

## HOW I SOLVED MY OWN SIX O'CLOCK SCRAMBLE

Every evening at 6:00 my mom was in our Spanish tile kitchen in Santa Barbara, California, putting the finishing touches on a mouth-watering dinner. Sometimes she'd make a fragrant main course like roast duck or brisket, which she'd serve with steamed rice with sautéed mushrooms, and a salad with avocados, walnuts, and diced oranges (sometimes the oranges were picked from our own tree!).

Sitting around our sturdy wooden dinner table at 6:30 was usually the only time the five of us were all in one place during the day. When I think back to my childhood, it's telling that so many of my favorite memories took place around the dinner table with my family. Whether we were at home, or at my grandparents' or aunts' and uncles' houses, where we often gathered for holiday meals, the dinner table was where we regularly came together and where, to me, we felt most connected.

So it makes sense that as soon as my husband Andrew and I had our first child, I knew that family dinners were something that would be part of our life. Since my mom had made it all look so easy, I figured it would be a breeze to get a lovely three-course meal on the table, and that, of course, my family would sit down and devour everything I cooked.

But I didn't count on how complicated it can be to get a good meal on the table. I started by following recipes that looked great in print, but quickly learned that many recipes don't turn out as well as the cookbooks, magazines or websites promise. Also, most recipes didn't tell you right off the bat how long things take, so sometimes 20 minutes before dinnertime, with Solomon on one hip and the spatula in the other hand, I'd finally read halfway down the recipe where it says "now marinate the chicken for 24 hours." I really started to appreciate my mom, who had made it all look so care free.

As I became a more confident cook, and even wrote my first cookbook with my friend Lisa Flaxman back in 1998, I couldn't figure out why 6:00 every night still felt so chaotic. I had a light bulb moment one night when I was frantically combing through the pantry and refrigerator looking for the tortillas I was sure I had bought to make sweet potato quesadillas. I couldn't find the tortillas anywhere, which meant that I had probably forgotten to buy them. So I needed to come up with a new plan for dinner when my brain was totally fried from the day, or resort to the very unappealing Plan B and bundle up the kids and drag them to the grocery store. (Since I wasn't working at the time, ordering takeout was not an option.) Then I'd still have to drive home, unbundle the kids, make the dinner and try to get everyone to eat it before evening meltdowns began-either theirs or mine!

**It was then that I realized that I was doing everything backwards!** Each night I was creating dinners out of what I had in the refrigerator and pantry, only to realize that since I had shopped with only a loose plan and without a grocery list, I didn't have as much chicken broth as I thought I did for the soup I hoped to make, or that the bag of frozen vegetables I was counting on for my stir-fry was almost empty.

I thought back to the calm kitchen of my childhood and I realized that my mom figured it out decades ago! Each week she would sit at the dining room table with her recipe box, decide what meals she was making that week, and then make a grocery list before going to the store. Just so simple, as most brilliant ideas are.

Once I disciplined myself to plan a week of meals in advance and grocery shop with a list, I was finally able to achieve the calmer evenings that I had craved, with my family sitting together around our dinner table, no TVs, cell phones, or laptops, just eye contact, some conversation, and a decent meal. In fact, it was shocking to me how much calmer the rest of my day felt once I knew that I had a solid dinner plan.

That was the idea that ultimately launched The Six O'Clock Scramble back in 2003. I hope The Six O'Clock Scramble has helped you connect with your family around the dinner table more often and with less stress. I'd love to hear from you about how you conquered your own dinner challenges and how The Scramble has helped.



**Quickie Beef And Asian Veggie Stir-Fry**  
**Servings = 4**  
**Prep+Cook = 15 min**

I concocted this stir-fry on one of those crazy carpooling nights when I had to be in the car for hours. When we finally got home, I was thrilled that I had a fabulous dinner on the table in less than 15 minutes (and even had time to feed the dogs and cat while it was cooking). Serve it over brown or white rice.

- 16 oz. frozen mixed oriental vegetables
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1-1 1/2 lbs. lean beef stir-fry or stew meat, cut into 3/4 - 1-inch pieces
- 1/4 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce (use wheat/gluten-free if needed)
- 2 Tbsp. rice vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. superfine sugar
- 1 Tbsp. hoisin or black bean sauce
- 1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes, or chili garlic paste (optional)
- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch

Remove the mixed vegetables from the freezer and set them aside (and start the rice, if you are serving it.)

Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium to medium-high heat and sauté the meat for about 5 minutes, flipping frequently, until the outsides are all lightly browned.

Meanwhile, whisk together the remaining ingredients. Add the sauce and the vegetables to the skillet with the beef and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are heated through and tender, about 5 minutes. Remove it from the heat and serve it immediately or refrigerate it for up to 3 days.

**Scramble Flavor Booster:** For an additional kick, add the crushed red pepper flakes or chili garlic paste to the stir-fry sauce.

**TIP:** You can add a can of bamboo shoots, sliced water chestnuts or pineapple chunks (all drained) to the vegetables if you have any of them on hand.

**SERVE WITH BROWN OR WHITE RICE**

Prepare 1 - 2 cups quick-cooking brown or regular white rice according to package directions.

**Nutritional Information per serving (% based upon daily values):**

Calories: 240; Total Fat: 8g, 12%; Saturated Fat: 2g, 8%; Cholesterol: 70mg, 23%; Sodium: 740mg, 31%; Total Carbohydrate: 12g, 4%; Dietary Fiber: 3g, 12%; Sugar: 6g; Protein: 27g

**Nutritional Information per serving with side dish (% based upon daily values) 3/4 cup brown rice:**

Calories: 402; Total Fat: 9g, 14%; Saturated Fat: 3g, 12%; Cholesterol: 70mg, 23%; Sodium: 747mg, 32%; Total Carbohydrate: 46g, 11%; Dietary Fiber: 6g, 23%; Sugar: 7g; Protein: 31g

These sandwiches, suggested by longtime Scramble subscriber Molly Thompson of Bozeman, Montana, are fun to make and even more fun to eat. If you are really short on time buy premade coleslaw instead of using my recipe below. Serve it with red or orange bell peppers dipped in ranch dressing.

- 12 oz. bagged coleslaw or broccoli slaw
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. black pepper
- 3/4 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp. Cajun or Old Bay seasoning
- 1 egg
- 4 ciabatta or sourdough rolls
- 2 tsp. butter
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lb. flounder, catfish, tilapia or other thin white fish fillets, cut into 4 even pieces

In a medium serving bowl, combine the slaw, mayonnaise, vinegar, honey, salt and pepper. Set it aside. (If possible, make this up to 24 hours in advance and refrigerate it until you are ready to serve. Mix it well before serving.)

In a shallow dish or bowl, combine the flour and seasoning mixture. In another shallow bowl, beat the egg. Warm the rolls in a 300 degree oven, if desired.

In a large heavy skillet (a cast iron pan works great for this), heat the butter and oil over medium heat until it is bubbling.

Dip the fish pieces in the flour mixture to coat them, then the egg, letting the excess drip back into the bowl, then back into the flour mixture to recoat. Cook the fish until it is nicely browned and crispy, 2 - 3 minutes per side. (Meanwhile, slice the bell peppers, if you are serving them.) Remove the fish to a plate.

Serve the fish inside of the rolls topped with the slaw.

**Scramble Flavor Booster:** Serve the sandwiches topped with barbecue sauce or your favorite sandwich spreads. Finely grate 1/4 onion into the coleslaw.

**TIP:** Ciabatta is an Italian bread that tends to be short and wide, making it a great choice for sandwiches. Ciabatta that is a few days old can also be great for making homemade croutons.

#### **SERVE WITH RED OR ORANGE BELL PEPPERS WITH LIGHT RANCH DRESSING**

Core and thinly slice 1 - 2 red or orange bell peppers and serve them with light ranch dressing or dip of your choice.

#### **Nutritional Information per serving (% based upon daily values):**

Calories: 323; Total Fat: 11g, 17%; Saturated Fat: 2g, 12%; Cholesterol: 99mg, 31%; Sodium: 751mg, 32%; Total Carbohydrate: 31g, 11%; Dietary Fiber: 3g, 12%; Sugar: 9g; Protein: 24g

#### **Nutritional Information per serving with side dish (% based upon daily values) 1/2 pepper and 4 tsp. dressing:**

Calories: 389; Total Fat: 15g, 23%; Saturated Fat: 2g, 14%; Cholesterol: 103mg, 33%; Sodium: 939mg, 40%; Total Carbohydrate: 39g, 15%; Dietary Fiber: 5g, 18%; Sugar: 13g; Protein: 25g

I really had to pat myself on the back after I created this recipe that manages to lighten up and make potatoes au gratin so much easier (most recipes call for par boiling the potatoes). This easier, healthier version is still rich and full of flavor. Serve it with a rotisserie or roasted chicken (try the Flawless Roast Chicken with Sweet Onions on The Scramble recipe database) and a green salad with carrots, celery and Parmesan cheese.

- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 3/4 tsp. dried rosemary
- 3/4 tsp. dried thyme
- 3-4 russet (baking) potatoes, (about 1 1/2 lbs.),  
peeled, if desired, and very thinly sliced
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. butter
- 1 cup nonfat milk, (or whatever kind you have)
- 1 Tbsp. flour
- 1 cup shredded Gruyere cheese

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Spray a round or square medium-sized casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray.

In a small bowl, combine the salt, pepper, rosemary and thyme. Lay the potatoes evenly in the casserole dish, sprinkling the spices between each layer.

In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat and heat the milk in the microwave. Whisk the flour into the butter for about 30 seconds, then add the hot milk and bring it just to a boil. Stir in the cheese for about a minute, and pour the sauce evenly over the potatoes. Cover the dish with aluminum foil and bake it for 40 minutes. Remove the foil and bake it for about 20 more minutes until the potatoes start to turn golden brown and are very tender. (Meanwhile, cut up the chicken and prepare the salad, if you are serving them.) Serve it immediately or refrigerate it for up to 3 days.

**Scramble Flavor Booster:** Increase your rosemary and thyme measurements to 1 tsp. each.

**TIP:** I use organic potatoes whenever possible. When I do, I don't bother to peel them before cooking them.

**SERVE WITH ROTISSERIE/ROASTED CHICKEN & GREEN SALAD WITH CARROTS, CELERY AND PARMESAN CHEESE**

Serve it with a rotisserie or roasted chicken. (Reheat the chicken in the microwave, covered, for about 3 minutes or in a preheated 325 oven for 20 - 30 minutes.)

To make the salad, combine 6 - 8 cups lettuce, 2 carrots, thinly sliced or shredded, 2 stalks celery, sliced, and 1 - 2 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese. Toss it with 2 - 4 Tbsp. light vinaigrette dressing, to taste.

**Nutritional Information per serving (% based upon daily values):**

Calories: 202; Total Fat: 9g, 15%; Saturated Fat: 6g, 27%; Cholesterol: 28mg, 10%; Sodium: 304mg, 13%; Total Carbohydrate: 22g, 8%; Dietary Fiber: 3g, 11%; Sugar: 8g; Protein: 9g

**Nutritional Information per serving with side dish (% based upon daily values) 1/6 of chicken; 1 1/2 cups salad:**

Calories: 430; Total Fat: 20g, 31%; Saturated Fat: 10g, 43%; Cholesterol: 137mg, 46%; Sodium: 940mg, 40%; Total Carbohydrate: 29g, 10%; Dietary Fiber: 5g, 20%; Sugar: 12g; Protein: 38g

I love the combination of spinach and feta cheese, but if feta is not one of your favorite cheeses or it's too strong for your kids, substitute shredded or fresh chopped mozzarella cheese. Serve it with Green Beans Almondine.

- 20 oz. cheese ravioli (or any variety)
- 10 oz. frozen chopped spinach
- 15 oz. diced tomatoes, with their liquid
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 cup nonfat or low fat sour cream
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. dried basil, or 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh basil
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese, or use shredded mozzarella cheese

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Meanwhile, in a large pot, cook the ravioli according to the package directions until it is al dente, and drain it.

While the ravioli is cooking, defrost the spinach according to the package directions and drain it thoroughly. In a large bowl, combine all the remaining ingredients, including the spinach. Gently but thoroughly stir in the ravioli (reserve some plain ravioli for picky eaters, if necessary).

Smooth the mixture into an 8 x 8-inch flat baking dish and cover it with aluminum foil. Bake it for 15-20 minutes until it is heated through (and prepare the green beans, if you are serving them).

**Scramble Flavor Booster:** Add 1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes and/or black pepper to the ravioli mixture.

**TIP:** Spinach is loaded with disease-preventing antioxidants. The health benefits of spinach are well documented, two of which are its significant anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer agents. Popeye sure knew what he was doing!

#### **SERVE WITH GREEN BEANS ALMONDINE**

To make the green beans, trim and steam 1 lb. green beans for about 5 minutes in the microwave or on the stovetop. Meanwhile, in a small skillet, heat 1 Tbsp. butter or margarine over medium heat. Add 1/4 cup sliced almonds and sauté them for 1 - 2 minutes until they start to toast. Drain the green beans and add them to the skillet. Sauté them with the almonds for 1-2 minutes. Add the juice of 1/4 lemon before serving, if desired.

#### **Nutritional Information per serving (% based upon daily values):**

Calories: 330; Total Fat: 12g, 18%; Saturated Fat: 7g, 35%; Cholesterol: 75mg, 25%; Sodium: 730mg, 30%; Total Carbohydrate: 37g, 12%; Dietary Fiber: 4g, 16%; Sugar: 6g; Protein: 17g

#### **Nutritional Information per serving with side dish (% based upon daily values) 3/4 cup green beans:**

Calories: 404; Total Fat: 16g, 24%; Saturated Fat: 8g, 42%; Cholesterol: 80mg, 27%; Sodium: 735mg, 30%; Total Carbohydrate: 44g, 14%; Dietary Fiber: 7g, 29%; Sugar: 7g; Protein: 19g



This is a rich and creamy soup for those last nights of winter, adapted from a recipe that ran years ago in the Washington Post. This is also a good dish to make ahead on the weekend and serve on a busy night. Serve it with a baguette and seedless grapes.

- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 3 carrots, peeled and finely diced
- 2 leeks, thoroughly washed, white and light green parts, finely diced
- 2 stalks celery, finely diced
- 1/4 cup flour
- 8 cups reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 3/4 cup wild rice
- 3/4 cup half and half
- 2-3 Tbsp. dry sherry, (or use 1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar)

In large stockpot over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the diced carrots, leeks and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes.

Reduce the heat to low, add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, for about 3 minutes. Slowly add the broth, whisking well to eliminate flour lumps. Bring the soup to a simmer. Add the rice, return to a simmer, and cook, stirring frequently, until the rice is tender but still somewhat chewy, about 45 minutes. (Meanwhile, warm the baguette, if you are serving it.)

Warm the half & half in the microwave (about 30 seconds) and add it and the sherry to the soup. Stir to combine and serve it hot.

**Scramble Flavor Booster:** Add a Parmesan cheese rind to the soup while it's cooking, if you have one, and season the soup with freshly ground black pepper.

**TIP:** Put like utensils in the same section of your dishwasher's silverware tray (forks with forks, knives with knives, etc.). This makes for quicker unloading as you can pull them out by group and get them put away quickly. Just make sure that your forks and spoons aren't "nesting" against each other as that will keep them from getting completely clean.

#### **SERVE WITH BAGUETTE & SEEDLESS GRAPES**

Serve it with a warm baguette, sliced. Alternatively, brush thin slices of the baguette with olive oil and toast or broil them for a few minutes until they are lightly browned and crispy.

Serve it with seedless purple or green grapes (or you can serve frozen grapes for a sweet and crunchy treat). Safety note: Young children (3 and younger) should only eat halved grapes to prevent choking.

#### **Nutritional Information per serving (% based upon daily values):**

Calories: 267; Total Fat: 11g, 16%; Saturated Fat: 6g, 31%; Cholesterol: 27mg, 9%; Sodium: 240mg, 11%; Total Carbohydrate: 32g, 1%; Dietary Fiber: 3g, 11%; Sugar: 5g; Protein: 11g

#### **Nutritional Information per serving with side dish (% based upon daily values) 1/4 of baguette; 1/2 cup grapes:**

Calories: 506; Total Fat: 13g, 19%; Saturated Fat: 6g, 31%; Cholesterol: 33mg, 11%; Sodium: 653mg, 28%; Total Carbohydrate: 84g, 18%; Dietary Fiber: 5g, 19%; Sugar: 18g; Protein: 20g

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## GROCERY LIST

### STAPLES

- 3 1/2 Tbsp. + 2 tsp. butter (2) (3) (5)
- 1 Tbsp. butter or margarine (4S)
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil (1)
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil (2)
- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch (1)
- 1 Tbsp. superfine sugar (1)
- 1 Tbsp. + 1 cup flour (2) (3) (5)
- 1 Tbsp. honey (2)
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat mayonnaise (2)
- 2 Tbsp. rice vinegar (1)
- 1/4 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce (use wheat/gluten-free if needed) (1)
- 2-4 Tbsp. light vinaigrette dressing (3S)
- 1 egg (2)
- 1 cup nonfat milk (3)

### SPICES

- 3/4 tsp. salt (2) (4)
- 5/8 tsp. black pepper (2) (3)
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt (3)
- 3/4 tsp. dried thyme (3)
- 3/4 tsp. dried rosemary (3)
- 1 tsp. dried basil (4)
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder (4)
- 1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes (optional for 1)
- 1 Tbsp. Cajun or Old Bay seasoning (2)

### MEAT AND FISH

- 1 rotisserie chicken (3S)
- 1-1 1/2 lbs. lean beef stir-fry or stew meat (1)
- 1 lb. flounder, catfish, tilapia or other thin white fish fillets (2)

### REFRIGERATED/FROZEN SECTION

- 1-2 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese (3S)
- 1 cup shredded Gruyere cheese (3)
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese (4)
- 1 cup nonfat or low fat sour cream (4)
- 3/4 cup half and half (5)
- 20 oz. cheese ravioli (or any variety) (4)
- 16 oz. frozen mixed oriental vegetables (1)
- 10 oz. frozen chopped spinach (4)

### PRODUCE

- 5 carrots (3S) (5)
- 2 leeks (5)
- 1-2 red or orange bell peppers (2S)
- 4 stalks celery (3S) (5)
- 12 oz. bagged coleslaw or broccoli slaw (2)
- 1 small head lettuce (3S)
- 1 lb. green beans (4S)

### PRODUCE (CONT.)

- 3-4 russet (baking) potatoes (3)
- 1/4 lemon (optional for 4S)
- 1 bunch seedless grapes (5S)

### SHELVED ITEMS

- 4 ciabatta or sourdough rolls (2)
- 1 baguette (5S)
- 1-2 cups quick-cooking brown or regular white rice (1S)
- 3/4 cup wild rice (5)
- 15 oz. diced tomatoes (4)
- 8 cups reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth (5)
- 1 Tbsp. hoisin or black bean sauce (1)
- 2 Tbsp. apple cider vinegar (2)
- 1/4 cup light ranch dressing or other dip (2S)
- 2-3 Tbsp. dry sherry (5)
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds (4S)

### These ingredients will prepare the following recipes

- (1) Quickie Beef and Asian Veggie Stir-Fry  
(1S) Brown Or White Rice
- (2) Cajun Fish Sandwiches with Crunchy Slaw  
(2S) Red Or Orange Bell Peppers With Light Ranch Dressing
- (3) Painless Potatoes Au Gratin  
(3S) Rotisserie/roasted Chicken & Green Salad With Carrots, Celery And Parmesan Cheese
- (4) Ravioli, Spinach and Feta Bake  
(4S) Green Beans Almondine
- (5) Creamy Wild Rice Soup  
(5S) Baguette & Seedless Grapes

S = used in sidedish for the corresponding recipe