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Tamale Pie! Skillet Lasagna! Cooking Really Is Simple With These Healthy Meal Kits

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1



I've heard it time and time again: "I love home-cooked meals, but I hate cooking!"

When people say this, it's usually because of a few things. 1) They feel like they can't cook (or had a terribly — literally — charred experience in the past), and so they don't like it. 2) They view it as "work" and another to-do chore. 3) They haven't yet found easy-to-make meals that are actually healthy and tasty. 4) They say they don't have time.

So when four boxes of [cooksimple](#) — a line of all-natural, gluten-free meal kits that boast giving you a delicious homecooked meal without much effort in less than 30 minutes — arrived here for us to try, I knew we'd have to review them. 'Cause that pretty much counter-punches every single reason people don't want to cook. 1) Good for the beginner. 2) Easy (and with a glass of wine and some tunes, I promise cooking won't feel like "work" at all). 3) Healthy and tasty! 4) Less than 30 minutes is hard to beat — even takeout usually takes longer.

I cooked up the [Cranberry Wild Rice](#), [White Bean Chili](#), [Skillet Lasagna](#) and [Tamale Pie](#).



Kind of like a more creative and certainly healthier twist on Hamburger Helper, each of these healthy meal kits has the foundation of a meal — you just add a few extras like meat, milk, water, cheese, olive oil or canned tomatoes. They don't call for anything too special, mostly stuff you'll probably already find in your pantry.

I tried the Cranberry Wild Rice and White Bean Chili first, as they were the least complicated. Simply add your ingredients plus the cooksimple packets of ingredients and cook. Yes, there's a little boiling and simmering involved, but it's all super easy. Although the meal kits called for chicken or turkey, I had some bison liver thawed and subbed that in instead for both. (I know organ meats gross a lot of people out, but hang with me here for a bit!)

The Cranberry Wild Rice was pretty good — full of real whole ingredients and chewy wild rice. I found the cranberries — although nicely plump for coming out of a box — to be a bit too sweet for my taste, but that was my only complaint. (And I [always have that complaint it seems...](#))



I liked the White Bean Chili even more. It had really good spice to it and tasted as though it had been cooking for way more than 30 minutes. The beans were nice and soft without being overly mushy, and the bell peppers had a nice smokey flavor. There were **chia seeds** in this one, too, although I didn't really notice them. (Still love that they're there!)



On another night, I tackled the Skillet Lasagna and Tamale Pie, which were just a touch more involved. For both, you brown some ground meat (I did ground turkey for the Skillet Lasagna and **grass-fed beef** for the Tamale Pie), and then add the other ingredients and packets.



The Skillet Lasagna turned out good, too. I ended up using diced tomatoes and ricotta salata for the cheese — and added some fresh basil from my garden for an extra pop of color and flavor. It had that slightly tinny gluten-free aftertaste that I've noticed in so many g-free products, but the noodles were tender, and, on the whole, the overall flavor was good — very lasagna-y. Not to mention that it made a HUGE skillet of it. Fantastic for leftovers or feeding a fam, especially when paired with a green salad.



But the Tamale Pie was the real show-stopper for me. Black-bean chili with a cornbread topping, it was delish — and a real ta-da. This one took me a bit more than 30 minutes to prepare, and it had the extra step of mixing the cornbread (with an egg, some water and honey), topping the chili and baking it, but it was worth it. (Side note: I used goat cheese instead of cheddar cheese in the chili, and it was awesome.)



Nicely browned on the top, the cornbread was slightly sweet and complimented the rich chili wonderfully. I'd make this and serve it to guests any day of the week — and probably wow a lot of people (sneaky!). For 30 minutes of effort, you get something to really be proud of.



So, yeah. I really, really love these cooksimple healthy meal kits. Not only were the results pretty delicious, but the ingredients lists are clean (you'll recognize all of the ingredients — nothing scary), a decent-serving is usually 200-500 calories, they're only \$5 a kit, and they don't seem gluten-free at all for being gluten free. (Minus that tinny aftertaste on the lasagna.)

The other thing I really, really love about these is that you have as much — or as little — freedom as you want to get creative. If you're a cooking newbie, you can follow the directions exactly. If you want to have some culinary fun with it, you can sub this or that (like I did with the bison and goat cheese) or try adding extra ingredients of your own (like my basil). It's really kind of perfect. And it's a great way to get into cooking without a lot of risk or scariness. So if you've been looking to cook more at home but are afraid, I highly recommend trying it!

Have you ever used a healthy meal kit? Would something like this get you cooking more? —Jenn

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