

Too Many Dishes!! *Bill Bradley, RD*

“Let’s make tacos!”, I exclaimed to my wife yesterday, as we conversed on what to make for lunch.

“Too many dishes”, she said.

My wife and I have a general rule. I cook, she cleans. Lately, though, she has gotten the bum end of the deal as she has done more of both.

She needed a day off from dishes and I needed tacos.

The problem with tacos is there is a bowl for tomatoes, a bowl for cheese, a bowl for lettuce, a bowl for taco beans or meat and maybe a bowl for olives or onions. There is also the cheese shredder, the cutting board, and the skillet to make the taco filling. That’s a lot of dishes, but I really wanted tacos.

I quickly came up with a plan and a challenge for myself. “I will make tacos with no extra dishes”, I told my wife. She didn’t seem all that sure that I would be able to accomplish such a feat, but truth be told, she wanted tacos too.

So, this is what I did. I pre-heated the oven to 350 degrees. I prepared my chili bean filling in a cast iron skillet on the stove top. Fairly typical mixture: Black beans, cannellini beans, chili powder, chipotle powder, tomato paste, onions, carrots, garlic, liquid smoke, A1 sauce and, of course, extra virgin olive oil. So far, so good. Once the filling was done, I topped it with shredded cheese and then put the skillet in the oven. I baked this for about 15 minutes, took it out and topped the filling and cheese with a layer of chopped tomatoes, a layer of lettuce, and then sprinkled chopped black olives on top. I put the taco shells in the oven to get crisp and then I filled each taco with heaping spoonfuls of all the layers of the taco fillings. Voila! No extra plates. While the tacos were cooking, I washed the shredder, the cutting board and the knife.

The tacos were delicious and my wife thanked me for not creating extra dishes.

Since most of us are spending more time at home and more time cooking, we are also creating a lot more dishes. Here are some tips on decreasing dishwashing fatigue.

1. Take a day off from dishes. Most of us have paper plates and bowls and plastic knives, spoons and forks. Every once in a while, have a paper plate day. You may be able to salvage (to reuse) your paper products if they aren't too mushy!

2. Make one pot meals. The taco filling I made is an example of a one skillet meal. You can make one pot meals, one sheet pan meals, one casserole dish meals. Many of these only require a cutting board and knife plus whatever cooking vessel you will use to cook the meal in. The perfect one pot meal is a complete meal with a protein, vegetables, and sometimes grains, and they are all cooked together in one pot.

Here are a few one pot meal recipes:

[Healthy Vegetarian Bean Chili](#)

[Sheet Pan Salmon with Asparagus, Lemon and Dill](#)

[Moroccan Chicken Stew](#)

[One Pan Pasta](#)

3. Make extra and enjoy a leftovers day. My wife and I love the leftovers! Here is my favorite hint for enjoying leftovers: Make food that you love and you will love the leftovers too!

4. Make extra and freeze. There are some nights when I don't want to have a lot of dirty dishes, but I also don't want to cook at all. Once upon a time this meant going out to eat, but now that we live in the country, have a baby and many restaurants are closed or have limited service we have taken to freezing some of our favorite recipes so we can enjoy them anytime. Just last week, my wife and I made hundreds of zucchini fritters, one of our all-time favorite recipes. We put 20 or so in the fridge to eat that week, we gave some away and we froze the rest. Some night when we don't feel like cooking (or cleaning) we will take out some fritters and one of the frozen bean or meat dishes in our freezer and voila, instant dinner!

5. Prepare ingredients ahead. You can save a lot of time and dirty dishes by preparing certain ingredients for the week ahead of time. For example, think how many times during the week you won't have to wash your cutting board, knife, peeler, grater and lettuce spinner if you do all the prep all at once. It also saves you valuable cooking time if your vegetables are prepped and ready to go for each meal.

6. Cook 2 or 3 different meals at once. Similar to preparing ingredients ahead, you can also prepare meals ahead. Make 2 or 3 meals on a day off, refrigerate, reheat and eat.

7. Clean as you go. I will admit that I need help in this department. I'm a messy cook and I get super involved in the cooking process, but my wife is much happier when I remember this golden rule of cooking- If you clean as you go you might have nothing to clean up by the time you are ready to eat. I will practice it if you will!

May your food be delicious and your dirty dishes few!