IS IT TIME FOR RICE AND BEANS?

No Kitchen? No Problem!

Budget-friendly meals for anyone cooking without a full kitchen — one appliance at a time.

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Table of Contents

Introduction Making the Most of What You Have
Chapter 1 Air Fryer
Chapter 2 Portable Induction Plate
Chapter 3 Slow Cooker
Chapter 4 Electric Skillet
Chapter 5 Toaster Oven
Chapter 6 Kettle
Chapter 7 Sandwich Maker
Chapter 8 No Appliances at All

Making the Most of What You Have

Not everyone has access to a full kitchen. Students in dorm rooms, people in transitional housing, travellers staying in short-term rentals, and anyone living in a basement suite with a hot plate and a mini-fridge all face the same challenge: how do you eat well and spend as little as possible when your cooking options are limited?

The answer is the same one that budget cooks have always relied on: work with what you have. A single appliance, used well, can produce a surprising variety of meals. An air fryer can roast vegetables, cook eggs, and crisp up canned chickpeas. A slow cooker can turn dried beans and cheap cuts of meat into deeply flavourful stews. A kettle can do more than make tea.

This guide covers eight scenarios — one chapter per appliance, plus a final chapter for those with no appliances at all. Each chapter explains what the appliance does well, names the meals most worth making, and links to reliable recipes so you can get started right away.

None of these meals require a stove, an oven, or a full set of pots and pans. Most rely on pantry staples: canned beans, dried lentils, rice, oats, eggs, and a few spices. The investment is creativity, not money.

CHAPTER 1

Air Fryer

An air fryer is one of the most versatile single appliances you can own. It roasts, crisps, bakes, and reheats — all without a full oven.

KEY POINTS

- Cooks faster than a conventional oven and uses less electricity
- Excellent for roasting vegetables, cooking proteins, and crisping canned legumes
- Works well with frozen vegetables — no thawing needed

An air fryer acts like a mini convection oven and is a versatile appliance.

It's great to have when there is no kitchen range available — in rooming houses or student dorms, for example. And it's easy to take along on a road trip for use in a motel room.

In a regular kitchen an air fryer uses a lot less energy than a full oven. That is good news for small households of one or two people, when there is only a small quantity of food to prepare or some leftovers to reheat.

It's mainly designed to air-fry frozen convenience foods or cook raw meat and fish. While those are pricey, an air fryer also shines when it comes to cooking with lower-cost ingredients: potatoes baked whole or fried in wedges, eggs boiled or fried, toast, roasted vegetables, and roasted chickpeas.

There is an inspiring amount of online content on social media to take an air fryer to the next level, even on a budget!

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **50 Budget Friendly and Easy Air Fryer Recipes**
  https://organizationaltoast.com/50-budget-friendly-and-easy-air-fryer-recipes/
- **Air Fryer Baked Potato**
  https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/a46043388/air-fryer-baked-potato-recipe/
- **21 Easy Air Fryer Egg Recipes**
  https://twohealthykitchens.com/air-fryer-egg-recipes/
- **Easy Air Fryer Recipes Plus Tips for Toast with the Most**
  https://www.bakersdelight.com.au/blogs/news/easy-air-fryer-recipes-plus-tips-for-toast-with-the-most
- **26 Air-Fryer Vegetables for Sides and Snacks**
  https://www.tasteofhome.com/collection/air-fryer-vegetable-recipes/
- **Easy Air Fryer Baking Recipes That Actually Work**
  https://airfryerbaking.com/

CHAPTER 2

Portable Induction Plate

A portable induction plate gives you almost everything a full stovetop does — at a fraction of the cost and in a fraction of the space.

KEY POINTS

- Heats faster and more efficiently than a gas or electric burner
- Handles any stovetop cooking: frying, boiling, simmering, sautéing
- Requires induction-compatible cookware (magnetic base)

A portable induction plate is the closest thing to a full stovetop you can get in a single plug-in appliance. It boils water quickly, maintains a steady simmer, and gets hot enough to sear. For budget cooking, this versatility is invaluable: you can make soups, stews, stir-fries, fried rice, and pasta all on one burner.

Induction cooking is also more energy-efficient than gas or conventional electric burners because heat is generated directly in the pot rather than in the element. This means lower electricity bills and faster cooking times — both important when you are watching every dollar.

The main limitation is that induction requires cookware with a magnetic base. Cast iron and most stainless steel pots work. Aluminium and copper do not. A single good-quality induction-compatible pot or pan is all you need to get started.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Black Bean Soup**
  https://www.countryliving.com/food-drinks/a63185900/vegan-black-bean-soup-recipe/
- **Vegetable Barley Soup**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/vegetable-barley-soup/
- **Sausage, Potato, and Cabbage Soup**
  https://www.countryliving.com/food-drinks/a46267205/sausage-potato-and-cabbage-soup-recipe/
- **Chicken Noodle Soup**
  https://www.bigbearswife.com/30-minute-pantry-chicken-noodle-soup/
- **Easy-Peasy Mac 'n Cheesy**
  https://www.countryliving.com/food-drinks/a40709000/easy-peasy-stovetop-mac-n-cheesy-recipe/
- **Ground Meat Spaghetti Skillet**
  https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/ground-beef-spaghetti-skillet/
- **Cheesy Gnocchi Skillet**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/cheesy-gnocchi-skillet/
- **Easy Fried Rice**
  https://therecipecritic.com/easy-fried-rice/
- **One-Pot Chicken and Rice**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/one-pot-chicken-and-rice/
- **One-Pot Veggie Rice Bowl**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/one-pot-veggie-rice-bowl/

CHAPTER 3

Slow Cooker

A slow cooker turns the cheapest ingredients — dried beans, tough cuts of meat, root vegetables — into deeply flavourful meals with almost no active effort.

KEY POINTS

- Ideal for dried beans, lentils, and cheap cuts of meat that need long cooking
- Set it in the morning and eat in the evening — no monitoring required
- Uses very little electricity compared to an oven

The slow cooker is the budget cook's best friend. It transforms the cheapest ingredients — dried beans, lentils, cheap cuts of pork or chicken, root vegetables — into deeply flavourful meals through long, gentle heat. The process requires almost no active effort: add ingredients in the morning, turn it on, and come back to a finished meal in the evening.

Dried beans are one of the best things to cook in a slow cooker. They are far cheaper than canned beans, and the slow cooker handles them beautifully without any soaking required (though soaking does speed things up). A bag of dried black beans or chickpeas cooked in a slow cooker costs a fraction of the canned equivalent and produces a much larger quantity.

Slow cookers also excel at soups and stews. A handful of root vegetables, a can of tomatoes, some dried lentils, and a few spices will produce a large pot of soup that can feed you for several days. The long cooking time develops flavour that quick-cooked versions simply cannot match.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Vegetarian Chili**
  https://realfoodwholelife.com/recipes/crockpot-vegetarian-chili/
- **Crock Pot Chili**
  https://www.eatingonadime.com/crockpot-chili-recipe/
- **Curries**
  https://greatcurryrecipes.net/category/slow-cooker-curries/
- **Hamburger Stew**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/slow-cooker-hamburger-stew/
- **Potato Soup**
  https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a37260749/slow-cooker-potato-soup-recipe/
- **Split-Pea Soup**
  https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a37936345/slow-cooker-split-pea-soup-recipe/
- **Black Bean Soup**
  https://www.budgetbytes.com/slow-cooker-black-bean-soup/
- **Apple Sauce**
  https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a41137801/slow-cooker-applesauce-recipe/
- **Rice Pudding**
  https://dinnerthendessert.com/slow-cooker-rice-pudding/
- **Refried Beans**
  https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a79219/how-to-make-slow-cooker-refried-beans/
- **Corn Dip**
  https://www.lemonblossoms.com/blog/slow-cooker-corn-dip/#corn_dip_recipe_ingredients

CHAPTER 4

Electric Skillet

An electric skillet is a large, flat, temperature-controlled pan that plugs into the wall. It can fry, sauté, simmer, and even bake — all without a stove.

KEY POINTS

- Large cooking surface handles family-sized portions
- Precise temperature control prevents burning
- Can simmer soups and stews with the lid on

An electric skillet is essentially a large frying pan with its own heating element and a temperature dial. It can reach high temperatures for searing and frying, or hold a low, steady simmer for soups and stews. The large surface area makes it ideal for cooking larger quantities — useful if you are batch cooking for the week.

One of the electric skillet's best budget applications is making pancakes, eggs, and other breakfast foods in large batches. A dozen pancakes can be cooked at once, then refrigerated or frozen for the week. This is far cheaper than buying individual servings of breakfast food.

With the lid on, an electric skillet can also function as a shallow braising pan. Chicken thighs braised in a simple tomato sauce, or pork chops simmered in broth with onions, come out tender and flavourful at a fraction of the cost of restaurant equivalents.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Vegetable and Goat Cheese Frittata**
  https://inthekitch.net/electric-skillet-vegetable-and-goat-cheese-frittata/
- **Crunchy Chow Mein Noodles**
  https://inthekitch.net/electric-skillet-crunchy-chow-mein-noodles/
- **Chicken Enchiladas**
  https://inthekitch.net/electric-skillet-chicken-enchiladas/
- **Spaghetti**
  https://inthekitch.net/electric-skillet-spaghetti/#ingredients
- **Oatmeal Cookies**
  https://inthekitch.net/electric-skillet-oatmeal-cookies/#recipe

CHAPTER 5

Toaster Oven

A toaster oven does almost everything a full oven does, but uses a fraction of the energy and heats up in minutes rather than half an hour.

KEY POINTS

- Roasts, bakes, broils, and toasts — a true oven substitute
- Heats up quickly and uses less electricity than a full oven
- Ideal for single servings and small batch cooking

A toaster oven is the most oven-like of the countertop appliances. It can roast vegetables, bake casseroles, broil fish, and toast bread — all the things a full oven does, but in a smaller space and with less energy. For anyone without access to a full oven, a toaster oven opens up a wide range of cooking options.

The toaster oven's small size is actually an advantage for budget cooking. It heats up in minutes rather than the 15–20 minutes a full oven needs to preheat, and it uses significantly less electricity. For single servings or small batches, it is more economical than heating a full oven.

One of the best budget uses for a toaster oven is roasting vegetables. A tray of whatever vegetables are cheapest that week — potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage — tossed with a little oil and salt, roasted at high heat, becomes a satisfying and nutritious meal for very little money.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Baked Potatoes**
  https://momcrieff.com/baking-potatoes-in-a-toaster-oven/
- **Rosemary Potatoes (plus many more ideas)**
  https://toasterovenlove.com/toaster-oven-rosemary-potatoes/
- **Roasted Sweet Potatoes**
  https://simplyceecee.co/roasted-sweet-potatoes-recipe/
- **Egg in a Hole**
  https://theskinnyfork.com/blog/toaster-oven-egg-in-a-hole
- **Roasted Broccoli**
  https://www.foodfanatic.com/recipes/toaster-oven-roasted-broccoli-recipe/
- **Roasted Root Vegetables**
  https://eatfresh.org/recipe/side-dish/toaster-roasted-vegetables/
- **Toaster Oven Dinners**
  https://www.tasteofhome.com/collection/totally-awesome-toaster-oven-dinners/

CHAPTER 6

Kettle

A kettle does more than boil water for tea. With a little creativity, it can prepare a surprising range of budget meals — no other appliance required.

KEY POINTS

- Boils water faster and more efficiently than a stovetop pot
- Can cook instant noodles, oatmeal, couscous, and more
- Pairs well with a wide-mouth thermos for hands-off cooking

A kettle is the most basic cooking appliance, but it is more capable than most people realise. Boiling water is all it takes to prepare instant noodles, oatmeal, couscous, instant mashed potatoes, and a range of other foods that simply need to be rehydrated or softened in hot water.

The kettle's capabilities expand significantly when paired with a wide-mouth thermos. Pour boiling water over rolled oats, dried lentils, or couscous in the thermos, seal it, and leave it for 20–30 minutes. The retained heat finishes the cooking without any additional energy. This technique — sometimes called thermos cooking — is popular among hikers and travellers and works just as well in a dorm room.

For anyone on an extremely tight budget, kettle-based meals can be surprisingly satisfying. Instant oatmeal with peanut butter and banana, couscous with canned chickpeas and olive oil, or instant noodles with a soft-boiled egg (cooked by submerging in boiling water in a mug for 12 minutes) are all filling, nutritious, and very cheap.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Instant Oatmeal**
  https://fitfoodiefinds.com/instant-oatmeal-recipes/
- **Ramen hacks**
  https://www.seriouseats.com/easy-ways-to-upgrade-your-instant-noodles-japanese-what-to-do-with-ramen
- **Mashed Potatoes**
  https://www.food.com/recipe/instant-garlic-mashed-potatoes-333157
- **Rice Salad**
  https://minuterice.com/recipes/cucumber-ranch-salad/
- **Tabouleh**
  https://iheartvegetables.com/couscous-tabbouleh/

CHAPTER 7

Sandwich Maker

A sandwich maker — also called a panini press or jaffle iron — is a simple, cheap appliance that can do far more than make toasted sandwiches.

KEY POINTS

- Heats from both sides simultaneously for fast cooking
- Can cook eggs, quesadillas, and even small omelettes
- Inexpensive to buy and very cheap to run

A sandwich maker applies heat from both sides at once, which means it cooks faster than a single-sided pan and seals fillings inside a crispy outer layer. The obvious use is toasted sandwiches, but the same principle works for quesadillas, stuffed flatbreads, and even small omelettes.

For budget cooking, the sandwich maker's best application is turning cheap fillings into satisfying meals. A can of beans mashed with a little garlic and spice, spread on bread with whatever cheese or vegetables you have, makes a filling and nutritious meal for almost nothing. The same filling works in a tortilla for a quesadilla.

Sandwich makers are also useful for cooking eggs. Crack an egg directly into the sandwich maker (with a little oil), close the lid, and it cooks in about 3–4 minutes. Add bread on either side and you have a breakfast sandwich. This is faster and uses less energy than cooking eggs on a stovetop.

Recipe Ideas

Links open in a browser. Visit thecabinnearby.com for the fully interactive version.

- **Hack Your Sandwich Maker 13 Ways!**
  https://hamiltonbeach.ca/hack-your-breakfast-sandwich-maker
- **Breakfast Burrito**
  https://www.food.com/recipe/breakfast-burrito-sandwich-maker-34828
- **Omelette**
  https://www.kaveyeats.com/making-omelettes-in-a-sandwi
- **Grilled Chocolate Sandwich**
  https://rakskitchen.net/chocolate-sandwich-recipe-grilled-chocolate-sandwich/
- **20 Things That Are Not Sandwiches!**
  https://www.frugalandthriving.com.au/20-things-to-make-in-a-sandwich-maker/
- **15 Surprising Things You Can Make In A Panini Press**
  https://williamsfoodequipment.com/blog/

CHAPTER 8

No Appliances at All

When you have no appliances and no kitchen, you are not out of options. A surprising number of satisfying, nutritious meals require nothing more than a can opener and a bowl.

KEY POINTS

- Canned and shelf-stable foods are the foundation of no-cook eating
- Many grains and legumes can be soaked rather than cooked
- Focus on assembly rather than cooking: salads, wraps, and grain bowls

Not having a stove, microwave, or other kitchen appliance makes meal planning harder, but it does not mean every meal has to come from a restaurant or convenience store. A small collection of shelf-stable foods can go a long way.

Think in combinations rather than recipes. Bread, tortillas, canned beans, nut butter, canned fish, fruit, vegetables, cheese, and yogurt can become satisfying meals without cooking. Choose what fits your budget, your storage space, and what is available nearby.

A cooler or mini fridge makes it easier to keep milk, cheese, eggs, leftovers, and fresh produce. If you do not have cold storage, buy smaller amounts more often and focus on foods that are safe to keep at room temperature.

You Can Do This

Cooking without a full kitchen is a constraint, but it is not a barrier. Every appliance in this guide — and the no-appliance chapter — proves that good, filling, nutritious food is possible on a tight budget with limited equipment.

The most important thing is to start with what you have. One appliance, a few pantry staples, and a willingness to experiment will take you further than you might expect. The recipes linked in each chapter are a starting point, not a prescription — adapt them to whatever is cheapest and most available where you are.

For more budget cooking ideas, tips, and resources, visit thecabinnearby.com. Everything on the site is free, and new content is added regularly.

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