

Dinner Is A Crock: The Kitchen Renovation



Thank you for following my kitchen renovation, week by week! If you started following from the beginning, you might remember my boring almond and oak colored kitchen. Actually, you probably don't. I hid most of it from pictures and only showed you the edges of my [Pfaltzgraff dishes](#). So we gutted it. Like, down to the subfloor. And now we've spent

the last three months rebuilding it into this beautiful, functional, spacious kitchen. Don't be fooled... it's the same square footage it was before, but the landscape is so much more welcoming and the storage is accessible and workable.

In [WEEK ONE](#), we did demolition. It was like free therapy, we took our aggressions out on every wall. While it was intimidating to start, it was actually pretty easily and required a minimal amount of tools.

In [WEEK TWO](#), we celebrated Thanksgiving by installing our hardwood floors. This was a fun challenge that required a little booze, a lot of manpower, and no guests for the holiday! And yes... I crock potted our Thanksgiving dinner.



WEEKS THREE AND FOUR were exciting because our cabinets arrived early. I was naive enough to think that meant that the kitchen would be done three weeks early. NOPE. That's not how it really works.

I was also reminded how thankful I am that my boys are good eaters. This whole process included meticulous meal planning and a balance between crock pot cooking, fresh produce, and easy microwave foods. Not everything was healthy, but not every decision is life-changing... sometimes a meal just has to be filling and easy. Ramen noodles are still food, just ask any college student!

I would be happy to forget about WEEK FIVE. I shared with you my meals each night in hopes that we could all forget about that horrible incident with that undesirable creature. Pretty sure I'm going to have nightmares again now, thanks to myself.



A lot of progress happened quickly in WEEKS SIX THROUGH EIGHT, but then it came to a halt. Cabinets were installed, electric was run, plumbing was prepped and then countertops were measured. And then because the quartz needed cut, we had to update and wait.

I tried to be patient, I really did. But caffeine sometimes prevents that virtue from shining! I was anxiously waiting for the install, and every day of waiting seemed like a thorn, but ultimately it really wasn't an extended time at all.

[WEEK NINE](#) was the culmination of everything. Except for one day of snow that slowed our progress, this week was crazy! Electric. Plumbing. Tile. Countertops. HVAC. Paint. [Amazon Prime delivery!](#) Oh my! My dream kitchen became a reality. Like, legit reality. I can cook and clean and start creating again— new recipes, new posts, new video, and even new cooking classes (*locally only, but please reach out if you are interested in having me as a guest speaker!*).



Thanks so much for your support in this new adventure! Let me help you save time and cook slower.

Renovation, Week Five: Dinners and Creatures

Let's break this week's renovation update down day by day. I updated my four-week menu plan to carry us through the rest of the project, the installations are still on schedule, and it's remarkably nice weather still outside. **I want you to understand that while my posts may make this whole process appear to be coated in sugary fairy dust, let me be clear... I'm stressed. I'm hungry. I ran out of coffee filters. And I really hate snakes.**



Crock Pot French Onion Soup is ridiculously easy. And ridiculously delicious!

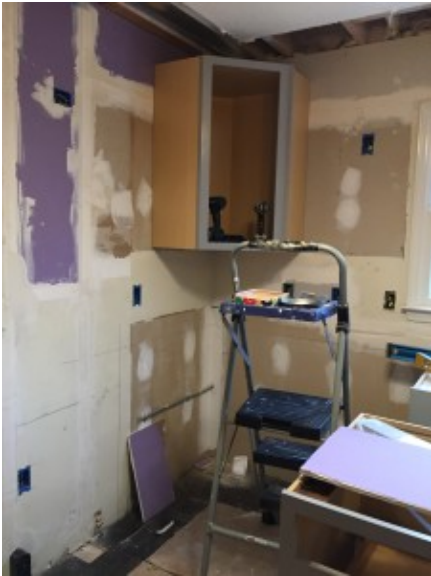
MONDAY: Dinner— french onion soup in the crock pot. [Crock Pot Caramelized Onions](#) are the best and easiest thing you should be making once a month, at least. I had two great electricians and a city inspector in the house today. We've got a gazillion new outlets installed in order to pass county code and now I can plug my crock pots in anywhere and everywhere. Very cool. What is uncool?? The crazy freaking snake that the electrician met in my crawl space and killed with a crow bar. I'm pretty sure that wasn't in the contract, but I could not be more

grateful to him for taking care of it!

TUESDAY: Dinner– Microwaveable tacos that my kids can heat up themselves. Why? Because I spent the afternoon with the pest control company checking my house for undesirable creatures. Want to know something terrifying?? If you have snake(s) in your crawl space, the first place they check for snakes is the ATTIC. If you have a rodent problem in the attic, there is a potential likelihood that the snakes enter through the crawl space and then wiggle through your walls to get to the attic for the mouse buffet. (I may never sleep again if they ever find something up there!) Luckily, no mice were found. No snakes either. After a full house inspection, the only culprit was the one in the crawl space. After all the anxiety over slithery slimy snakes, this mama had a crazy migraine and went straight to bed before dinner. Hence the reason that the kids made their own dinners!

WEDNESDAY: Dinner– Macaroni and cheese, fresh blueberries, grape tomatoes. Ramen noodles and steamed sticky buns for the grown ups. No workers today in the house so I used my time to get out and run errands, get groceries, etc. I feel a little guilty for feeding my kids so much processed stuff during the renovation, so I combat that concern by trying to include fresh produce as much as possible.

By the way, about the sticky buns... I buy them at the asian market's freezer section. Then, they go in my rice cooker on "STEAM" for about 10 minutes. Makes a great quick lunch or dinner. I highly recommend using your small appliances for more than just their primary purpose, I love using [my rice cooker](#) as a steamer as well!



It's a mess, but it's progress!

THURSDAY: Dinner– Stuffed zucchini in the crock pot. This dish takes my favorite pork meatball recipe and puts it inside a vegetable... clearly meaning that this is good for me, right?! Probably need to include a little more of that fresh fruit into dinner tonight, just to be sure it all cancels out. Ha! Electricians are here today finishing up the wiring so that hopefully the inspector comes tomorrow to sign off on everything so far.

Here's the recipe for tonight's dinner.

It's so quick, I'm not even going to write it up in a separate post:

1 lb ground pork or pork sausage for more flavor. 1 c. pancake mix. 1 c. shredded cheddar cheese. Mix all three ingredients. Take two zucchini, cut lengthwise and scoop out the insides. Fill the "boats" with the sausage mixture. Cook on low in the crock pot for 4 hours.

(To do these as just meatballs, roll into golf balls and then bake in the oven– they get a really nice crispiness to the outside.)



Once you learn to make the rolls, the possibilities are endless. So many different filling combinations to try!

FRIDAY: Dinner– sushi rolls. Back to the rice cooker I go.

I'm keeping it simple and just doing spicy tuna rolls tonight (drained canned tuna, a little mayo, and enough sriracha to make the mixture orange). The kids will eat the rice, some steamed edamame, and cut-up mango. Sometimes simple is just so good. Have you tried making sushi before? Once you learn to roll, it's really easy, and you can use a crazy variety of fillings! First you need [these mats](#). I keep mine clean by putting them in a gallon-sized ziplock baggie before rolling. Then just spread the rice thin, lay the toppings in the first 1/3 of the [seaweed sheet](#) and then roll it tight! Once my kitchen is back together, I'll make a video for you on making sushi rolls.

Oh, and the kitchen work?? The electric inspection was passed! And cabinets started going in! (insert happy dance here!)

Renovation, Week THREE and FOUR: Hurry Up to Wait



The cabinets arrived three weeks early, can you believe it?!

Welcome to the Renovation Dance. Please, find a partner and a tool. Take two steps forward and then slide to the left. Take another step forward and then jump back. The Renovation Dance is a new way of jiggling about in your kitchen— there's no sink, no appliances, not even a cabinet to be seen. Time for a party... just hurry up and wait for the music to begin.

I was super excited to report that our cabinets arrived last week— three weeks ahead of schedule! What?! That never happens with a renovation! *Jump up and down two times.* The boxes filled my family room from wall to wall to ceiling. My poor dogs had to travel a labyrinth in order to get outside (which was pretty entertaining to watch!).

Count three days and then the install team joined in the dance. By now, the cabinets are all unboxed and counted.

Ooooh... look at those pretty doors. *Take one step right as the electrician shows up.* Check out the old layout and realize that the current wiring set up will no longer pass code. *Grab your partner and take a full turn backwards.*

I bowed out and decided to focus on food instead- clearly a better project for me to manage. I was thankful for friends that hosted us for dinners this past weekend. I loved the company and the delicious meals. My kids even complained that we haven't had friends over for dinners in the last few weeks. Ummm yeah?! We don't have a kitchen! But it's reassuring to know that they like entertaining just as much I do. *(Remind me to add my boys to my dance card.)*



Fresh foods make all the difference in keeping us eating healthy during the renovation.

Meals have been pretty basic recently. I used the side burner on the grill to boil up a pound of pasta one night. We had home-rolled sushi the next with edamame and pomegranate seeds. I'm so glad my kids like fresh produce. I've been trying to have something fresh at each meal... sometimes something like pomegranate seeds or sometimes as simple as baby carrots and

ranch dip.

Hard boiled eggs, tuna salad, and lunchmeat have become great go-to snacks at all hours of the day.

I have a newfound appreciation for all of those frozen veggies that you cook in the bag. At first, I was skeptical about cooking IN a plastic bag, but it saves me so much effort if I don't have to wash a separate container out in the basement sink.

I've worked through my first four week meal plan pretty well, so starting next week, I will write a new plan that will carry us through the beginning of January. I'm **very hopeful** that the kitchen will come together by then and I can get back to real cooking. I miss it, but this plan has saved me time and money, so I don't mind a little legwork.

Renovation, Week Two: THX and Floors



Here's an easy way to free up space in your oven when you are making Thanksgiving dinner.

While most of you are probably brining your turkeys, whipping your cream, or stuffing that bird, we're being a little non-traditional with our family time this holiday season. Yes— we will still eat a full Thanksgiving dinner, but no... the renovation is not complete. No kitchen? No problem!

The goal this holiday weekend is to install about 600 square feet of hardwood floors in the kitchen (and throughout the family room). Last week, in [Week One](#), we stripped everything down to the subfloors. We received great news about our cabinets being ready ahead of schedule, but we need to get the wood down first!

At this point, most people think I'm crazy for doing so much of the work ourselves, but it's been really therapeutic. Haven't you ever wanted to take a crow bar to some part of your own house?! The floors though— this was legit remodeling work. Lucky for me, my husband has a masters degree in pure awesomeness and together, with a little help from friends and family, we were able to get the job done.

But let's focus on what is important— what we are eating! Again— I have NO KITCHEN. I've got a workable sink in the basement, a stack of paper/plastic everything from Costco, and some prepped foods in the freezer.

Here's how Week Two panned out in our bellies. Thanksgiving dinner was the big challenge. I was all set to do [Crock Pot Turkey Legs](#)— it's a family favorite. But after checking three grocery stores for turkey legs with no success, I gave in and just bought cooked turkey meat. I did manage to make [Crock Pot Green Bean Casserole](#) and reheated some mashed potatoes. My boys wouldn't call it Thanksgiving dinner though if I didn't have the "secret" cranberry sauce. You know, the one that has the ridges on the sides from the shape of the can. I did find organic cranberry sauce this year that didn't have high fructose corn syrup in it, so that seemed like a win-win to me.



It's easy to keep all of these ingredients on hand for a delicious dinner anytime!

On Friday and Saturday, we worked on THX dinner leftovers. I also made [Crock Pot Chili](#)— it's the easiest recipe ever. You

might have also seen my [Crock Pot Tortellini Soup](#) on social media, that was a huge hit. I used [this recipe](#), but also added a can of white beans to add more protein. It's so easy and there was no prep work and no clean up. The ingredients for both of these meals are easy to keep on hand in the pantry and freezer and I recommend adding them to your next shopping trip.

You might not be remodeling this holiday season, but I'm guessing you too will have crazy days, impromptu gatherings and festive celebrations. You don't need a demolition to save yourself time and energy in the kitchen. Save time, cook slower. Savor the flavors and the moments.

Renovation, Week One: Demolition

I cook. I am not a trained cook, but it's my favorite thing to do for my family, my friends and my fans. I just needed a better place to do it all.



This is the last picture I took of my old kitchen before we started tearing it apart.

But my kitchen— well, it was still circa 1985 with a laminate countertop, too little cabinet space and not enough storage. This is my office, my test kitchen, and it was time for an upgrade. It took six months to plan and will probably take six weeks to do, but I am so excited to share this whole process with you.

DISCLAIMER: I was hoping to get sponsorship on the renovation and tell you all about it and thank the companies blah blah blah, because it was better for ME to get that. But since we're doing a lot of the work ourselves, it made more sense to just be brutality honest with you about the process and give shout outs to those that did great... and let you know what choices I would make differently in retrospect.

I worked primarily with my local [Home Depot](#) to do the designs—the kitchen designer was fantastic. She met with me every week for almost three months. We played with different layouts, discussed my style and what I was picturing in my head and figuring out how to get it on paper. We carefully selected cabinets and worked out some interesting kinks in my space.

She was patient and knowledgeable and even kept it on budget. Thank you, Kelly, for helping to bring my project to fruition.

My kitchen style is going to be French Country. It's going to be a careful balance between rustic and elegant. It will be very user-friendly, lots of workable surfaces, and even a desk. It will be sturdy and spacious and inviting. When it's all done, you'll get to see me working in my crock pots while looking out the back windows. You can belly-up to the counter bar and enjoy libations while I fix dinner. If you want to help out, there will be two prep stations on the kitchen island. And at the end of the day– cleanup should be a cinch. I'm giddy with excitement.



And 24 hours later...
the kitchen was gone.

But before this can all come together... it has to all come apart. We've spent the week tearing my old kitchen apart– as a family. Yes, I gave my kids hammers and crow bars and a lesson is safety. Yes, I prepped meals ahead and cooked in my crockpot while wearing safety glasses. It was hard work– exhausting, in fact, but I love the fact that we did it. I encourage you to push yourselves to be involved as much as possible in projects of the home and of the heart, when possible.

And then I got the call... your cabinets are ready. WHAT?! But

that's three weeks ahead of schedule! In what alternate universe does production and delivery go ahead of schedule.

My kitchen— and family room— are torn out down to the subfloors and my cabinets will be delivered in a week?

Happy Thanksgiving, y'all. It's time to get to work!