Five meatless meals my kids will eat

Hello, Lent. Here's my confession: we're NOT a Meatless Friday family. *I* am meatless, myself, for the most part on Fridays. But for a variety of reasons, I don't insist on it for the whole family.

Meatless Notsanga

This gem of a recipe works with or without meat…and you can vary the meat that goes in it. It serves my whole family and sometimes the in-laws, too.

Ingredients:

- 2 – 16 oz cans of spaghetti sauce
- 1 lb short-cut pasta such as rotini or penne
- 1 – 16 oz bag of shredded cheese – mozzarella works best
- 1 – 16 oz tub of ricotta cheese (or you can make your own and it will taste just as good: one 16 oz tub of cottage cheese, a good handful of grated parmesan cheese, an egg, and a splash of milk)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Put the pasta on and cook to al dente, i.e., time it for the lower end of the recommended cooking time. While it's cooking, mix up the fake ricotta and get your other stuff ready.
3. Drain the pasta, put it back in its pan, and mix in one can of sauce.
4. Using a 9×13 baking pan, put in a bottom layer of the pasta. Next put in a layer of the ricotta or cottage cheese mix, then some sauce, then half of the shredded cheese. Repeat for a second layer. (I sometimes aim for

a third layer, but I'm an overachiever.)
5. Pop it in the oven, forget about it for 20 minutes (but don't forget to set your timer), and then pull it out and chow down!

A friend of mine has adapted this so that it's completely stovetop and has no baking. If you're savvy, go for it!

Mac and cheese

There's nothing saying mac and cheese has to be boring. We were at a parish function recently, and after my oldest ate the mac and cheese (all but licking her plate!) and insisted I find the recipe. I googled "spicy mac and cheese" and came up with this delectable challenge.

Also: It turns out mac and cheese is a thing online. (Who knew?)

I've thought about trying a different form of mac and cheese each week of Lent this year, but I'm not sure I'll be able to pull it off. (I'm also not sure some of my more traditional eaters will appreciate this approach at all.)

No shame if you're boiling noodles and opening a box of whatever brand is your favorite.

In case you're looking for something a bit different than that, though, how about one of these?

- Homemade baked mac and cheese with breadcrumbs on top
- Veggie mac and cheese, which may cause a riot with certain members in my house
- No-bake veggie mac and cheese, which looks quicker
- "Hidden veggie" mac and cheese, which I may try (I love squash!)
- Sweet potato mac and cheese bake, which may have had me drooling all over my keyboard
- For something completely different, here's a meatless

cheeseburger mac and cheese that I may try with some adaptations

You may also find that combining a few of these ideas is what works best for your family.

Snack plates

Snack plates can include a number of things. I tend to always include baby carrots, apple slices, grapes, and string cheese or cheese chunks, because that's typically what I always have on hand. I'll also toss in whatever veggies and fruits I have on hand that week.

What makes this fun is the presentation: I'll pull out a plate, platter, or my veggie tray (the one I take to potlucks or use for hosting parties). I'll put ranch out and, if I'm feeling particularly motivated, I'll make it a picnic dinner and we'll eat on the living room floor. (This works great when Daddy's out of town or working late.)

If I have small yogurts (either the tubes or small containers), I'll include those as well. Some of us (like my husband) don't consider this a dinner until there's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich included, and we roll with that.

Breakfast for dinner (minus the bacon)

Make pancakes, get out the OJ, and ignore the fact that there's no bacon or sausage. You may also pull down the cereal and enjoy that. One of my kids loves to have "hot toast" as a treat, so when it's served up as part of dinner, he's beyond thrilled.

Tomato soup and grilled cheese

No shame in an old standard, in part because I have at least one kid who will cheer when he hears it's what's for dinner. Turns out this is *also* a thing online: There's a collection of 16 (!!!) different tomato soup and grilled cheese recipes and

one of them may be just the thing for taking a favorite into new territory. (Note: Not all of those are meatless, so be aware of that when you click over.)