



Plant-Based Diaries Week 3: Prep Talk

By Lucie Monk Carter
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When following a recipe for dinner, it's one thing to forget an ingredient at the store. Shallots can, up to a point, be replaced by onions, while substituting plain old water is the punishment you deserve for failing to check broth off your grocery list.

But it's quite another offense to overlook the time commitment of a recipe. More than once, my husband's asked, politely, when dinner will be on the table. Sometimes he has to repeat himself over the rumbling of his stomach. I'd then consult my trusty recipe and notice, for the first time, that the next step needed me to "chill the puff pastry for four hours." Nothing doing, we're eating at midnight.

I'm grateful to the [Forks Over Knives Meal Planner](#)—which I tried for the first time this week, to continue expanding my plant-based repertoire even as the Fresh Start Challenge draws to a close—for quietly anticipating my failings as a recipe reader. In the Weekend Prep tab on the website, I receive fair warning about what lies ahead: grains for the Roasted Carrot & Wheat Berry Salad will need an hour-long hot soak in simmering water but can be taken care of on Sunday night rather than a Tuesday evening as all get antsy about sustenance. The granola that will carry me through more than one weekday morning breakfast (with a splash of almond milk) is in its airtight container by Saturday afternoon.

I didn't cook every single recipe detailed on the plan—and borrowed a few from last week as well as spread leftovers to a third and fourth meal—but the map and accompanying grocery list proved more than handy as I watched a relatively small amount of ingredients take up roles in a whole week's worth of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. If not a script I followed to a tee, it's one that gave me a sense of how to approach a diet that can seem restrictive and overwhelming. During moments of flagging resolve, the plan's creative structure kept me interested. Did I think of the fried eggs I couldn't have as I shook out crunchy, sweet, homemade granola into a bowl? Did I miss chunks of chicken as I hovered over fragrant Moroccan Lentil Stew? I can't say I did. I like a kitchen where lentils and beans hardly have the time to make themselves at home in my cabinets,

where half the work is done in the waning hours of Sunday evening, and where each bite, when I do finally eat, tastes lighter somehow (okay, I know how). It's a new sort of pleasure I'm finding with dining, where happiness lingers long past the first few salty bites.

Editor's Note: This month is the second annual Forks Over Knives Fresh Start Challenge, our free 21-day program for adopting a plant-based diet one meal at a time. Food writer Lucie Monk Carter is taking the challenge, and we've asked her to document her experiences with whole-food, plant-based cooking and eating in this series.