

# Lunch



## Welcome to the wonderful world of radiant bentos

Some of you know that lunch was always the hardest meal for me. Then came BENTO BOXES. Suddenly lunch became a joy. Bentos somehow are a cross between office supplies and food, who could ask for more. Bentos are fabulous for parents with picky eaters. Start doing bentos, and nothing will be the same. I mean just look at those little penguin eggs. Yes, yes, I KNOW you think that you couldn't possibly do that, but...your 8 year old can and will!!

I understand these look like museum pieces, but really they are not. The penguins are on little potato pancakes, and that is chicken up there in the green box with some sort of green stuff. Your 8 year old is not going to shout for kale, but, apple sauce, baby bels, you bet. Try some chicken nuggets, and watch them chomp em down.

The one above looks yummy to me. This is breaded fish sticks and some sort of Japanese rice noodles and then broccoli and strawberries. The colors are so much fun, I wanted to eat the picture! The third one is with brown rice under the cheese and tomato stuff, green beans, potatoes, and a fig and some laughing cow cheese for dessert. I think you can begin to see there is an art to this.

I decided to find the queens of Bentos in the community. That would be Heather and Terri W. I asked them to send some ideas. They did. And they will be leading the Lunch chat on Wednesday.



Bentos can be wonderful works of art or they can just be attractively packed food. Terri aims for the attractively packed food angle. Packing a bento box is a great way to have a meal ready to go whether eating lunch at work, on a trip, at a family or other social gathering, or even if eating at home and not wanting to be bothered with preparing lunch at lunch time.

## Terri's Tips

But my favorite bentos are boxes filled with finger foods--it's like having my own hors d'oeuvres party in a box.

1. Pack leftovers after dinner  
This makes food prep feel like it takes care of itself.

2. Fill the freezer  
Keep a freezer stash of foods that are pre-cooked - either by you or someone else. This can be protein, browns and veggies.

3. Use shortcuts  
Use pre-sliced veggies, meats and cheeses and use food cutters (cookies cutters or small cutters designed just for bentos or even from a play dough) set to cut them into shapes.

4. Mix and match your gear  
Use food storage containers you already own with cheap bento accessories like little sauce containers, silicone baking cups in various shapes and sizes, and small containers from the 99 cent store. Prep the food to fit.

5. Stop shifting  
Use small space fillers to pack your bentos tight. Use wrapped cheeses, small fruits, sauce containers, or other small containers.

## Take Accesories

Don't forget to pack silverware, a nice tea towel or napkins. It will make lunch feel more civilized.



making bento boxes has transformed boring leftovers into fun to eat food.

Bentos provide both an analytical and creative outlet. You look at your food and try to figure out how to make it fit in a bento box. The creative side comes with making it look attractive.

Bento making supplies can be simple and you may already have what you need.

**Apple corer**—Use it to hollow out veggies like cucumbers to fill with things like cream cheese)

**Paring knife**—For cutting shapes into produce, luncheon meat, or even hard boiled eggs

**Cookie cutters**—Finally a use for those cookie cutters again! Use the big ones to cut out shapes into bread, tofu patties, or any large items. The smaller cutters are great to use for veggies or fruit.

Or use other containers with lids to be your "Bento".

**Smaller containers** to hold sauces or small portioned items

**Silicon muffin cups**—The sizes and shapes are endless, but even the traditional ones are useful for keeping food separated.

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## And you can get special Bento supplies

**Egg molders**—these are used to put peeled freshly cooked hard boiled eggs in to shape them into fun shapes.

**Rice molds**—use these to mold warm brown rice into fun shapes. I have ones in the shape of animals, and also ones in more Japanese specific shapes like the "onigiri" triangle. They are simple to use, and once you start pressing rice you'll be amazed at how much you can fit into your box.

**Bento boxes**—lots of places on the internet sell these. Heather's favorites are Laptop Lunches, Mr. Bento, Lock & Lock and Gel Cool.

