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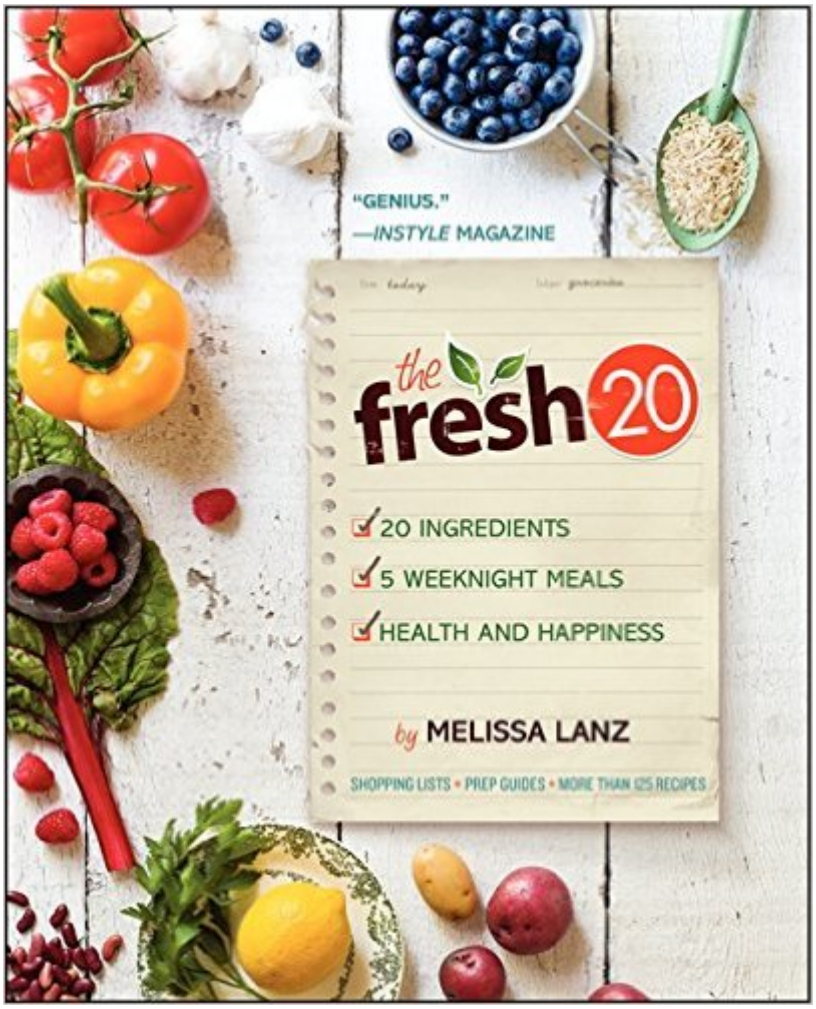
The Fresh 20: 20-Ingredient Meal Plans For Health And Happiness 5 Nights A Week



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Synopsis

The Fresh 20, the popular budget-friendly meal-planning service founded by working mother Melissa Lanz, is now a cookbook, offering families an all-natural and easy approach to mealtimes.Using just 20 organic, non-processed ingredients per week, home cooks can create 5 wholesome, delicious meals in just minutes. A busy home cook herself, Lanz understands the â œWhatâ ™s for dinner?â • conundrum and has developed a program that gives parents healthy cooking options.Inspiring and educational, The Fresh 20 is filled with gorgeous color photos, shopping lists that take advantage of seasonal fruits and vegetables, prep tips, and, of course, easy and delicious recipes â ” including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book because while I can cook, I often times have a hard time coming up with weekly meal plans. I tried meal subscription plans [not Fresh 20, though] in the past but didn't like how many of them either used [a] a lot of processed junk that my family doesn't [or shouldn't. we're working on the doesn't] eat; [b] 50+ ingredients for a weeks worth of meals, many of which would only call for half of what you'd buy in the store, wasting product and money; or [c] the meals didn't repeat [husband's complaint, which I understood because sometimes you want to eat a dish more than once a year]. So I was looking for a cookbook with meals that would accomplish the exact opposite of these three things.The Fresh 20 did exactly that.The ingredients truly are fresh, seasonal ingredients, most of which are things you've [probably] heard of, if not at least eaten once

before in your life. The recipes are presented in a weekly format, four weeks per season, with a coordinated shopping list before each week [and let me tell you, the first time I went grocery shopping using this book, it was liberating to just be able to take a picture and walk out the door. Literally. It was amazing.]. Because there are only four weeks of meals per season, that means you can repeat the weeks up to four times, giving you FOUR repeats a year! My favorite part about the meal plans is that there are only five days, giving two extra days for events, leftovers, or for a cook to add some family favorites in. Now if you don't regularly keep her suggested list of pantry items [grape seed oil? Never heard of it before this book], it can be a pain to purchase them at first but she does use them week to week and in such small quantities that they last you for a while. Well, except for chicken/vegetable broth. If that's on sale, go ahead and buy like 100 cartons. You'll need it [at least for the summer!].You'd think with all of these positive points, I could give Ms. Lanz's book a 5/5 but there are some cons to it as well. First off, not everyone is going to like the food choices she gives you, as is the problem with every cookbook in the world unless it's your mama's cookbook. However, we have a pretty diverse food-loving family here to the point where at least one person likes the dish being offered. There have been a couple of dishes that we've made that have been absolute 'no's [I'm looking at you, gazpacho]. There are also other recipes that had the potential of being fan-favorites had it not been for one or two things [too much salt, for some reason watery, bland, etc.] but I keep notes in the margin of the book to remind myself of what did and didn't work, plus alternatives for which my family is okay with.In any other cookbook, this wouldn't be a big deal but when you're taking the meal plan as-is, it because a little irksome. However, I honestly believe if you're using this book for the long run in terms of what your family eats, than it's worth the time to adjust or remove the recipe that isn't working for you and sub something else in [making notes on the shopping list page of what to get rid of and what to add]. For instance, the aforementioned gazpacho now lives a second life as a harvest salad, using most of the ingredients listed from before].Another con is the prep-time on some of the recipes. I'll be straight up with you - some of it's a little ridiculous. But it's also really fun if you like to cook and have the time. However, this is billed as a weeknight family meal solution so I do think the prep time for some of the recipes doesn't fit that description. Once again, adjust it to meet the needs of your family. One of the meals is a Mediterranean spread of hummus and other dips with pita chips and veggie slices. It calls for preparing everything, including making tahini paste for the hummus and baking your own pita chips. If you don't have the time [or patience or skill level or a food processor, whatever], you can buy all of that stuff PREMADE, including the hummus. See? Adjustable. Sometimes just having the idea of what to make is more of a battle than actually putting it on the table. Of course, it may take out the

"fresh" part of the dinner but come on, balance is the key to life and buying the pre-made stuff from reputable brands is still better than going through Mickey D's.Also, if you have more than 4 people in your family, you're going to need to adjust as most of the recipes are made for four [if you have less than four, congratulations! Lunch is now covered]. But again, not a major con and an easily fixed one by the reader.Other than that, this book is a godsend. The recipes are excellent, the layout is excellent, even the short stories about other families is a nice touch. This book is a book that, if used consistently, will change your family dinner habits immensely. If you're a new cook [or a seasoned cook who's stuck in a rut], then this book will help you explore new dishes in the safety of your own home. If you want to try out seasonally cooking, this book is for you. If you're trying to balance making good food for your new family, this is a book for you. If you like to EAT, this book is for you. I cannot sing high enough praise for this book. If you're here, then I highly, highly, highly suggest that you give it a shot.

I just finished the first week (5 recipes) in the book and want to share some of my experiences. I am NOT a Fresh 20 subscriber, so this is my first experience with a meal planning concept.First off, I love the shopping list and layout of the book. Very convenient. I was confused about the "20 ingredients" mantra, because it took me a bit to realize that it's 20 ingredients plus a hundred herbs/items you probably have on hand. In other words, the recipes involve a lot of items.Week 1, spring menu (ratings from 1-5*)Parmesan Chicken Nuggets with Herbed honey carrots - 4*Coconut Curry-style Fish with lime coconut rice - 5*Korean-style short ribs with braised napa cabbage and brown rice - 5*Pan-seared chicken panzanella - 4*Baked potato soup with simple cabbage salad - 1*As you can see, 4/5 recipes were excellent, but the baked potato soup was bland and flavorless, even with extra salt (and optional cheese & bacon).Each week has a "prep ahead" section, but I quickly learned that each recipe has far more prep than expected. There is a lot of chopping involved, and every recipe took far longer to cook than anticipated. I am hoping to find a few weeks that we like and then just repeat them over and over.A few problems I encountered:-The prep ahead included making bread crumbs and 2" bread cubes. I followed the directions and ended up with "croutons" that were 2x2x2 (a 2" cube). I didn't realize this was the final product, and I ended up having to chop them all up for the salad. I think the author meant 1" cubes. Spending 40 minutes preparing bread crumbs and croutons was a lot of time spent!-My toddler isn't much into eating a salad for dinner, so this presented some obvious challenges.-The "braised napa cabbage" was flavorless. You remove everything from the pan and then throw in the cabbage/carrot combo, but by doing that, it had no flavor. Maybe I should leave some of the juice from the ribs in there next

time.-TIME - again, each recipe took far longer to prepare/chop/cook than anticipated. I will try prepping this chopping ahead of time in the future.Overall, we are pleased with the book and plan to try out a few more weeks, but we also plan to take a week off in between weeks. I'm not a pro chef, and it was a lot of work. Give it a try!**UPDATE 6/11/13**We recently completed a week from the fall menu which was absolutely delicious! The menu is this:-Muffin Tin Meatloaf with Broccoli Forest Rice - 5*-Shrimp Gumbo - 1* (unfortunately, it was flavorless and we couldn't even eat the leftovers)-Chicken Tamale Spoon Bread - 5*-Spaghetti & Meatballs - 5*-Broccoli Cheddar Soup with leftovers - 5*As you can see, 4/5 meals were five stars. One great thing about this week's menu is the prep ahead section. We prepared the meatloaf and the meatballs at the same time. I also chopped about 80 pounds of onions up front, which saved a ton of time since every recipe required them. These meals all made plenty of food plus leftovers. They weren't served with "side salads", but rather the veggies were built in. While I can't say my toddler came within ten feet of the broccoli forest rice, she did actually eat the broccoli soup. Twice!!I'm very excited about how well this week went and how the prep seemed to make a lot of sense. I didn't feel as exhausted or beat down as the previous week's experience and I will be more cognizant in picking weeks ahead that I can really get the most from. Enjoy.

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