next week's prep is already started.

Frequently asked questions

Can overnight oats be meal prepped? +

How long does vegan meal prep last in the fridge? +

How do I meal prep for a week on a budget? +

How do I meal prep for the week as a beginner? +

This guide is general information for healthy adults, not medical advice. Talk to your doctor or a dietitian before starting or changing supplements, especially if you're pregnant, breastfeeding or have a health condition.

Sources

- USDA FoodSafety.gov: Cold food storage chart (foodsafety.gov)
- USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service: Leftovers and food safety (fsis.usda.gov)
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–2025: vegetarian eating pattern (dietaryguidelines.gov)

From vegochef.com: meal planner and nutrition tracker for vegans, vegetarians and pescatarians. Free for 7 days on the App Store.