BUDGET COOKING

A GUIDE TO HEALTHY EATING HABITS & SAVING MONEY

ASH MAHONEY

Budget Cooking: A Guide to Healthy Eating Habits & Saving Money

Ash Mahoney

Published by One Jacked Monkey, LLC, 2018.

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By Ash Mahoney

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Introduction

As an adult, you can cook whatever you want, and it can be hard to stick to healthy meals that are also budget-friendly. That's precisely what this book can help you with. There's no reason to succumb to the fast food craze because it doesn't break the wallet. We'll concentrate on fresh ingredients as much as possible while still not breaking the bank.

Side Note: Would you like to get my quick and easy suggestions for cooking on a budget? Head over to **Bit.ly/Cooking-Budget** to get a free copy of my short audiobook *Cooking on a Budget* with a 30-day trial of Audible.

Your Kitchen Tools Matter

Your kitchen tools do matter! You don't want to be using dollar items all of the time, and you may want to invest in your kitchen equipment to prepare cheap, healthy meals. In this section, we'll go over some basic kitchen necessities and their importance with budget cooking. There's no reason for expensive gadgets. You just need a few essential tools that can perform a large variety of tasks.

Your Knives Matter

Your knives are an essential part of cooking, and so good quality knives are crucial. They can last a lifetime, so they're important to invest in. You'll at least want a chef's knife and a paring knife if you can't afford a set. You'll use the check knife as a go-to. Choose one roughly ten inches long, and it should have a gently curved blade, but don't fall for a serrated one. It should be sharp right when you buy it too.

Your paring knife is better for peeling, and they can range from two and a half to four inches they have a plain blade. Look for a budget-friendly knife that fits your hand well. Now, if you're going to drop the cash on a knife that's good, then you'll need to take good care of it. Only hand wash and dry them. It isn't recommended that you put a good knife in a dishwasher and store them safely. They're sharper than your average table knife. Some people wrap them in a dishcloth before placing them in the drawer to keep any accidents from occurring.

The Right Skillet

Your best pan will be your best cooking friend. Our recommendation is ten to twelve inches, and a stainless-steel skillet with a heavy bottom is best. A nonstick skillet would be icing on the cake. Nonstick pans are easier to clean, but you need to remember they damage easily they can be worth it for the sear they can produce on your meat though, especially seafood where the texture is essential to plating and taste. A skillet's heavy bottom retains the transmitted heat so it can reduce the change of you burning your food.

The Right Pot

You're going to need a pot to cook stews, sauces, and soups. It's also essential for boiling water so you can cook pasta. Choose one with a heavy bottom, and make sure it has a lid. The lid can be glass or metal, but glass allows you to check on your food without steam escaping. The heavy bottom better distributes the heat, and similar to the skillet, it can prevent scorching.

The Right Baking Sheet

No matter if you call it a sheet pan or a baking sheet, you're going to need a good one. We suggest a rimmed baking sheet, and a nonstick coating is a plus. These are great for roasting vegetables, baking cookies, or for cooking one pan meals.

The Right Jars

You'll want wide-mouthed Mason jars because of their versatility. It makes it easy to pack soups, layered salad, pudding, oatmeal, and smoothies. You can just buy one and make do, but if you want to meal prep, it's best to have at least four. Planning ahead is an easy way to stay under budget too! Mason jars are usually more budget friendly when you buy them in packs.

Wide-mouthed jars as essential because it makes it easier to get food in and out. Mason jars also come with a ring and lid, but you can often buy additional lids for under five dollars! Mason jars can also be used for drinks, so they're very versatile. Be careful because glass gets hot quick! They're not ideal for microwaves even if labeled microwave-safe without the lids.

Get a Wok!

Though woks can be expensive, I recommend avoiding bargain basement models. Cheaper woks require more care. If you must get an inexpensive wok, then visit place like Walmart where you can get one for as low as $10. This helps with cheap stir fries or just to get the right texture on vegetables. When you're cooking with more inexpensive ingredients, texture can be essential.

Other Essentials

Here are a few other easy pickup items needed to prepare your meals.

- **Baking Dish:** Ceramic or glass baking dishes are best. Remember not to put them under cold water when they're hot, or they'll crack
- **Measuring Utensils:** You'll want a set of measuring cups as well as measuring spoons.
- **Cutting Board:** Bamboo cutting boards are a cheap alternative to plastic, and they'll last longer too. Glass or marble works as well, but they're usually a tad more expensive.
- **Whisk & Colander:** Metal will last longer, but plastic will work without changing the flavor of your food.
- **Can Opener:** Any will do.

Slow Cooker/Crockpot

This is an essential part of cutting fast food out of your budget. If you have a slow cooker or crockpot, you're less likely to eat out because your meals are quick and easy. In the next chapter, we'll go over how to pick one out to fit your budget and serve your needs.

Picking Out a Slow Cooker

A slow cooker is an essential cooking tool to help stick to your grocery budget. Picking the right one is extremely important, so follow these guidelines.

Determine Your Budget

Slow cookers cost between $30-$100. Most people stick to decent slow cookers around $30-40. Remember, some features come at a premium, so a regular slow cooker is best. A 6-quart or larger slow cooker, able to fit most needs, runs for under $50. If you're looking for a slow cooker for long-term use, find one with a ceramic insert. Skip the programmable slow cooker and stick to one with basic buttons.

Do Your Need Extras?

In case you won't be home when cooking, you may want self-stirring slow cooker. If you have a hard time telling if the meat is done, you may need to pick one with a built-in meat thermometer. If you use ground beef as a staple, buy one with a browning unit. Do you enjoy cooking miniature slow cooker recipes, such as dips? Then, you will want a miniature slow cooker.

Considering a Pressure Cooker

Do you want to use the slow cooker, but have a tough time remembering to turn it on? Then, you'll need to use a pressure cooker. Pressure cookers are more expensive but have a longer lifespan than their counterparts. These special appliances get dinner on the table in less than an hour, perfect for any busy lifestyle.

Pantry Essentials for Budget Meals

To cook cheap meals, you'll need inexpensive yet healthy ingredients. Load up your pantry with these cooking essentials.

Cooking Oil

How do you expect to cook a meal without oil? It doesn't matter if you're cooking vegetables, making sauces, or just dressing salads. Oil is a must-have, but don't give in to the temptation to buy canola or vegetable oil. You only need a small quantity of oil for most things so you can buy a higher quality cooking oil in bulk, such as olive oil or coconut. Walmart often offers a gallon of either for under ten dollars depending on where you live. Take note, olive oil has a low smoke point at 320°. This makes it perfect for salad dressing, but coconut oil may be better for cooking vegetables. Some people prefer to have both on hand, but other people prefer to choose one and stick with it.

Sea Salt

Table salt just doesn’t compare, and you can search around for the right price. Just look around and buy it in bulk if necessary. Fine sea salt is best for cooking, it helps to bring out the flavor of your food. If you’re using table salt, try cutting the salt in half, and season more cautiously so you don’t over-salt your food.

Fresh Ground Black Pepper

You'll have to stock your pantry with peppercorns and grind them if you want a fresher alternative to pre-ground pepper. Peppercorns are often sold with a grinder, and cost about $3 at most stores.

Red Wine Vinegar

If you want to balance a sweet and savory dish, then add a little acidity, which means adding vinegar. If you're making your own salad dressings, this is even more essential. Red wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar (which can usually be found for $1) are almost interchangeable. For a little more money, try the musky but slightly sweet flavor of Balsamic vinegar. And, rice vinegar, also known as rice wine vinegar, is great for Asian-inspired food.

Spices

Do you have a favorite food? Then, stock your pantry with the right spices too! If you like Italian food, you'll want to stock your pantry with red pepper flakes, oregano, and fennel. If you prefer Latin flavors, get out your smoked paprika, cinnamon, and cumin. Rosemary and thyme are a solid choice. Spices can be bought slowly over time, and you can get a vast majority of them for under two dollars.

Tips for Stretching it Out

If you don’t want to go broke, you have to realize you won’t be cooking three meals a day. Here are some tips to stick to three meals a day without going broke.

Plan Ahead

You'll have to plan the number of meals you're making each week. Meal prepping is an excellent way to buy in bulk and use all the ingredients, so they don't' go bad. Buying in bulk keeps everything cheaper per serving, but not everything you buy in bulk will last if you don't cook and freeze it. If you're cooking for just yourself, for example, a recipe may have 4 servings! In case you don't want to eat all the meals at once, freeze or store them in the fridge for later.

Check Bulk Bins

Even if you aren't buying in bulk, you can weigh out the amount you need. It's a great strategy for dry foods such as spices, grains, dried fruits, and nuts.

Skip Family Size

While it can be great to buy some things in family size, more than likely family sizes will go to waste. Don’t get a membership to Sam’s, BJs or Costco’s unless you’re feeding a significant number of people. Remember, wasted food is wasted money.

Don’t Buy Name Brand

To stick to a budget, you may have to give up name brand products with few exceptions to the rule. Usually, name brand and generic products have little differentiation between ingredients. Before paying the higher premium for name brand products, compare the two ingredient labels.

Look for Sales

Sign up for your preferred store's email newsletter to get the latest deals delivered directly to your email inbox. Stores offer leader items, usually found on the front page, at a huge discount. Sometimes, stores lose money on these deals! When the time is right, take advantage of these deep discounts to stock your freezer.

Leverage Leftovers Properly

Always store your leftovers properly for more meals to be used for any meal at any time of the day. It's not enough to store leftovers for use later. You must eat them, so they don't go to waste. When in doubt, repurpose leftovers into new meals. For example, a piece of smoked meat can be removed from the bone, shredded, and used in barbecue sandwiches.

What to Always Buy Fresh

Buying fresh is essential to eating healthy, but it can turn your inexpensive meals into expensive ones if you don’t figure out what you should and shouldn’t buy fresh.

Onions

Scores of savory recipes include onions. Due to price concerns, go with whatever is on sale. White and yellow can be interchangeable, but red onions are a bit more expensive and shouldn't be used regularly. You'll usually buy only one red onion as opposed to the cost-effective, 5-pound bags of white and yellow onions. When buying onions, make sure they have a light sheen, no signs of visible mold, and crisp skin. Take note, onions should be stored at room temperature.

If a recipe calls for a ¼ cup or less of onions, then substitute the smaller and often cheaper alternative, shallots. The advantage of buying smaller portions of shallots is you only buy what you need.

Potatoes

While mashed potatoes packets may be easy, it's still better to buy potatoes fresh. Red potatoes can be just as expensive as mountain or fingerling potatoes, but russet potatoes are the cheaper choice. With real, russet potatoes you can make everything from fries, stews, mashed potatoes or even hash browns. When choosing potatoes, look for ones without mold spots, sprouts or green things. Store potatoes in a dark, cool place away from onions. Storing your onions and potatoes together can speed up decay.

Tomatoes

Your tomatoes should be bright red or yellow, and they should be tender. If it's firm and a pale red, then it's probably mealy and bland in taste, which is no good for any recipe. Tomatoes attached to the vine often have a better flavor, but the minor upgrade in taste is hardly worth the cost difference.

Tomatoes are best in-season around summer or early-fall. In-season tomatoes taste amazing, and are less expensive due to more availability. As far as canned tomatoes go, purchase whole canned tomatoes, and crush them before using them. When using canned tomatoes, cut and add them to your dish.

Fresh Herbs

Some herbs should be bought dried, but others need to be fresh. Thyme and rosemary can be bought either dried or fresh depending on what is cheaper for you, and so can basil, but it's usually best dried. Cilantro and parsley should be bought fresh. When buying fresh, store them by putting the stems in a glass of water, and then cover them with the plastic bag they were sold in. put them in the refrigerator, and they should last for a week or more.

You can also puree fresh herbs and place them in an ice cube tray before freezing them. You can find fresh herbs at your grocery store, but your local farmer's market or flea market will usually sell them cheaper. When using dried herbs instead of fresh herbs, use a third of the amount of fresh herbs. For example, if the recipe calls for a tablespoon of basil, if you're using dried basil you'll only want to use a teaspoon.

Garlic

Garlic goes a long way, so buy fresh! It's worth the extra effort to peel and mince it, especially when prepping a meal. Look for a firm head with white paper skins and no visible signs of mold. For a deeper discount with a small sacrifice in flavor, try pre-minced raw garlic or roasted garlic. Not to be mistaken though, fresh garlic still has a stronger, more distinct taste!

Lemons

Lemons can be used for their juice and their zest. Bottled lemon juice or dried zest just don’t compare. Look for a bright, shiny yellow skin without any green tones. To get them to last longer, you’ll want to place them in the fridge.

Avocados

Since avocados bruise easily, most stores carry them not quite ripe. Purchase avocados a few days ahead when you plan to use them. To check for ripeness, lightly squeeze the fruit and look for a gentle give. If the avocado is still firm, then expect few more days before full ripening.

Bell Peppers

These are a cheap, nutritious vegetable. Green bell peppers are the cheapest, but also come in orange, yellow, red and even purple. Of course, purple bell peppers are an expensive option available in select stores. Red, orange, and yellow bell peppers are sweeter than green bell peppers. Whatever color you choose, it should be firm and vibrant when buying them.

Leafy Greens

Kale and spinach are a little more expensive as far as leafy greens are concerned, but they're healthy and won't break the bank. Between the two, spinach is usually cheaper. Lettuce is the most affordable option for salads, but you can't substitute lettuce for a recipe calling for spinach or kale. When choosing lettuce, iceberg is the most affordable, and Romaine is second. However, some grocery stores sell artesian lettuce, which will give you a variety cheap options.

Cheap Ingredient Substitutions

We all have those few recipes we can’t live without, and that’s where substitutions come in handy.

Red & White Wine

There's a reason people have cooking wine. It's an inexpensive substitute if you can't afford a ten-dollar bottle. You'll often find it next to cooking oils in grocery stores, and are usually only a few dollars. If you want a non-alcoholic alternative, then use chicken broth for white wine and cranberry juice for red wine.

Truffles

Ruffles add a complex flavor to a dish, but they're way too pricey for the average person. You can use truffle oil for a fraction of the cost. It'll deliver a similar flavor. If you're looking for texture, you can substitute for other mushrooms, such as porcini mushrooms, which have a pungent flavor.

Saffron

This is one of the most expensive spices out there, but you can sometimes get them in the international aisle a lot cheaper. However, if you're having a hard time finding or affording them, you can combine turmeric and paprika together as a substitute.

Arrowroot Starch

Some baking recipes require arrowroot starch, but you can substitute it in equal measures with cornstarch.

Buttermilk

Buttermilk is more expensive than regular milk, but a good substitution is a mixture of one tablespoon of lemon juice per one cup of milk.

Brandy or Rum

Maybe your favorite recipe calls for brandy. If so, use brandy extract instead to save on cost. A teaspoon of imitation brandy per ¼ cup of water in equal measures works fine. The same goes for rum!

Heavy Cream

If heavy cream is out of your budget, try equal measures evaporated milk, which is cheaper and found in the canned food aisles.

Lemongrass

If you're having a hard time finding lemongrass where you are, or it'll break your budget, substitute it in equal measures for lemon zest for a similar taste.

Ground Beef

While ground beef can be cheap, it can also be expensive depending on the time of the year, your budget, or even where you live. While ground beef can be five dollars or more a pound, you can get ground turkey instead for under three dollars a pound.

Ground Bison

If bison is a must, try ground beef instead. It’s not as cheap as ground turkey, but ground beef will have a similar taste.

Veal

Veal is a particularly expensive cut of meat, but you can substitute it for pork or chicken. Although, the latter option has a more significant difference in taste.

Cardamom

This is a spice that's in Indian, Scandinavian, and Middle Eastern cuisine. It's an expensive spice, but you can substitute equal parts of ground cinnamon and nutmeg to get a similar spicy and warm flavor.

Vanilla Bean

Vanilla extract is usually a great substitute. Vanilla bean is expensive, and even buying one or two can break your budget, so just use vanilla extract instead. For most recipes, the artificial vanilla extract works, but pure vanilla extract does have a crisper flavor.

Tips to Save Even More

Are you still hard-pressed to save more money? Then, try a few more tips to master cooking on a budget!

Look at the International Food Section

This is a section in your supermarket that's either a part of an aisle or usually a whole aisle. Most importantly, it's a great place to save money on items such as seasonings, sauces, and marinades. This is a cheaper place to find spices in your store than the actual spice section. It's also easier to find bulk-sized bags of spires instead of just buying a small bottle.

Go Meatless Every Once in a While

You're probably using one of the most expensive ingredients for every meal - meat. Meatless Mondays are famous for adoptiong a meatless meal or two for cost-cutting. If you eat one or two dinners without meat a week, you can still buy high-end ingredients without breaking the bank. You can even sneak in a few more expensive cuts of meat by going meatless to save up for it. This will give you better quality meals overall.

Make & Don’t Buy

Learn how to prep some items on your own if you want to save money. Grating your own cheese will help save money. And, making your own waffles and pancakes to pop into the toaster as needed helps too. There are many things you buy for convenience, but you have to realize you’re choosing convenience for a premium.

Make Things Differently

Maybe there's a recipe you're in love with, but the ingredients are too highly priced. In this case, try to find recipes with cheaper ingredients or substitutions. Perhaps the recipe calls for lamb. Usually, in this case, you can use ground beef. If the recipe calls for red potatoes, you can generally use white potatoes and adjust the cooking time. When substituting, you're looking for things that will cook the same and only change the taste a little to not at all.

Keep an Inventory

A sure-fire budget killer is buying already-stocked items because you didn't realize what you had on hand. Keep an inventory of the ingredients you have for your meals, so you know what to buy and skip for another shopping trip. If you have an excess, it's likely to go to waste too. When you run out of something, then just put it on the shopping list.

Don’t Go Shopping Hungry

When you shop hungry, you’re going to buy with your stomach. Hunger is more likely to cause you to make poor choices, such as buying items of convenience or worse yet junk food. If you’re afraid you’ll be hungry before you shop, grab a protein bar, drink a glass of water, grab a piece of fruit or even a glass of milk to help fill you.

Buy Certain Items Frozen

Sometimes fresh isn't always best, so consider buying frozen out-of-season fruit or vegetables. I believe canned vegetables are just as expensive and usually have a much different taste. Frozen vegetables have a more similar taste to fresh vegetables. You can even get vegetable medleys if you aren't looking for just one vegetable as your side dish.

Split Your Shopping Trip

If you only have yourself or a few people to cook for, then buying in bulk isn't something that can be done without a lot of storage space. That's where splitting your shopping trip with a friend comes in handy. Together, you can buy in bulk, and split up the items. It will help you and your friend to cut down the grocery bill. Having a friend come along for the ride makes shopping trips more enjoyable *and* affordable.

Use a Slow Cooker

Most people own a slow cooker, but very few people use it regularly. If you're having a hard time staying away from fast food for convenience, you will want to pull your slow cooker out instead. Just throw everything in, and you'll have an easy, cheap meal. It'll just take a few minutes in the morning, which makes it much easier. If Chinese takeout is really calling your name, try a delicious, slow cooker beef and broccoli meal. Then, you'll only need to make some rice, and you'll have an easy meal to satisfy your cravings and cost-cutting needs.

Buy a Water Filter

Buy something to filter your water that can be reused with only a few filter replacements on occasion. Having a water filter helps expenses on bottled water. And, water overall is cheaper and healthier than soft drinks or other popular beverages such as sweet tea or juices. If you drink a glass of water before you go to the grocery store, you're also less likely to buy a drink while shopping.

Skip the Extra Often

You can have a treat or dessert once in a while, but it shouldn't be a regular occurrence. You don't always need to have a snack once or even two times a day. When you're eating healthy meals, you'll feel fuller for a longer time.

Make Meat a Side Dish

If you don’t want to go entirely meatless for meals, start thinking of meat as a side dish. If you’re having a stir fry, for example, have a vegetable stir-fry. You can then have shredded teriyaki chicken as a side dish, which will mean you’re spending less on meat for that meal.

Keep an Eye Out for Manger’s Specials

These specials are usually on a few items, and they can change by the day or the week depending on the store. You can check these specials when shopping and consider changing your meals to accommodate accordingly. Only change the meal plan if it’ll drastically reduce the amount you’re spending that week. If you don’t want to change your meal plan but want to take advantage of the sale, consider freezing the item.

Look for Daily Markdowns

You can add up the savings with daily markdowns. Produce that's marked down will generally only last three to five days if there's no discoloration when you purchase it. If there is discoloration, it'll only last one to two days. In this case, cook and store it in the fridge or freezer to make it last longer. If you're buying meat from the daily markdowns, you'll need to freeze or cook it by the expiration date.

Limit Your Trips

The more shopping trips you make, the more likely you are to buy things you don’t need. Try to go to the store only once a week. You may only be going to the store for a bell pepper, but it isn’t likely you’ll leave with just a bell pepper.

Seasonal Fruits & Vegetables

Remember buying in-season is the cheapest way to get fresh ingredients! Leave room in your deep freezer for surplus, so you don’t have to eat strictly seasonal.

Spring Fruits & Vegetables

Spring is during the months of March, April and May. Be on the lookout for these fruits and veggies:

- Apricots
- Asparagus
- Artichokes
- Endives
- Barbados Cherries
- Butter Lettuce
- Bitter Melon
- Broccoli
- Chayote Squash
- Cactus
- Chives
- Collard Greens
- Fava Beans
- Corn
- Fennel
- Green Beans
- Honeydew
- Jackfruit
- Limes
- Lychee
- Mango
- Manoa Lettuce
- Morel Mushrooms
- Mustard Greens
- Oranges
- Pea Pods
- Ramps
- Radicchio
- Purple Asparagus
- Pineapple
- Snow Peas
- Red Leaf Lettuce

- Rhubarb
- Sorrel
- Spring Baby Lettuce
- Spinach
- Strawberries
- Swiss Chard
- Vidalia Onions
- Watercress
- White Asparagus

Best Buys: Snow Peas, Spring Baby Lettuce, Spinach, Strawberries, Butter Lettuce, Pineapple, Oranges, Squash, Jackfruit, Asparagus, Collard Greens, Honeydew

Summer Fruits & Vegetables

Summer is during the months of June, July, and August. Be on the lookout for these fruits and veggies:

- Beets
- Bell Peppers
- Black Crowberries
- Black Currants
- Blackberries
- Boysenberries
- Blueberries
- Breadfruit
- Asian Pears
- American Cucumbers
- Apricots
- Chile
- Barbados Cherries
- Butter Lettuce
- Casaba Melon
- Cantaloupe
- Champagne Grapes
- Summer Squash
- Sour Cherries
- Chinese Long Beans
- Endives
- Elderberries
- Cucumbers
- Crenshaw Melons
- Corn
- French Beans
- Figs
- Garlic
- Grape Tomatoes
- Galla Melon
- Grapes
- Grapefruit

- Hearts of Palm
- Honeydew
- Jackfruit
- Jalapeno Peppers
- Edamame
- Key Limes
- Lima Beans
- Limes
- Loganberries
- Loquat
- Lychee
- Manoa Lettuce
- Mulberries
- Nectarines
- Okra
- Raspberries
- Radishes
- Plums
- Persian Melons
- Peas
- Passion Fruit
- Most Spinach
- Rose Apples
- Sugar Apples
- Shallots
- Strawberries
- Sugar Snap Peas
- Tomatoes
- Watermelons
- Yukon Gold Potatoes
- Zucchini

Best Buys: Yukon Gold Potatoes, Watermelons, Shallots, Spinach, Jalapeño Peppers, Honeydew, Jackfruit, Bell Peppers, Cucumbers, Corn, All Squash, Strawberries, Tomatoes, Peas, Blueberries, Garlic

Fall Fruits & Vegetables

Fall is during the months of September, October and November. Be on the lookout for these fruits and veggies:

- Acorn Squash
- Black Salsify
- Belgian Endive
- Black Crowberries
- Asian Pear
- Barbados Cherries
- Broccoli
- Brussels Sprout
- Butter Lettuce
- Butternut Squash
- Buttercup Squash
- Cactus Pear
- Cape Gooseberries
- Cauliflower
- Chayote Squash
- Chinese Long Beans
- Crab Apples
- Cranberries
- Date Plum
- Daikon Radish
- Delicata Squash
- Endive
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Guava
- Grapes
- Heart of Palm
- Jalapeno Peppers
- Jerusalem Artichoke
- Key limes
- Kumquats
- Muscadine Grapes

- Ong Choy Spinach
- Mushrooms
- Passion Fruit
- Pear
- Persimmons
- Sugar Apple
- Sharon Fruit
- Quince
- Pumpkin
- Pineapple
- Pomegranate
- Sunflower Kernels
- Sweet Dumpling Squash
- Sweet Potatoes’
- Turnips
- Swiss Chard

Best Buys: Pumpkin, Pineapple, Any Squash, Sweet potatoes, Ong Choy Spinach, Swiss Chard, Garlic, Ginger, Cauliflower, Any Lettuce, Brussels Sprouts

Winter Fruits & Vegetables

Winter is in the months of December, January and February. Be on the lookout for these fruits and veggies:

- Clemintines
- Collard Greens
- Dates Plums
- Delicata Squash
- Kale
- Grapefruit
- Cardoon
- Cactus Pear
- Buttercup Squash
- Endives
- Brussels Sprouts
- Kiwi
- Leeks
- Mandarin Oranges
- Papaya
- Navel Oranges
- Passion Fruit
- Pear
- Persimmons
- Red Banana
- Pomegranate
- Red Currants
- Sharon Fruit
- Sweet Dumpling Squash
- Sweet Potatoes
- Tangerines
- Turnips

Best Buys: Tangerines, Turnips, Any Squash, Sweet Potatoes, Brussels Sprouts, Navel Oranges, Grapefruit, Leeks, Collard Greens, Collard Greens

Year-Round Fruits & Vegetables

You won't need to wait for these fruits and vegetables to come in season to enjoy them. Be on the lookout for these year-round fruits and veggies:

- Apples
- Amaranth
- Avocados
- Banana Squash
- Bell Peppers
- Bananas
- Black Eyed Peas
- Bok Choy
- Broccoli
- Burdock Root
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Celery Root
- Celery
- Chinese Eggplants
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Coconut
- Dandelion Greens
- Leek
- Lettuce
- Lemons
- Olives
- Onions
- Mushrooms
- Parsnips
- Pearl Onions
- Papaya
- Rutabagas
- Potatoes
- Salad Savory
- Snow Peas
- Wasabi Root

- Yucca Root

Best Buys: Onions, Mushrooms, Parsnips, Potatoes (Russet), Lemons, Lettuce, Leeks, Apples, Avocados, Bell Peppers, Celery, Chinese Eggplant

Start Meal Planning Today

There's more to meal planning than just making a list of meals you're going to make and creating a shopping list. Consider a few of these options and alternatives to meal prepping and planning.

Meal Planning Not Meal Kits

There is a difference between meal planning and meal kits, which are mailed straight to your home. Meal planning requires buying the ingredients, and cooking your meals before freezing or packaging them in the fridge. On the other hand, meal kits usually have unique recipes and exotic ingredients, but at an astronomical price. With meal kits, you're spending at least ten dollars a meal, and you'll still need to prepare and cook all the dishes! Meal planning allows for an overlap in ingredients, and cooking in advance. So, there aren't dishes to clean every single day, and you can utilize fresh ingredients and leftovers.

Why Do It

In short, meal planning saves you money and time. Those are the main reasons you should do so. However, it also helps you to eat out less, eat healthier, and use all of your food to reduce food waste. It allows you to make accurate grocery lists, helps to stave off the temptation of junk food, and helps you to sharpen your skills as a home chef. The best part is no matter how busy life gets, you're ready to take on the day without skipping a meal.

Getting Started

Even if you aren't the planning type, you can get used to meal prepping so you make life easier. Some people plan for the entire week's meals while some people can only plan dinners. A lot of people find planning breakfasts and lunches to be easy too. Experiment and try out all the options so you see what works best for you. Maybe you can't plan for more than eight meals a week plus a few breakfasts. Possibly, you're great at planning a month in advance. It's all up to you. Start by taking inventory and making a plan. Remember that meal planning may need practice, but it shouldn't be stressful.

Look at Your Calendar

You need to look at your schedule to see when you can meal prep. Look at which nights you'll need a meal for if you don't plan to prep for the whole week. Will you be out for one night and won't be getting home early? Does your boss buy you a meal one day, so you don't have to prep for it? Do you need lunch for school or work? Are you getting up early one day and need a snack? Identify everything on your schedule so you know what you need to cook in advance and why. And, plan more intricate recipes for your free time or the weekend.

Select the Right Recipes

You need to pick out the recipes that work for your tastes, budget, and time. Most people opt to keep breakfast as simple as possible, such as smoothies, homemade protein bars, or just cereal so meal prepping is unnecessary. You also need to pick recipes that meet your time restraints. Double a recipe once or twice a week if you're cooking the night of, and you'll have leftovers. You could also take a day out of the week to prepare meals you'll use later.

Meal Prepping Essentials

Other than your ingredients and a freezer, you'll need a few things to meal prep properly.

- **Aluminum Foil:** is a great way to freeze meat without getting frost burn.
- **Wax Paper:** is ideal for freezing things on because it peels right off. But, avoiding putting it in the oven because it'll melt.
- **Freezer Bags:** You'll need gallon- and quart-size freezer bags for individual ingredients or meals. If you're only cooking for one, you'll need sandwich-size bags, too. You can freeze produce, cooked meats and certain meals in these bags too. The best part is they're easy to label with a permanent marker.
- **Glass Containers:** are wonderful for anything you plan to microwave later, but it's a little more costly than plastic options. Just remember, even though glass containers cost more upfront, they'll last much longer than their plastic counterparts.
- **Plastic Containers:** aren't the best options, but are more affordable. It's also better to travel with plastic if you're accident prone. Also, some say it's healthier to avoid microwaving your food in plastic because some containers can release BPA and phthalates into your food, especially meat and cheese. If you're looking for plastic you can microwave, buy plastics that are BPA-free.
- **Permanent Markers:** You don't have to get name brand. Just get something that isn't dried out and that you can read easily. Worst case scenario, you can always use masking tape and a pen to mark your containers with the dish name and prep date.

Bulk Roasting

If you want to roast things in bulk, here's a quick guide for temperatures:

- **Very Low:** 250-275 degrees for braises and slow roasts
- **Low:** 300-325 degrees for Vegetables, Chicken Casseroles & Cakes
- **Moderate:** 350-375 degrees for pot roasts, most vegetables, quiche and muffins
- **High:** 400-425 degrees for baked or roasted potatoes and quick roasts
- **Very High:** 450 degrees for pizza and bread

Freezing Vegetables

If you're freezing vegetables yourself, you'll need to blanch them for the best texture. Otherwise, you'll lose the crispness fresh vegetables have when thawed. To blanch veggies, you need to submerge and cook it in boiling water. Once you're done blanching vegetables, drop them in an ice bath to immediately stop cooking, and then drain them. Portion the veggies out before freezing them. Here's a general guide for blanching basic vegetables.

- **Celery:** 3 Minutes
- **Cauliflower:** 3 Minutes (Chopped into 1-Inch Pieces)
- **Asparagus:** 2-4 Minutes
- **Broccoli:** 2 Minutes (Chopped into 1-Inch Pieces)
- **Potatoes:** 3-5 Minutes
- **Onions:** 4-5 Minutes (Quartered)
- **Peas in Pod:** 2-3 Minutes
- **Carrots:** 2 Minutes (Sliced)
- **Whole Baby Carrots:** 5 Minutes
- **Summer Squash:** 3 Minutes

Aldi vs. Walmart

Let’s take a look at two competitive grocery stores in the US right now - Aldi’s, and Walmart. Both have great prices, and you may have both in your city. But, which one should you choose? Let’s compare the two.

Aldi

This grocer erupted in Germany after World War 2. You don't always need fancy stuff. They just needed food they could afford, and that's exactly what the store built its motto on. They are small stores with a much smaller selection than Walmart. There are no bags, and no baggers. The grocer requires you return your own cart as a way to cut labor costs. You put a quarter into the shopping cart to use it, and you get your quarter back when you return it.

They even treat their employees great with paid holidays and a five percent match on their 401K retirement plan. They also streamline everything for their employees, which allows them to offer you a lower price. The products are displayed in the original shipping boxes, and have various barcodes to make them easy to scan. The grocer makes it cheap and fast to shop for your food. You can check for a store near you or one coming soon on their website.

You'll need to bring your own bags, but you can get reusable bags for as little as a dollar. They also leave empty boxes around for you to take with you if you forget your bags, which cuts down on their waste. They specialize in affordable basics, so they provide you with seasonal items. Every Aldi's has a different layout, so take a trip to your local Aldi before you buy anything.

The produce is always fresh, so it'll last as long as any other store. They usually have the essentials such as oranges, berries, lemons, and apples on hand. But exotic fruits make an appearance if they're in-season, including pomegranates and mangos. Aldi has a tremendous selection of vegetables including the basics such as sweet peppers, carrots, potatoes, celery, and onion. Seasonal produce is usually available including fall and winter squash. Though it costs a bit more, Aldi has an organic section if needed.

Frozen vegetables are also available, and Aldi has off-brands comparable to the other name brands. They even have frozen pizza if you're trying to avoid take-out. In the refrigerated section, you'll find eggs and dairy products. Some people complain the milk doesn't last as long, so you may not want to go for a gallon unless you plan to use it up right away. And, fans of gourmet cheeses will love the discounts. Canned food is inexpensive, and they have a limited selection of grains. You'll find mostly navy and black beans, quinoa and rice.

The selection may be lacking, but the price and quality are exceptional. If you really need a fix for beer and wine, they have you covered. Most of their store brand wines are less than five dollars a bottle, and they're great for cooking or drinking. The limited selection of beer is worth the price and won't break

your bank. Sadly, you can’t use coupons in this store, which can be a serious drawback. But, the price cuts make it worthwhile for a lot of people.

Walmart

Walmart has one distinct advantage over Aldi - coupons. If you're a coupon clipper, consider going to Walmart because you get better bang for your bucks! Compare local ads to see if Walmart is priced lower or at least even with Aldi before you shop. Walmart has affordable prices, and it has a larger produce and grain section than Aldi. So, you may have to venture here for a few ingredients.

Walmart has also recently let you shop online, which can save you time and temptation. Just search for what you need, and you can pick it up in-store or at curbside. They usually have a coupon code floating around online for your first purchase, so do a quick search before you place your initial order! While they offer shipping for their food, it'll rack up your bill again if you choose it. You can usually pick up your shopping order within twenty-four hours. Walmart also has an app you can use to save even more money.

The retail chain even has a Savings Catcher app you can install in your mobile device so you can get money back if you've purchased an item you could've gotten cheaper at a different store. Once you prove your purchase, Walmart will give you the money back in the form of an e-gift card. Walmart offers their own coupons online to help even more! If you can use all of these together, Walmart may be the best option for you. If all of that seems stressful, then choose Aldi instead.

Using Soup Properly

People don’t start with soup because they are under the impression that having both a meal and soup for dinner will double their cost. This isn’t the case. If you start with soup, then you’re more likely to eat less. You can cook less meat, and you can prepare a smaller portion overall. The soup is often cheaper than the actual dinner would be without it since you’d eat more. In this chapter, we’ll discuss soup recipes great for saving money. You can also freeze and use soup for lunch or a more significant portion for dinner all on its own.

Freezing Soup Easily

Don’t just freeze your soup in one large tub if you want it to come out right. You’re not going to be scooping frozen soup out and reheating it. Instead, follow these simple steps.

- **Step 1:** Let it cool all the way. If you pop hot soup into your freezer or fridge around other food, your other food could spoil. Instead, allow it to cool naturally or place the pot in a bath of ice water in your sink. Stir it often to release the heat sooner.
- **Step 2:** Package your soup by getting out freezer safe zip-top plastic bags. They can either be a quart size or a gallon depending on how much soup you want in a serving. Place them in a bowl and cuff your bag over the edges. Ladle your soup into each one, and then let out the excess air before sealing them.
- **Step 3:** Freeze your bags by laying them flatly in a single layer in your freezer. Then, stack your flattened bags to save on freezer space.
- **Step 4:** You’ll want to thaw your soup in the fridge overnight, and occasionally stir when you reheat them over the stove or even in the microwave. You’ll need to microwave your soup in intervals and stir in between to keep it from popping.

Soups Under $2

While you'll also find some soups under the lunch area, here are some quick appetizer soups and meals to get you started.

Easy Chicken Congee

Trade the chicken out for shrimp for an additional $0.75 a serving when using a pound of shrimp.

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.75
Ingredients:

- 1 Red Chili, Deseeded & Chopped (Optional) ($0.30)
- 1 Bowl Congee, Cooked in Chicken Broth ($2.00)
- 1 Inch Piece Ginger, Peeled & Chopped ($0.30)
- Shredded Chicken, Cooked ($4.00)
- 1 Scallion, Fresh & Chopped ($0.20)
- Soy Sauce to Taste ($0.10)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Chopped ($0.10)

Directions:

1. Add your garlic, ginger, and chili into your congee, simmering for about ten minutes.
2. Add in your scallions and chicken. Simmer for another two minutes.
3. Season with soy sauce, and top as desired.

Beef & Barley Stew

This recipe is a full meal, but you can cheapen it further by using a two-dollar ground turkey roll instead of beef stewing meat.

Serves: 6
Time: 8 Hours 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.32
Ingredients:

- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.40)
- 2 Carrots, Chopped ($0.60)
- 1 Celery Rib, Chopped ($0.30)
- 2 lbs. Stewing Beef (or Cheap, Chopped Beef) ($4.50)
- 1 Cup Barley ($0.75)
- 1 Bay Leaf ($0.08)
- 1 Teaspoon Paprika ($0.03)
- 1 Tablespoon Tomato Paste ($0.10)
- 4 Cups Beef Broth ($2.00)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.10)

Directions:

1. Get out a skillet and place it over medium-high heat. Add in your olive oil. Once your olive oil is hot, brown your beef in small batches before adding it to your slow cooker.
2. Add your carrots, celery, beef broth and onions. Stir in your tomato paste, paprika and barley before adding in your bay leaf.
3. Cover and cook for eight hours on low.

Broth & Eggs

This recipe is excellent for lunch or even breakfast.

Serves: 2
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.75
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Bone Broth of Choice ($2.10)
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)
- Grated Parmesan Cheese ($0.40)
- Fresh Parsley, Chopped ($0.40)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Put your broth over medium-high heat and bring it to a simmer. Add your eggs, and simmer for a few minutes. The whites should be cooked, but your yolks should still be a little runny in the soup.
2. Top with parsley, and parmesan after seasoning with salt and pepper.

Ginger Pork Congee

A dash of hot sauce will liven up the taste of this meal for under $0.10 a serving.

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.15
Ingredients:

- 1 Inch Piece Ginger, Peeled & Diced ($0.30)
- 1 Bowl Congee, Cooked in Pork Broth ($2.00)
- Handful Pork, Cooked & Shredded ($1.75)
- 2 Scallions, Chopped ($0.40)
- Soy Sauce to Taste ($0.15)

Directions:

1. Bring your congee to a simmer before adding in your ginger. Allow it to simmer for five to ten minutes.
2. Add in your scallions and pork, allowing it to simmer for two to three more minutes.
3. Add soy sauce to taste before serving.

Chicken & Vegetable Soup

If you don't like dark meat, you can trade the chicken out for chicken breasts. However, this modification increases the cost.

Serves: 7
Time: 7 Hours 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.72
Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. Boneless Chicken Thighs, Chopped ($4.15)
- 1 Onion, Small & Chopped ($0.60)
- 1 Celery Rib, Chopped ($0.30)
- ½ Small Parsnip, Chopped ($0.60)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Fresh & Chopped ($0.15)
- 1 Carrot, Chopped ($0.30)
- 1 Red Bell Pepper, Chopped ($1.75)
- 1 lb. Russet Potatoes, Peeled & Cubed ($1.25)
- 5 Cups Chicken Broth ($2.50)
- 1 Teaspoon Thyme ($0.04)
- 1 Teaspoon Sea Salt ($0.05)
- 2 Bay Leaves ($0.16)
- Black Pepper to Taste ($0.05)
- 1 Teaspoon Summer Savory ($0.10)

Directions:

1. Season your chicken with salt, pepper, and summer savory.
2. Add in all of your ingredients into a slow cooker and cook on low for six to seven hours.

Lima Bean & Chicken Stew

This soup is a full meal, and it can be made with kidney beans or the same price but different flavor.

Serves: 6
Time: 8 Hours 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.35
Ingredients:

- 4 Chicken Thighs, Bone-In & Skinless ($2.75)
- 1 Ounce Lima Beans, Frozen ($0.70)
- 16 Ounces Corn, Frozen ($0.60)
- 1 Green Pepper, Chopped ($0.90)
- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.40)
- 28 Ounces Fire Roasted Tomatoes, Undrained & Diced ($1.25)
- 2 Ounces Tomato Paste ($0.75)
- 1 ½ Ounces Worcestershire Sauce ($0.40)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.15)
- ¼ Ounce Cumin ($0.03)
- ¼ Ounce Oregano ($0.03)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Add all of your ingredients into your slow cooker and cook for eight hours.
2. Remove the chicken and discard the bone. Shred your chicken and cook for another half hour before serving.

Shrimp & Scallion Congee

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.64
Ingredients:

- 1 Bowl Congee, Cooked in Chicken Broth ($2.00)
- 1 Inch Piece Ginger, Peeled & Chopped ($0.30)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Chopped ($0.10)
- 2 Scallions, Chopped ($0.50)
- Handful Raw Shrimp ($3.00)
- Fish Sauce to Taste ($0.50)
- 1 Lemon Wedge, Optional ($0.15)

Directions:

1. Bring your congee to a simmer, and then add in your scallions, ginger, and garlic. Allow it to simmer for ten minutes, and then add in your shrimp. Cook for a few minutes before seasoning.
2. Season with fish sauce and lemon before serving.

Chicken Soup & Rice

Serves: 4
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.88
Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Chicken Thighs, Chunked ($4.25)
- 1 Onion, Small & Sliced Fine ($0.60)
- ¼ Cup Rice, Rinsed ($0.60)
- 1 Celery Rib, Chopped Fine ($0.30)
- 5 Cups Water
- 2 Carrots, Grated ($0.60)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Chopped ($0.10)
- 1 Bay Leaf ($0.08)
- 4 Tablespoons Lemon Juice ($0.18)
- ½ Cup Parsley, Fresh & Chopped Fine ($0.70)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Get out a soup pot and place it over medium heat. Sauté your onion, carrot, celery, and garlic.
2. Add your water, bay leaf, and chicken before bringing it to a boil. Simmer for ten minutes before seasoning with salt and pepper.
3. Add in your rice and allow it to cook for fifteen minutes more.
4. Remove your bay leaf and serve with parsley and lemon juice.

Chicken & Kale Soup

For a sweeter taste, use a teaspoon of honey Dijon mustard instead for only five cents more.

Serves: 6
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.41
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Chicken, Cooked & Shredded ($2.30)
- 1 Carrot, Grated ($0.30)
- 1 Onion, Small & Chopped ($0.40)
- 4 Cups Chicken Broth ($1.50)
- 1 Teaspoon Worcestershire Sauce ($0.30)
- 1 Teaspoon Dijon Mustard ($0.15)
- 1 Teaspoon Paprika ($0.03)
- 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.20)
- 1 Bunch Kale, Torn ($2.20)
- 3 Tablespoons Lemon Juice, Fresh ($0.18)
- 1 Teaspoon Lemon Zest, Grated ($0.20)
- Parmesan Cheese to Serve ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (<$0.10)

Directions:

1. Get out a soup pot and heat it over medium heat. Sauté your carrot, onion, and garlic together. Stir occasionally to keep it from sticking.
2. Add in your chicken broth, Worcestershire sauce, lemon zest, Dijon mustard, and chicken.
3. Bring it all to a boil and reduce it to a simmer for ten minutes.
4. Stir in your kale, simmering for another four minutes. Your kale should be tender. Stir in your lemon juice, and then season with salt and pepper.
5. Serve with parmesan cheese.

Tomato & Basil Broth & Eggs

If you use turkey sausage, you can virtually double the sausage in this meal for the same price.

Serves: 4
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.78
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Chicken Broth ($0.80)
- 1 Teaspoon Tomato Paste ($0.30)
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)
- ½ Link sausage, Crumbled ($1.10)
- 4 Basil Leaves, Fresh & Chopped ($0.32)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Bring the broth to a simmer, and then remove a half a cup into a bowl. With that broth mix your tomato paste, and then mix it back into your broth.
2. Add in your sausage, cooking for a minute. Add in your eggs and poach them for about five minutes.
3. Top with basil after seasoning with salt and pepper. Alternatively, you can add fresh tomato as well.

Green Chicken Chili

To make this chili a little sweeter, substitute one green bell pepper for a red bell pepper for $0.09 more per serving.

Serves: 10
Time: 6 Hours 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.51
Ingredients:

- 8 Ounces Jalapeño Slices, Pickled ($0.70)
- 2 Green Peppers, Chopped ($1.80)
- 2 Onions, Chopped ($1.20)
- 4 Chicken Breast Halves, Bone-In (Roughly 14 Ounces Each) ($4.25)
- 32 Ounces Salsa Verde ($3.40)
- 4 Ounces Green Chilies, Chopped ($0.70)
- 8 Ounces Sour Cream ($1.00)
- 31 Ounces Navy Beans, Rinsed & Drained ($1.35)
- 4 Ounces Cilantro, Fresh & Minced ($0.65)

Directions:

1. Place your onion, peppers, chicken, chilies, and jalapeños into your slow cooker.
2. Top with chicken and salsa, cooking for six hours. Your chicken should be tender.
3. Shred your chicken before returning it back to your slow cooker and heat all the way through with the rest of your ingredients.
4. Serve warm.

Potato Chowder

Serves: 12
Time: 10 Hours 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.92
Ingredients:

- 64 Ounces Potatoes, Diced ($4.20)
- 3 Cans Chicken Broth (14.5 Ounces Each) ($1.25)
- 2 ½ Ounces Onion, Chopped ($0.60)
- 10 ¾ Ounces Condensed Cream of Chicken Soup, Undiluted ($1.10)
- ¼ Teaspoon Pepper ($0.05)
- 8 Ounces Cream Cheese, Cubed ($0.80)
- 8 Ounces Bacon, Cooked & Crumbled ($2.60)
- Minced Chives for Garnish ($0.40)

Directions:

1. Add your soup, onion, broth, and potatoes into your slow cooker, cooking for ten hours on low. Your potatoes should be tender.
2. Stir in your cream cheese, and then season with pepper before blending.
3. Garnish with chives and bacon.

Egg Drop Soup

This soup is a classic appetizer, and it will help make any meal more filling! Hot sauce is optional, and it strays from the traditional taste.

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.56
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Chicken Broth, Low Sodium ($1.25)
- 2 Eggs, Beaten ($0.50)
- Chives to Taste ($0.30)
- Hot Sauce to Taste, Optional ($0.10)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Bring your broth to a simmer, and then pour your eggs in. Pour them in slow and steady. And, continue to stir for about two minutes.
2. Your eggs should form thin strands.
3. Sprinkle with chives, and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Slow Cooker Meals

While you've already found some use in your slow cooker, also known as a crockpot, in the soup section above, there is so much more you can do with it. There's nothing like a crockpot meal to keep you from buying out while still having the lazy, laid-back day you desire.

Pot Roast

For roughly $2.00 less you can use a pork roast instead to lower the price of this traditional pot roast recipe.

Serves: 6
Time: 9 Hours 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.94
Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. Pot Roast ($7.00)
- 2 Onions, Sliced ($1.20)
- 4 Cloves Garlic, Crushed ($0.10)
- 6 Carrots, Quartered ($.85)
- 4 Celery Ribs, Chopped ($0.70)
- 4 Tablespoons Tomato Paste ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Chicken Broth ($0.75)
- 1 Teaspoon Rosemary, Chopped ($0.35)
- ¼ Teaspoon Black Pepper ($0.05)
- 1 Tablespoon Basil, Dried ($0.03)
- 1 Tablespoon Oregano, Dried ($0.03)

Directions:

1. Grease your slow cooker, and then get out your roast. Season your roast with salt, pepper, basil, oregano, and rosemary before placing it into your crockpot.
2. Get out a bowl and combine your tomato paste and chicken broth, pouring it over the meat.
3. Put your vegetables around the meat, cooking for nine to eleven hours on low.

Chicken & Black Beans

Red onion adds a bold flavor to this slow cooker meal, but it can be swapped out for white onion if necessary.

Serves: 5
Time: 6 Hours 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.82
Ingredients:

- 4 Chicken Breast Halves, Diced ($4.25)
- ¼ Teaspoon Cayenne Pepper ($0.03)
- 1 Teaspoon Cumin ($0.03)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.15)
- 1 Red Onion, Chopped Fine ($0.85)
- 3 Cups Black Beans, Cooked, Rinsed & Drained ($1.20)
- 1 Cup Corn, Frozen & Thawed ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Cherry Tomatoes, Halved ($1.25)
- 1/3 Cup Cilantro, Fresh & Chopped Fine ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Rub your chicken down with cumin and cayenne.
2. Grease your slow cooker before placing in your chicken.
3. Add the remaining ingredients, and cook on low heat for six hours.

Easy Chicken Drumstick Meal

Frozen broccoli can be added to this meal instead of fresh if necessary. But, you'll need to reduce the cooking time so they don't become too tender.

Serves: 4
Time: 6 Hours 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $2.01
Ingredients:

- 8 Chicken Drumsticks ($4.20)
- 1 Head Broccoli, Chopped into Florets ($1.40)
- 1 Leek, Sliced ($1.15)
- 1 Carrot, Chopped ($0.30)
- 1 Sweet Potato, Peeled & Cubed ($0.60)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Crushed ($0.05)
- 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.20)
- 1 Teaspoon Oregano, Dried ($0.03)
- 1 Teaspoon Rosemary, Dried ($0.03)
- SEA Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Heat your oil in a skillet over medium heat and add in your drumsticks. Cook for three to four minutes per side.
2. Grease your slow cooker, and then add all ingredients in.
3. Cook on low heat for six hours before serving.

Slow Cooked Beef Meal

Quinces are similar to pears so you can substitute them if it's easier to find!

Serves: 6
Time: 9 Hours 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.67
Ingredients:

- 2-3 lbs. Roast Beef Round ($6.15)
- 4 Parsnips, Peeled & Quartered Lengthwise ($0.60)
- 6 Carrots, Quartered Lengthwise ($0.70)
- 2 Quinces, Peeled, cored & Cubed ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Beef Broth ($1.10)
- 2 Tablespoon Apple Puree ($0.40)
- 1 Tablespoon Dijon Mustard ($0.20)
- 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.15)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Grease your slow cooker, and sprinkle your roast with salt and pepper before adding it in.
2. Whisk your beef broth and apple puree before whisking in your mustard. The mixture should be smooth.
3. Pour this mix over the meat, and then arrange your quinces, parsnips, and carrots around it.
4. Cook on low for nine to eleven hours.

Ground Beef & Cabbage

Cut the cost of meat in half to use turkey instead of ground beef with this meal. You'll just want to add a little more salt and pepper.

Serves: 5
Time: 5 Hours 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.69
Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Ground Beef ($4.00)
- ½ Cabbage, Shredded ($1.10)
- ½ Onion, Chopped ($0.50)
- 2 Leeks, white Part Only, Chopped ($1.20)
- 1 Tablespoon Paprika ($0.03)
- 1/3 Cup Chicken Broth ($0.60)
- 1 Tomato, Diced ($0.60)
- 4 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.25)
- ½ Teaspoon Cumin ($0.03)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Get out a saucepan and sauté your leek and onion in olive oil until tender.
2. Add in your tomato, paprika, cumin, ground beef, salt, and pepper. Sauté for another two to three minutes.
3. Add all ingredients to your slow cooker, cooking for five to six minutes.

Smoothies on the Cheap

Famously known for use as a breakfast, lunch on the go, dessert or snack, the smoothie can get expensive! If you aren't making smoothies in-season or using cheap ingredients, you'll blow your entire food budget fast. However, this chapter can help.

Cheap Smoothie Tips:

Here are a few tips to make your smoothies even more affordable.

- **Buy In-Season:** if you're making your own recipe or deciding which one to use, then buy your fruits and veggies in season.
- **Buy & Freeze:** If strawberries are on sale, then buy them up! For example, during Memorial Day Weekend, strawberries cost a dollar per pound. I can hardly go through a pound without it going to waste, but I bought six pounds since they're usually three times as much. I froze the rest! Freeze them in portion size bags so that you can pull them out as needed.
- **Cucumber Leftovers:** A really frugal option is freezing cucumber peels and adding them to smoothies. They taste great, and you only need one to two per smoothies
- **Avocado:** There are often sales on avocados in the US, and you can freeze these after cutting them as well.
- **Buy Frozen Greens:** Spinach costs less frozen than fresh, and it' a great addition to a green smoothie.
- **Freeze Milk:** if you have a gallon of milk about to go bad, freeze it in ice cube trays and keep it for smoothies later.
- **Use Tea:** You can often get tea bags on sale, such as chia or green tea, which you can also brew and freeze into ice cubes to help thicken and flavor your smoothies.

Thick & Creamy Smoothies Tips

While some people like a slushy-like texture, other people want creamy smoothies. Thick and creamy smoothies are usually more filling too, but you don't have to make it expensive or unhealthy. Here are a few quick ways to thicken a smoothie.

- **Cottage Cheese:** This is a healthy way to thicken a smoothie, but it does have a tang to it.
- **Cream Cheese:** You can usually get an off brand of cream cheese for ten cents an ounce, so it's a cheap way to thicken smoothies. However, it does add calories.
- **Flaxseeds:** You can get this from the international section, but it'll add up to seventy cents easily.
- **Banana:** Since you can get a single banana for less than thirty cents, this can be a great thickener.
- **Avocado:** This is a more expensive thickener, but it doesn't add the flavor that banana does.
- **Oats:** You can use instant oats or rolled oats, but a tablespoon is under twenty cents and will go a long way to thicken your smoothie and make it more filling.
- **Frozen Fruit:** Even if you aren't buying your fruit frozen, you can freeze it to make it thicker.
- **Frozen Tea or Coffee:** This will heavily flavor your smoothie, but it will thicken it too.
- **Ricotta Cheese:** This will add a tang similar to cottage cheese, but it's about as cheap.
- **Yogurt:** Greek yogurt will thicken your smoothie the most, and you can get one as cheap as ninety cents or less if they're on sale. You can get quick sales for fifty cents and under.
- **Tofu:** This can be expensive if you don't buy during yearly sales at various stores. The best part is you can stock up and store it in your pantry. Tofu is great for additional protein in your smoothie. Silken tofu is best but depending on the brand it may need refrigeration.

Smoothies Under $2

You now know how to make your own smoothies, but it's sometimes easier to follow a recipe. Try these out for under two dollars per serving, and feel free to double the recipe if you like them! Remember that smoothies freeze well for that breakfast on the go.

Easy Green Smoothie

This smoothie can be made even cheaper if you use orange juice concentrate, and it's recommended you use canned pineapple. Just drain it first or substitute part of your water for the juice in the can for an even more tropical taste.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $2.00
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Parsley ($0.35)
- 2 Cups Spinach, Chopped ($0.75)
- 1 Cup Water
- 1 Cup Pineapple, Frozen ($0.30)
- 1 Cup Orange Juice ($0.40)
- 1 Lime, Peeled ($0.20)

Directions:

1. Blend everything together until smooth.

Tropical Breakfast

If you want an even creamier taste, try canned coconut instead of coconut water for an extra $0.20. Just save the rest for later. You can also freeze the full fat coconut milk into ice cubes after shaking well to give a thicker texture.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.41
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Coconut Water ($0.60)
- ½ Cup Mango, Frozen & Chunked ($0.36)
- ½ Cup Pineapple, Frozen & Chunked ($0.15)
- 1 Banana, Diced ($0.30)
- 1 Cup Ice

Directions:

1. Blend together until smooth.

Peanut Butter Smoothie

Don’t fall for peanut butter powder. You can get good quality peanut butter for as little as four dollars a jar, and they’ll make great sandwiches as well as a protein addition to your smoothies. Hot cocoa mix can be as little as $2 a pack, with usually seven or more packets in a box. It’s much cheaper than cocoa powder.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.35
Ingredients:

- ¾ Cup Milk (2 Percent is Best) ($0.45)
- 2 Tablespoons Hot Cocoa Mix ($0.20)
- 2 Tablespoons Peanut Butter ($0.15)
- 1 Cup Banana Chunks, Frozen ($0.55)

Directions:

1. Blend everything together until smooth.

Pumpkin Spice Delight

Pumpkin Spice Delight is the perfect smoothie for the Fall without breaking the bank. If you don't have any pumpkin pie spice on hand, you can substitute it for equal parts nutmeg and cinnamon. Some people even enjoy adding a dash of allspice.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.55
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Pumpkin Pie Filling ($0.65)
- 1 Banana, Diced ($0.30)
- ½ Cup Milk, 2 Percent is Best ($0.45)
- 1 Cup Ice
- ½ Teaspoon Pumpkin Pie Spice ($0.15)

Directions:

1. Blend all ingredients together until smooth.

Strawberry Delight

Blueberries are roughly the same price as strawberries when you buy them frozen so you can swap them out for an entirely different taste.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.45
Ingredients:

- 8 Strawberries, Frozen ($0.30)
- 1/2 Plain Yogurt ($0.50)
- ½ Cup Coconut, Shredded ($0.60)
- Pinch Cinnamon ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Blend everything together until smooth.

Green Apple Blend

While a crisp green apple is tart, you can make this smoothie recipe a little sweeter by swapping it out for two small crab apples instead. The best part is that it'll only cost roughly $0.25 more.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.65
Ingredients:

- 1 Green Apple, Cored ($0.60)
- ½ Cup Spinach, Frozen ($0.40)
- ½ Inch Piece Ginger, Peeled & Sliced ($0.35)
- ½ Cup Water
- 1 Teaspoon Honey, Raw ($0.30)

Directions:

1. Blend until smooth.

Sunrise Smoothie

Swap out your coconut oil for almond butter for a creamier texture and only $0.10 more.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.98
Ingredients:

- 1 Orange or Red Bell Pepper, Seeded & Quartered ($1.25)
- 1 Navel Orange, Peeled ($0.70)
- 1 Tablespoon Coconut Oil ($0.10)
- Dash Cinnamon ($0.03)

Directions:

1. Blend until smooth.

Berry Blue

Remember that if you freeze your banana first, your smoothie will be thicker without any need for extra additions.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.65
Ingredients:

- ¾ Cup Blueberries, Frozen ($0.70)
- 1 Tablespoon Almond Butter ($0.20)
- ½ Cup Almond Milk ($0.40)
- 1 Banana ($0.35)

Directions:

1. Blend until smooth.

Blackberry Sage Smoothie

You can find fresh sage at most stores, but it's cheaper if you get it from a farmer's market. Usually, you can get a full bundle for under a dollar.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.95
Ingredients:

- 1 Handful Sage, Fresh ($0.40)
- ½ Cup Blackberries, Frozen ($0.45)
- ½ Cup Almond Milk ($0.60)
- ½ Greek Yogurt ($0.50)

Directions:

1. Blend everything together until smooth.

Watermelon Fresh

Watermelon is only cheap when it's in season, so switch it out for any melon in-season to keep this recipe cheap and easy.

Serves: 1
Time: 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.90
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Watermelon Cubes ($0.70)
- 1 Cucumber, Small & Sliced ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Green Tea, Chilled ($0.60)
- 4-6 Ice Cubes

Directions:

1. Blend until smooth.

Breakfast Under $2

If you've struggled financially, you've probably skipped breakfast a few times or even for a few weeks if you can't afford it. That's where these recipes can really help! All of the prices in this section are an estimate, and it may vary where you live.

Baked Avocado & Egg

A pinch of garlic powder adds a lot to this simple breakfast for under $0.05.

Serves: 1
Time: 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.10
Ingredients:

- 1 Egg ($0.25)
- 1 Avocado ($0.75)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (<$0.10)

Directions:

1. Crack an egg into your avocado and bake at 425 for fifteen minutes.

Banana Pancakes

Add a drizzle of sweet honey for under $0.30.

Serves: 1
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.75
Ingredients:

- 1 Banana ($0.25)
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)

Directions:

1. Blend your ingredients together to create a smooth batter.
2. Cook your batter like you usually would.

Cheesy Apple Muffins

There is a natural sweetness to this breakfast, but some people still prefer to add a teaspoon of honey for a few cents more.

Serves: 1
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.00
Ingredients:

- 1 English Muffin ($0.50)
- 1 Teaspoon Ricotta Cheese ($0.25)
- Apple Slices ($0.25)

Directions:

1. Toast your muffin, and then top with ricotta and apples.

Cinnamon Raisin Oatmeal

Swap the raisins for cranberries for $0.40 more to give this recipe a new spin.

Serves: 1
Time: 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.86
Ingredients:

- 1 Oatmeal Packet ($0.21)
- ½ Cup Almond Milk ($0.30)
- ¼ Cup Raisins ($0.20)
- 1 Teaspoon Cinnamon ($0.15)

Directions:

1. Cook your oatmeal using your almond milk.
2. Top with raisins and cinnamon before serving.

Egg & Hashbrown

For under $0.20 more, swap your white potato for a sweet potato to make a naturally sweet and filling breakfast.

Serves: 1
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.80
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Potato ($0.40)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- 1 Egg ($0.25)
- 1 Teaspoon Olive Oil (>$0.05)

Directions:

1. Season your potato and egg with salt and pepper.
2. Heat up your olive oil in a skillet, and crack your egg in. Scramble it before placing it to the side.
3. Slice your potato, adding it to the same greased skillet, and cook to form hash browns.
4. Serve together.

Easy Coconut Oatmeal

Top with a shredded coconut for about $0.30 more.

Serves: 1
Time: 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.81
Ingredients:

- 1 Oatmeal Packet ($0.21)
- ½ Cup Coconut Milk ($0.30)
- 1 Banana ($0.30)

Directions:

1. Get out a pre-measured oatmeal packet and then prep it using coconut milk. Top with banana slices as desired. You can use flavored oatmeal packets as well!

Yogurt with Granola

Switch your yogurt from plain to flavored for less than $0.20 more. Strawberry is a favorite of many!

Serves: 1
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.00
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Yogurt, Plain ($0.50)
- 1 Tablespoon Granola ($0.25)
- 1 Tablespoon Raisins ($0.25)

Directions:

1. Serve your yogurt with granola and raisins on top.

Peach Toast

You'll want a fresh peach for this recipe because canned peaches would make your toast too soggy even if you try to drain them.

Serves: 1
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.95
Ingredients:

- 1 Slice Toast ($0.25)
- 1 Teaspoon Ricotta ($0.20)
- Peach Slices ($0.50)

Directions:

1. Top your toast with ricotta and finish it off with peach slices.

Banana & Peanut Butter Toast

This is an easy on-the-go breakfast, and you can use any nut butter you like for a small addition.

Serves: 1
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.85
Ingredients:

- 1 Slice Bread ($0.15)
- 1 Tablespoon Peanut Butter ($0.40)
- 1 Banana ($0.30)

Directions:

1. Slice your banana, and then toast your bread. Spread your peanut butter over the toast, and then slice the banana and place it on top.

Tomato & Egg Toast

For a completely different taste, swap your red tomato out for a green one.

Serves: 1
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.90
Ingredients:

- 1 Slice Whole Wheat Toast ($0.25)
- Tomato Slices ($0.40)
- 1 Hardboiled Egg ($0.25)

Directions:

1. Toast your bread and slice your tomato and egg.
2. Serve together.

Egg & Spinach Bake

Halve your spinach cost by using frozen spinach instead. Thaw and drain it before you use it so that your bake doesn't come out watery.

Serves: 4
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.98
Ingredients:

- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Crushed ($0.05)
- 15 Ounces Diced Tomatoes, Drained ($0.60)
- 2 Tablespoons Onion, Minced ($0.10)
- 4 Eggs ($1.00)
- 10 Ounces Spinach ($2.00)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 350.
2. Get out a skillet and heat up your olive oil. Sauté your garlic for a minute, and then add in your spinach.
3. Toss the spinach for a minute, and then add in your tomatoes.
4. Add in your tomatoes, cooking for five to seven minutes at a simmer. Add in your onions, and then place everything in an ovenproof dish.
5. Crack your eggs over top and bake for eight to ten minutes.
6. Season with salt and pepper before serving.

Lunch Under $2

Most of these lunches can be taken on the go to fit your busy lifestyle.

Quick Chili

Serves: 4
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.08
Ingredients:

- ½ lb. Ground Beef ($2.00)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 1 Cup Tomato Sauce ($0.60)
- 1 Green Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.90)
- ½ Teaspoon Chili Powder ($0.05)
- 1 Can Chili Beans ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Sauté your onion, garlic, and ground beef together.
2. Add in your chili powder, green bell pepper, tomato sauce, salt, and pepper.
3. Cover, and allow it to simmer for fifteen minutes. Stir occasionally, and add water if it becomes too thick.
4. Stir in your beans with the liquid from the can, bringing it to a boil
5. Reduce the heat, covering the pot. Allow it to simmer for ten minutes.

Easy Quiche

Serves: 6
Time: 50 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.77
Ingredients:

- 1/4 Cup Yellow Onion, Chopped Fine ($0.30)
- 1 Cup Mushrooms, Sliced ($1.20)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.15)
- 3 Eggs, Beaten ($0.75)
- ½ Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.40)
- 1 Cup Milk ($0.60)
- 1 Unbaked Pie Shell ($1.00)
- 1/8 Teaspoon Nutmeg ($0.04)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 375°.
2. Cook your mushrooms, garlic, and onion until softened using your oil.
3. Place your shredded cheese and cooked vegetables into the pie shell.
4. Whisk your eggs in a bowl and add in your milk. Whisk in your nutmeg, salt, and pepper.
5. Pour this mixture over your cheese and vegetables.
6. Bake until its set, which should take forty minutes.
7. Set for five minutes before slicing.

Rice & Black Bean Salad

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.90
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Cooked Black Beans ($1.00)
- 2 Cups Cooked Rice, Cooled ($0.75)
- ½ Cup Onion, Chopped ($0.43)
- ¼ Cup Lime Juice, Fresh ($0.30)
- ½ Cup Green Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.90)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Chopped ($0.02)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.15)

Directions:

1. Mix your bell pepper, onion, rice, and bean together in a bowl.
2. In a jar add your garlic, salt, pepper, oil and lime juice, and shake well. This will mix your salad dressing and pour this over your bean mixture.
3. Chill for an hour before serving.

Rice & Chicken Salad

Serves: 4
Time: 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.79
Ingredients:

- 4 Cups Lettuce ($0.54)
- 2 Cups Brown Rice ($0.60)
- 1 Tomato, Cored & Diced ($0.45)
- 1 Green Bell Pepper, Cored & Diced ($0.90)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.15)
- 1 Lemon, Juiced ($0.40)
- 2 Tablespoons Apple Cider Vinegar ($0.10)

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients, and refridgerate until you're ready to serve.

Greek Salad

Serves: 4
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.72
Ingredients:

- 6 Romaine Lettuce Leaves ($0.20)
- 1 Cucumber, Peeled & Sliced ($0.60)
- 1 Tomato, Chopped ($0.43)
- ½ Cup Red Onion, Sliced ($0.30)
- 1/3 Cup Feta Cheese, Crumbled ($0.55)
- ¼ Cup Olives, Sliced ($0.28)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.10)
- 2 Tablespoons Lemon Juice, Fresh ($0.30)
- 1 Teaspoon Oregano, Dried ($0.05)
- Sea Salt to Taste (>$0.05)

Directions:

1. Combine your cucumber, tomato, onion, olives, cheese, and lettuce.
2. Whisk your lemon juice, salt, oregano and oil together in a bowl, pouring it over your mixture.
3. Toss to coat before serving.

Black Bean Soup

Serves: 4
Time: 55 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.83
Ingredients:

- 2 Cans Black Beans ($1.00)
- 1 Tablespoon Cumin ($0.03)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.43)
- 3 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.15)
- 1 ½ Cups Chicken Broth ($1.55)
- ¼ Cup Oregano, Dried ($0.04)
- 1 Tablespoon Chili Powder ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Mash your black beans with juice and set it to the side.
2. Sauté your olive oil and onion and add in your cumin when your onion becomes translucent.
3. Cook for half a minute before adding in your garlic. Cook for another minute.
4. Add in your black beans, chicken broth, chili powder, and oregano. Bring the mixture to a boil.
5. Add your mashed beans in, stirring well.
6. Simmer on low heat for another half hour. Serve warm.

Gazpacho

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.10
Ingredients:

- 3 Tomatoes, Large & Chopped ($0.90)
- 1 Cucumber ($0.80)
- 2 Carrots, Chopped ($0.60)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- ½ Red Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.75)
- 1 Cup Tomato Sauce ($0.65)
- ¼ Cup Red Onion, Sliced Thin ($0.33)
- 1 ½ Cups Water
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- 2 Tablespoons Red Vinegar ($0.15)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Chop your cucumber, red bell pepper, carrots, onion, and tomato.
2. Blend all ingredients together until smooth.
3. Chill for three hours before serving.

Potato Soup

Serves: 4
Time: 55 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.73
Ingredients:

- 2 Tablespoon Margarine ($0.10)
- ½ Cup Onion, Chopped ($0.30)
- 6 Potatoes, Diced ($1.00)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 2 Teaspoons Chicken Bouillon ($0.20)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- 3 Cups Water
- 2 Tablespoons Flour ($0.10)
- ½ Cup Cheddar Cheese ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Milk, Non-Fat ($0.45)

Directions:

1. Melt your margarine in a saucepan using low heat, and then add in your garlic and onion. Cook for three minutes.
2. Add in your potatoes, sea salt, half of your water, chicken bouillon and pepper.
3. Cover the pot and simmer for fifteen to twenty minutes. Your potatoes should become tender.
4. Stir the milk and flour in a small bowl.
5. Add in your water and pour into the potatoes.
6. Cook until the soup thickens, and top with cheese before serving.

Basil & Tomato Soup

Serves: 4
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.15
Ingredients:

- 1 Can Tomatoes, Drained & Chopped ($0.60)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.48)
- 2 Cloves Garlic ($0.05)
- 3 Cups Chicken Stock ($1.75)
- ¼ Cup Tomato Paste ($0.60)
- ½ Cup Basil, Fresh & Sliced Thin ($0.50)
- ½ Cup Heavy Cream ($0.45)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Cook your onion in a saucepan over medium heat with your olive oil and stir frequently so it doesn't burn. Cook until it turns golden brown, and then add in your garlic. Cook for another minute.
2. Add in your tomatoes, tomato paste, stock, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a medium-low heat to simmer.
3. Cook until it's thickened slightly, which should take twenty minutes.
4. Stir in your basil, and then puree in batches.
5. Return to your saucepan and add in your cream while stirring constantly. Cook over low heat until thick and heated all the way through.
6. Garnish with basil before serving.

Dinner Under $2

While it may start to seem easy to find breakfast at an incredibly low cost per serving, dinner can still be hard for most people.

Chow Mein

Serves: 6
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.94
Ingredients:

- 6 Ounces Rice Noodles ($0.75)
- 4 Teaspoons Olive Oil ($0.20)
- 1 Onion, Chopped Fine ($0.43)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Chopped Fine ($0.10)
- ½ Cup Snow Peas ($0.40)
- 1 Cup Carrot, Grated ($0.70)
- 1 Teaspoon Hot Pepper Sauce ($0.30)
- 1 Cup Celery, Chopped ($0.40)
- 2 Teaspoons Chicken Broth ($0.20)
- 1 Cup Green Bell Pepper, Chopped Fine ($0.95)
- 4 Ounces Ham, Sliced Fine ($1.10)
- 4 Teaspoons Soy Sauce ($0.30)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Prepare your noodles according to package directions, and then drain them. Set your noodles to the side.
2. Get out a frying pan, and cook your garlic, oil, and onion together over medium-high heat for a minute.
3. Add in your chicken broth, pepper, snow peas, and carrots. Stir well.
4. Add in your ham, bell pepper and celery, continuing to stir.
5. Reduce heat to low, and add in your soy sauce and noodles.
6. Fry for two minutes.
7. Season with salt and pepper before serving.

Beef Stroganoff

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.93
Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Beef, Ground ($4.00)
- 2 Tablespoons Flour ($0.10)
- 1 lb. Mushrooms ($1.50)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- ¼ Teaspoon Paprika ($0.03)
- ¾ Tablespoons Onion, Chopped Fine ($0.10)
- ¼ Cup Butter ($0.30)
- 1 Cup Sour Cream ($0.40)
- 10.5 Ounces Cream of Chicken Soup ($1.20)

Directions:

1. Start by combining your meat, flour, salt, pepper, and paprika, and set it to the side.
2. In a skillet sauté your onion using your butter. cook until golden and tender
3. Add in your beef, browning it until done.
4. Add the cream of chicken soup and mushrooms, cooking for another five minutes.
5. Add in your sour cream, stirring gently. Heat, but don’t let it come to a boil!
6. Serve with either rice or egg noodles.

3 Bean Dinner

Serves: 8
Time: 1 Hour 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.05
Ingredients:

- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.43)
- 1 Can Pork & Beans, 15 Ounces ($1.50)
- 1 lb. Ground Beef ($4.00)
- ¼ Cup Margarine ($0.25)
- 15 Ounces Kidney Beans ($0.50)
- 1 Can Lime Beans ($0.60)
- ½ Cup Ketchup ($0.30)
- ¼ Cup Brown Sugar ($0.40)
- 1 Teaspoon Dry Mustard ($0.20)
- 2 Tablespoons Vinegar ($0.15)
- ½ Teaspoon Black Pepper ($0.04)

Directions:

1. Sauté your onion and margarine in a skillet until it turns golden, and then add in your ground beef. Cook until browned and thoroughly cooked.
2. Add all remaining ingredients, mixing well.
3. Place your mixture in a casserole dish and turn your oven to 350.
4. Bake for an hour before serving warm.

Savory Chicken Noodles

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.50
Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Chicken Thighs, Boneless & Skinless ($2.00)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 15 Ounces Diced Tomatoes ($0.50)
- 8 Ounces Wide Egg Noodles ($1.20)
- 1 ½ Cups Chicken Stock ($0.68)
- 1 Cup Mozzarella, Shredded ($1.16)
- ½ Tablespoons Italian Seasoning ($0.15)
- ¼ Cup Parsley, Fresh & Chopped ($0.20)

Directions:

1. Get out a large skillet and cook your chicken and garlic together with your olive oil using medium heat. Cook until browned - about six minutes.
2. Add in your noodles, stock, tomatoes, and Italian seasoning. Cover, and bring to a boil.
3. Reduce to a simmer and cook for ten minutes. Your noodles should be tender, and the liquid should be absorbed.
4. Season with salt and pepper, then top with cheese and parsley.

Lentils Casserole

Serves: 5
Time: 1 Hour 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.62
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Lentils, Rinsed ($0.60)
- ¾ Cup Water
- ½ Cup Onion, Chopped ($0.40)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 2 Carrots, Sliced Thin ($0.45)
- 1 Stalk Celery, Sliced ($0.34)
- ½ Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.40)
- 1 Cup Tomatoes, Fresh & Chopped ($0.70)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)
- 1/8 Teaspoon Thyme, Dried ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 350.
2. Combine your onions, garlic, lentils, water, carrots, thyme, celery, salt, and pepper. Mix well and place it in a casserole dish.
3. Cover your dish and bake for forty minutes.
4. Take it out of the oven, and add in your tomatoes.
5. Cover and bake for fifteen minutes more.
6. Remove it from the oven, uncover, and sprinkle with cheese.
7. Bake for another five minutes before allowing it to cool. Your cheese should be melted.

Tilapia with Rice

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.32
Ingredients:

- ¼ Cup Cornmeal ($0.20)
- 1 Teaspoon Paprika ($0.02)
- 2 Tablespoons Flour ($0.03)
- 4 Tilapia Fillets, 4 Ounces Each ($3.50)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 4 Cups Cooked White Rice ($0.74)
- 1 Lime, Quartered ($0.34)
- ½ Cup Cilantro, Fresh & Chopped ($0.40)

Directions:

1. Get out a shallow dish and combine your paprika, flour, and cornmeal.
2. Coat your fish in it, and then season it.
3. Cook your fish in olive oil using medium heat. It should take three minutes per side, and your fish should be crispy.
4. In a bowl toss your cilantro and rice before serving it on the side of your fish with lime.

Spinach & Feta Quesadilla

Serves: 4
Time: 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.70
Ingredients:

- 6 Ounces Roasted Red Peppers, Drained ($1.90)
- 12 Ounces Spinach, Frozen &Thawed ($1.15)
- ¼ Teaspoon Crushed Red Pepper ($0.02)
- 1 Cup Mozzarella, Shredded ($1.20)
- 4 Ounces Feta, Crumbled ($1.75)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 4 Flour Tortilla, Large ($0.72)

Directions:

1. Puree your roasted red peppers and crushed red pepper together for a dip.
2. Get out a bowl and combine your garlic, cheeses, and spinach.
3. Spoon this mixture onto half of each of your tortillas.
4. Fold them in half, pressing them closed.
5. Cook each one until golden over medium heat. It should take three minutes per side.
6. Cut into four pieces and serve warm with your dip.

Tortellini Pesto Salad

Serves: 4
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.25
Ingredients:

- 20 Ounces Cheese Tortellini, Frozen ($2.60)
- ¼ Cup Pesto ($1.35)
- ¼ Cup Greek Yogurt, Plain ($0.25)
- 1 Tablespoon Lemon Juice, Fresh ($0.05)
- 2 Cups Arugula ($0.75)

Directions:

1. Cook your tortellini until it reaches your desired doneness. Drain it, and allow it to cool.
2. Get out a bowl and whisk together your yogurt, lemon juice, and pesto.
3. Add in your tortellini and toss.
4. Add in your arugula and toss again before serving.

Sausage Rice Skillet

Serves: 4
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.19
Ingredients:

- 8 Ounces Cured Chorizo, Sliced Thin ($1.70)
- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.50)
- 2 Teaspoons Chili Powder ($0.20)
- 1 Green Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.80)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.10)
- 15 Ounces Diced Tomatoes, Canned ($0.50)
- 1 ½ Cups White Rice ($0.75)
- 3 Scallions, Sliced ($0.20)

Directions:

1. Cook your sausage, onion, chili powder and bell pepper in a skillet with your olive oil over medium heat. Continue to cook until softened, which should take five minutes.
2. Stir in your rice, tomatoes, ¾ cup of water, and cover. Allow it to come to a boil.
3. Reduce to simmer and cook for about twenty minutes. Your rice should become tender.
4. Top with scallions before serving.

White Chicken Chili

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.56
Ingredients:

- 1 Green Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.90)
- 1 Onion, Chopped ($0.48)
- 1 ½ Teaspoons Oregano ($0.05)
- 1 Jalapeno, Minced ($0.16)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.15)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 2 Cans Beans, 14 Ounces Each & Drained ($1.50)
- 2 Cups Chicken Stock ($0.90)
- 1 lb. Chicken Thighs, Boneless & Skinless ($2.00)
- 1 Teaspoon Cumin ($0.03)

Directions:

1. Get out a saucepan, and then cook your onion, garlic, bell pepper, jalapeño, cumin, oregano and olive oil over medium heat. Stir well, and cook for five minutes. Your vegetables should be softened.
2. Puree half of your beans in a blender with half of your stock, adding it to the saucepan.
3. Add your chicken in, and then add in the remaining beans.
4. Allow it to simmer for five minutes, and season before serving.

Chicken & Broccoli

Serves: 4
Time: 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.24
Ingredients:

- ¾ lb. Chicken Breasts, Boneless & Skinless ($2.00)
- 2 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.05)
- 8 Ounces Broccoli Florets, Frozen & Thawed ($0.80)
- 1 Tablespoon Sriracha ($0.15)
- 4 Cups Jasmine Rice, Cooked ($0.80)
- ½ Cup Hoisin Sauce ($1.10)
- 2 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Cook your chicken and garlic in a skillet over medium heat, using your olive oil. Stir well and cook until browned. Cook all the way through, which will take about three minutes.
2. Stir in your hoisin sauce, Sriracha, and broccoli cook until heated all the way through, which should take another four to five minutes.
3. Serve over rice.

Dessert Under $2

Most of the time if you're on a budget you'll need to skip dessert. When you do decide to indulge, try some of these cheap recipes to make sure you don't break the bank.

Carrot Cookies

Serves: 30
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.23
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Butter ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Honey, Raw ($1.20)
- 3 Egg Whites, Beaten ($0.75)
- 2 Cups Flour ($0.75)
- 2 Teaspoons Baking Powder ($0.10)
- ¼ Teaspoon Baking Soda ($0.05)
- ¼ Teaspoon Sea Salt, Fine ($0.05)
- 1 Teaspoon Cinnamon ($0.03)
- 2 Cups Oatmeal ($1.10)
- 1 Cup Carrot, Grated ($0.75)
- 1 Cup Raisins ($1.25)

Directions:

1. Combine your butter, honey and egg whites until mixed well.
2. Stir in your baking soda, salt, cinnamon, oatmeal, baking powder, and flour. Mix until it’s almost combined.
3. Add in your raisins and carrots, mixing well.
4. Drop teaspoons of your batter onto a greased cookie sheet and flatten with a fork.
5. Bake at 350° for eight to ten minutes. They should be lightly browned.
6. Cool before serving.

Ambrosia

Serves: 8
Time: 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.55
Ingredients:

- 20 Ounces Pineapple Chunks in Juice ($1.25)
- 1 Banana, Peeled & Sliced ($0.30)
- 11 Ounces Mandarin Oranges, Drained ($0.60)
- ¾ Cup Miniature Marshmallow ($0.40)
- 1 Apple, Chopped ($0.50)
- 1/3 Cup Coconut Flakes ($0.45)
- 8 Ounces Vanilla Yogurt ($0.90)

Directions:

1. Drain your pineapples and oranges.
2. Combine all of your ingredients with your marshmallows and coconut.
3. Fold in your yogurt, and chill for several hours before serving.

Banana Bread

Serves: 12
Time: 1 Hour 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.33
Ingredients:

- 1 Cup Banana, Mashed ($0.75)
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)
- 1/3 Buttermilk, Low Fat ($0.70)
- 2 Cups Master Mixes ($1.10)
- ¼ Teaspoon Baking Soda ($0.15)
- ½ Cup Sugar ($0.75)

Directions:

1. Beat together your eggs, milk, and bananas. Add in your mix, baking soda, and sugar. Make sure it's well combined.
2. Grease a loaf pan and turn your oven to 350.
3. Once it's done heating, cook for fifty to fifty-five minutes. Allow it to cool before slicing.

Easy Apple Cake

Serves: 8
Time: 1 Hour 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.55
Ingredients:

- 10 Tablespoons Butter ($0.75)
- ¾ Cups Sugar ($0.70)
- 3 Eggs ($0.75)
- 1 ¾ Cup Flour, Sifted ($0.40)
- 2 Teaspoons Baking Powder ($0.20)
- 1 Tablespoon Lemon Zest, Grated ($0.30)
- 2 Apples, Cored & Sliced ($1.20)
- 1 Teaspoons Cinnamon ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 350.
2. Get out a bowl and beat together your sugar and butter until creamy.
3. Add your eggs, beating until well blended.
4. Add in your apples, mixing by hand before setting the mixture aside
5. Mix your lemon zest, baking powder, cinnamon and flour together in a different bowl.
6. Add your dry mixture to your apple mixture, greasing a thirteen by nine-inch pan.
7. Pour your mixture into the pan, baking for an hour.
8. Allow it to cool before serving.

Simple Rice Pudding

Serves: 6
Time: 1 Hour 10 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.59
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Rice, Uncooked ($0.70)
- 1 Cup Water
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)
- 2 ½ Cups Milk ($1.45)
- ½ Cup Sugar ($0.70)
- ½ Teaspoon Vanilla ($0.40)
- ½ Cup Golden Raisins ($0.85)
- ½ Teaspoon Cinnamon ($0.03)
- ¼ Teaspoon Sea Salt, Fine ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Bring your water and rice to a boil before reducing the heat to low. Cover your pot and allow it to simmer for fourteen minutes. The water should be absorbed.
2. Turn your oven to 325, and then beat your eggs in an ungreased casserole dish.
3. Stir in your milk, vanilla, raisins, salt, cinnamon, and sugar. Stir in your rice.
4. Bake for forty-five minutes, stirring two to three times during this time.
5. Remove from the oven and stir again.
6. Allow it to set for fifteen minutes to thicken.
7. You can eat this warm or cooled.

Baked Pumpkin

Serves: 8
Time: 1 Hour 15 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.96
Ingredients:

- 1 Pumpkin ($6.00)
- 2 Eggs ($0.50)
- 1 Cup Sugar ($1.00)
- 1 Teaspoon Salt ($0.10)
- 1 Teaspoon Cinnamon ($0.07)
- ¼ Teaspoon Nutmeg ($0.04)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 325, and then peel and cut your pumpkin into cubes.
2. Put the pumpkin cubes onto a greased baking dish.
3. Mix your nutmeg, sugar, salt, and egg together, and then toss your pumpkin cubes in it.
4. Cover the pan and bake until soft.
5. Sprinkle with cinnamon before serving.

Easy Chocolate Mousse

Serves: 4
Time: 4 Hours 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.20
Ingredients:

- 7 Ounces Dark Chocolate ($1.25)
- 7 Ounces Whipping Cream ($2.10)
- 1 ½ Ounces Powdered Sugar ($0.60)
- 3 Eggs ($0.75)
- 2 Tablespoons Water, Boiling

Directions:

1. Melt your chocolate and set it to the side.
2. Separate your egg yolks from the whites.
3. Beat your whites until they form stiff peaks, and then place them in the fridge.
4. Whip your cream until they are stiff and place it in the fridge.
5. Beat your egg yolks and powdered sugar gradually and add two tablespoons of water at a time. You should get a light-yellow cream that's smooth.
6. Slowly beat in your creamed egg yolks to your melted chocolate.
7. Fold your stiff egg whites in quickly and stir with vigor to combine the chocolate cream and whites.
8. Once it's blended in smooth, fold in your whipped cream.
9. Refridgerate for four hours before serving.

Potatoes, Potatoes, Potatoes!

In most stores, you can get a fifteen-pound bag for under ten dollars, usually closer to eight. That's well under a dollar a pound. That's why potatoes are so great for your budget, especially russet potatoes. In this chapter, we'll go over just potato recipes so that you can stretch your budget without shrinking your stomach. Use them as a side dish, a meal, or even a snack to make sure you're full for less.

Potato Types

Before we get to the recipes, let's go over potato types. Usually you'll want to use russet potatoes because they're cheap. But, you still need to know the differences to see if they're worth fitting into your budget.

- **Russet Potatoes:** These are also known as Idaho potatoes, and they're large and oblong in shape. They have a mealy flesh and rough brown skin. They're great for mashing, baking or frying. You can use them in almost every recipe in this book. They fall apart when boiled, but they hold their shape once whipped. They have a mild flavor. You can get a fifteen-pound bag for roughly $10-12 depending on your location.
- **Sweet Potatoes' & Yams:** These are also starchy potatoes, and they're naturally sweet. They're great for boiling, mashing, pureed, steaming, baking or roasting. You can use these in many recipes such as pancake potatoes, stuffed potatoes, or potato hash browns to get a much different flavor with just one substitution. Yams are similar to sweet potatoes, but they're less sweet. Buying a single sweet potato costs more than buying a bag of sweet potatoes. It may cost you close to a dollar to get a single sweet potato, but you can get a three-pound bag at Aldi's for roughly $1.50!
- **Red Potatoes:** These are waxy potatoes with a thin skin they're usually round and small. Their flesh is white and waxy, and they're very creamy when cooked, which makes them perfect for roasting, boiling, simmering or steaming. You may want to splurge and grab a few pounds of these to use in soup. You'll usually get a five-pound bag for about $6, but if you're lucky enough to have a Sam's or BJs membership, you can double this amount for about the same price.
- **White Potato:** This is an all-purpose potato, and it can be as creamy as red potatoes. They have a golden-colored skin, and the flesh is either white or yellow. It's waxy in texture, and they come in Finnish or White Rose varieties. They're suitable for sautéing or roasting. You can boil or steam them too. Yukon Gold is another well-known variety of white potato, and they have a tender, pale yellow skin. They can even be fried, and they have a natural buttery flavor. These usually cost less than the red but more than russet potatoes, so they're a great way to spring for that creamy texture without putting too high of a price tag on your grocery bill. You can usually get a five-pound bag for five dollars.

- **Purple Potatoes:** These are vibrant potatoes with a thin, deep purple skin. They also have firm, starchy and bright purple flesh. It has an earthy flavor, and the skin darkens once cooked. However, the flesh will lighten in color. They're good for steaming, simmering, roasting and boiling. They're even decent for baking and mashing if you can get ahold of large ones. They come packed with extra antioxidants too. They come in fingerling variety (Purple Peruvian), Purple Majesty, Purple Viking, and All Blue, as well as a few others, depending on your area. It can cost about five to six dollars depending on where you are for a three-pound bag of purple potatoes. These are not recommended for anyone that's trying to stick to a budget!

Selecting Good Potatoes

You're not going to save money if you can't pick out a good bag of potatoes. When picking out potatoes, choose a bag where they're firm and heavy. They should have clean skin, and they shouldn't have too many eyes. You can tell a potato has an eye before it sprouts by checking for indents. Avoid cracks, cuts, and soft spots. They shouldn't have sprouts or a green tinge, or they've been overexposed to light. Remember that they shouldn't taste bitter, and you should never buy a damp bag of potatoes.

Properly Storing Potatoes

Some potatoes store better than others. Starchy and all-purpose potatoes will store better than waxy ones. Waxy potatoes only last a few weeks, and all-purpose or waxy ones last up to two months. You'll want to keep them in a cool, dark area. Avoid warmth and humidity to avoid spoiling or sprouting. You also shouldn't refrigerate potatoes. It converts the starch to sugar, which makes them taste sweeter and burn easier during frying. Keep in mind that potatoes that are stored near fruit or onions will sprout and go bad faster too.

Simple Potato Wedges

Serves: 8
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.24
Ingredients:

- ½ Teaspoon Garlic Salt ($0.05)
- ¾ Teaspoon Cumin ($0.04)
- 1 ½ Teaspoons Paprika ($0.06)
- 1 Tablespoon Dion Mustard ($0.15)
- 8 Large Red Potatoes (roughly 1 lb.) ($1.55)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 400.
2. Line a shallow baking dish with cooking spray. Then, cut your potatoes into wedges
3. In a bowl combine your paprika, cumin, garlic salt, and mustard. Mix until well blended.
4. Add your potatoes to the bowl, making sure they're coated well with the mixture
5. Spread them out on your prepared baking dish in a single layer. There should be some space between each wedge.
6. Bake for ten minutes, and then turn them.
7. Bake for another ten. They should be crusty and tender.

Double Stuffed

Serves: 4
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.65
Ingredients:

- ¼ Cup Sour Cream ($0.35)
- 2 Teaspoon Chives ($0.18)
- ¾ Cheddar Cheese, Shredded & Divided ($0.70)
- ½ Cup Onion, Chopped ($0.35)
- 2 Tablespoons Margarine ($0.20)
- 4 Baking Potatoes, Large ($0.70)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Pierce each potato with a fork several times and microwave them on high for ten minutes.
2. Flip them over, and microwave for three minutes more. Your potatoes should be tender.
3. Turn your oven to 350 degrees and melt your butter in a skillet over low heat.
4. Add your onion and cook until translucent. It should take about five minutes.
5. Slice the potato tops off and scoop out the insides make sure to leave the shells intact.
6. Put the potato flesh in a bowl, mashing it.
7. Add in ½ cup of cheese, sour cream, onions, chives, salt, and pepper.
8. Mix well and spoon this mixture into your shells.
9. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese on top.
10. Bake in a casserole dish for ten minutes. They should be heated all the way through.

Easy Potato Salad

Serves: 6
Time: 1 Hour 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.07
Ingredients:

- 2 Teaspoons Mustard ($0.15)
- 3 Teaspoons Sweet Pickle Relish ($0.35)
- ¾ Cup Mayonnaise ($0.45)
- 1 Onion, Large ($0.50)
- 3 lbs. White Potatoes, Cooked ($3.10)
- 4 Eggs, Hardboiled ($1.00)
- 3 Stalks Celery ($0.75)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Dice your onion, eggs, celery, and potatoes.
2. Get out a bowl and mix your mayonnaise and mustard together.
3. Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate for at least an hour before cooking.

Corn & Potato Gratin

Serves: 4
Time: 1 Hour 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.40
Ingredients:

- 4 Potatoes, Peeled & Cubed ($1.10)
- 2 Cups Corn Kernels, Canned & Drained ($1.00)
- 6 Tablespoons Margarine ($0.70)
- 6 Tablespoons All Purpose Flour ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Milk ($0.70)
- 1 Cup Whipping Cream ($0.80)
- 1 Cup Chicken Broth ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (<$0.10)

Directions:

1. Put your potatoes in a saucepan, covering them with water.
2. Bring to a boil at medium-high heat, and boil until they're partially cooked. This should take about five minutes and drain them well.
3. Grease a casserole dish, then combine your potatoes and corn in it.
4. Heat your oven to 350 degrees and melt your butter in a saucepan.
5. Add in your flour, mixing well.
6. Add your milk, cream, and chicken brother, cooking and stirring until it becomes thick. This will take roughly five minutes.
7. Season with salt and pepper, and pour it over your corn and potatoes.
8. Bake until browned lightly, which will take about forty-five minutes.

Mashed Potato Bake

Serves: 4
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.86
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Milk ($0.60)
- 1 Teaspoon Parsley, Dried ($0.05)
- 3 Tablespoons Grated Parmesan ($0.45)
- ½ Cup Breadcrumbs ($0.50)
- 1 Teaspoon Garlic Salt ($0.10)
- 6 Tablespoons Margarine ($0.40)
- 3 Baking Potatoes, Large, Peeled & Cubed ($1.25)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Put your potatoes in a saucepan and add in enough water so that they're covered.
2. Cook for about twenty-five minutes. They should be tender and then drain them.
3. Add three tablespoons of margarine, and cover for two minutes.
4. Add in your garlic, salt, and pepper.
5. Mash your potatoes with a masher, and add in your milk gradually, mixing well.
6. Heat your oven to 375 degrees and grease a casserole dish.
7. Spoon this mixture into your dish, and top with breadcrumbs and parmesan.
8. Put the remaining butter spread out on top.
9. Bake for fifteen minutes. They should become golden brown.

Cheesy Potato Casserole

Serves: 6
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.51
Ingredients:

- ¼ Teaspoon Pepper ($0.05)
- 4 Baking Potatoes, Large & Peeled ($1.20)
- 1 ½ Ounces Cream Cheese, Softened ($0.15)
- ½ Cup Sour Cream ($0.45)
- ½ Teaspoon Onion Salt ($0.05)
- ½ Teaspoon Garlic Salt ($0.05)
- ½ Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.40)
- 1 Small Tomato, Sliced Thin ($0.40)
- 2 Teaspoons Chives, Fresh & Chopped ($0.30)

Directions:

1. Chop your potatoes, and then place them in a pan. Cover them with just enough water and bring it to a boil. Cook over medium-high heat for fifteen minutes.
2. Drain the potatoes and mash them.
3. Heat your oven to 350°, and then add your sour cream and cream cheese to your potatoes.
4. Whip them until they’re mixed well.
5. Season with onion, salt, garlic salt, and pepper.
6. Spoon this mixture into your baking dish, topping with cheese.
7. Bake for twenty minutes, and then top with tomato slices.
8. Sprinkle your chives over the dish and bake for five minutes more before serving warm.

Taco Stuffed Potatoes

Serves: 4
Time: 1 Hour 20 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $2.04
Ingredients:

- 4 Potatoes, Large ($1.20)
- 1 lb. Ground Beef ($4.00)
- 1 Cup Water
- 1 Ounce Taco Seasoning ($0.40)
- 2 Cups Cheddar Cheese, Divided ($1.60)
- ½ Cup Sour Cream ($0.50)
- ½ Onion, Chopped ($0.25)
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil ($0.08)
- Black Pepper & Sea Salt to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 400°, and then poke your potatoes with a fork several times. Cover them in oil, and sprinkle with salt.
2. Bake for an hour, turning once during this time.
3. Allow them to cook, and then cut a small piece off the top to reveal the flesh.
4. Scoop the flesh out, leaving the shell.
5. Cook your ground beef in a skillet over medium-high heat, and then stir in your seasoning mix and water. Combine well, allowing it to simmer for three to four minutes. The mixture should thicken.
6. Store in a cup of cheese and your sour cream
7. Mash the potato, and then add in your ground beef mix. Combine, and then fill the potatoes with this mixture.
8. Top your potatoes with the remaining cheese and place them in the oven.
9. Cook for five minutes and serve warm.

Beer Battered Chili Cheese Fried

Serves: 6
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.67
Ingredients:

- 4 Baking Potatoes, Large & Sliced into ½ Inch Fries ($1.20)
- 12 Ounces Beer ($1.50)
- 2 Teaspoons Sea Salt ($0.05)
- Water as Needed
- 1 Cup Olive Oil ($0.70)
- ½ lb. Ground Beef ($2.00)
- 1 Teaspoon Garlic ($0.10)
- 1 Teaspoon Paprika ($0.03)
- 1 Onion, Diced ($0.45)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Minced ($0.15)
- 14 Ounces Diced Tomatoes with Chili ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Salsa ($0.60)
- 2 Tablespoons Chili Powder ($0.06)
- 1 Cup Water
- 2 Teaspoons Cumin ($0.06)
- 14 Ounces Kidney Beans, Rinsed & Drained ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($1.20)
- 3 Green Onions, Sliced ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Salt your fires and pour the beer over them.
2. Fill a bowl with water until your fries are submerged. Soak for two hours in the fridge, and then heat your oven to 425°.
3. Drain, and rinse thoroughly. Pat your fries dry.
4. Get out a small bowl and whisk your paprika, oil, and garlic together.
5. Add your fries in, tossing until they're coated.
6. Spread them in a single layer on a baking sheet.
7. Bake for twenty to twenty-five minutes, and make sure to flip at least once during this time.

8. Brown your ground beef in a medium saucepan, cooking over medium-high heat.
9. Add in your garlic and onion, cooking until tender and fragrant. It should take about five minutes.
10. Add in the salsa, chili powder, chilies, tomatoes, cumin, water, and beans, salt, and pepper, and bring it to a boil.
11. Reduce your heat, and simmer for fifteen to twenty minutes.
12. Preheat your broiler and pile your fires in the middle of a baking sheet. Spoon your chili on top, and sprinkle with cheese.
13. Broil for two to three minutes, and top with green onions before serving.

Loaded Hasselback Potatoes

Serves: 6
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.78
Ingredients:

- 4 Small Baking Potatoes ($1.00)
- 4 Tablespoons Butter, Sliced Thin & Chilled ($0.60)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (<$0.10)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Sliced Thin ($0.05)
- 4 Strips Bacon ($0.70)
- 1 Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($1.20)
- ¼ Cup Sour Cream ($0.40)
- ¼ Cup Green Onions, Sliced ($0.65)

Directions:

1. Start by heating your oven to 400.
2. Take your potatoes and slice them 1/8 an inch thin without cutting all the way through.
3. Put them on a baking sheet, stuffing with garlic and butter. Season with salt and pepper, baking until crispy on top and tender in the middle. This should take about an hour.
4. Cook your bacon until crisp, which will take five to seven minutes. Crumble it, sprinkling it over your potatoes.
5. Top with cheese and bake for five minutes.
6. Tip with sour cream and green onions before serving.

Potato Egg Nest

Serves: 4
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.54
Ingredients:

- 2 Strips Bacon, Cooked & Crumbled ($0.35)
- 1 Tablespoon Butter ($0.20)
- 2 Potatoes, Large & Partially Cooked ($0.85)
- 1 Tablespoon Parsley, Fresh & Chopped ($0.30)
- 2 Tablespoons Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.35)
- Sea Salt & Black Pepper to Taste (>$0.10)

Directions:

1. Lay your potatoes on their side and cut off a third of the top lengthwise.
2. Hollow out the middle with a spoon, making sure the shell stays intact.
3. Place a half a tablespoon of butter into a middle of two bowls.
4. Break an egg into each potato bowl, topping with bacon, parsley, and cheese. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Bake at 350° for twenty to twenty-five minutes.
6. Serve warm.

Potato Frittata

Serves: 6
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.80
Ingredients:

- 2 Green Onions, Chopped ($0.40)
- 4 Russet Potatoes, Sliced Thin ($0.70)
- ½ Cup Mushrooms, Sliced ($1.20)
- ½ Green Bell Pepper, Chopped Fine ($0.45)
- 8 Eggs, Beaten ($2.00)

Directions:

1. Turn on your oven broiler.
2. Get out a pan to cook your sausage, and continuously stir so it browns and is crumbly. This should take ten minutes.
3. Drain your sausage, but reserve two tablespoons of the drippings.
4. Add your potatoes, reserved drippings, green onions, bell pepper and mushrooms to your pan. Cook for about fifteen minutes. Your potatoes should be browned and tender.
5. Add in your meat and eggs, stirring well, and cover. Cook on low heat for five minutes.
6. Broil in the oven for five more minutes. Then, cool before serving.

Potato Pancakes

Serves: 6
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.73
Ingredients:

- 3 Cups Mashed Potatoes ($1.65)
- 2/3 Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.70)
- 2 Tablespoons Scallions, Chopped ($0.30)
- 1 Egg, Beaten Lightly ($0.25)
- ½ Cup Flour, All Purpose ($0.80)
- Olive Oil for Pan Frying ($0.65)

Directions:

1. Stir together your cheese, mashed potatoes, scallions, egg and three tablespoons of flour until combined well.
2. Divide the mixture into twelve portions.
3. Roll each one into a ball and flatten it to a half-inch thick.
4. Place the remaining ones in a shallow dish after dipping each in flour.
5. Heat three to four tablespoons of oil in a pan over medium heat, frying your pancakes for about two minutes per side.
6. Add more oil as needed, and sprinkle with salt before serving.

Black Bean Loaded Potatoes

Serves: 4
Time: 1 Hour 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.10
Ingredients:

- 2 Baking Potatoes ($0.80)
- 1 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.10)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 15 Ounces Black Beans, Canned ($0.60)
- ½ Cup Corn, Canned & Drained ($0.35)
- ¼ Cup Green Bell Pepper, Chopped ($0.24)
- ½ Cup Water
- ½ Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.60)
- ½ Avocado, Sliced ($0.75)
- ¼ Cup Sour Cream ($0.40)
- Hot Sauce to Taste ($0.20)
- 1 Chive, Sliced ($0.30)

Directions:

1. Heat your oven to 375° and slice down the middle of your potato lengthwise to make a slip.
2. Wrap each potato in tinfoil, baking for one to one and a half hours. They should be tender.
3. While they're baking, get out a frying pan to cook your garlic and black beans together on low heat.
4. Add in your green pepper, corn, and water. Simmer until all the water has evaporated.
5. Season with salt and hot sauce as desired.
6. Cut open your potatoes, sprinkling the top with cheese. Top with black bean, sliced avocado, sour cream, and chives before serving warm.

Exploring Rice as a Cheap Option

Just like potatoes, this is a cheap filler. However, potatoes are considered to be more nutritious than most rice varieties.

Types of Rice

Rice is a staple in your kitchen, especially if you're on a budget, but some rice is cheaper and easier to use than others. Sadly, not every rice type is interchangeable. Every kind of rice has its own taste, texture, and unique properties to work with.

- **Arborio:** This is a medium grain rice, and it has a white dot in the center of the grain. It's high in starch, and it's chewy and sticky in consistency. It becomes creamy when cooked, so it's ideal for soup, rice pudding, and risotto. This type of rice is about two dollars a pound.
- **Basmati:** This is a long grain rice, and it's dry with a nutty aroma. It's great for curry, saffron rice, and Dal. You can serve it plain or with herbs, but it's better as a side dish. This is about the same as jasmine rice, so it's about a $1.50 a pound.
- **Brown:** Brown rice is considered to be one of the healthier types of rice, and it's a long grain with a nutty profile. It's great for stir fries, rice pilaf, casseroles, and stuffing. It's a versatile rice that is light and fluffy when cooked. Brown rice is usually equal to white rice in price, so it's about a dollar per pound.
- **Jasmine:** This is long grain rice cultivated in Thailand. It has an exotic flavor with a jasmine aroma. Jasmine is great for curries and stir fries. It's moist and soft, which makes it perfect for soaking up flavors and spices. You can get jasmine rice for a little under a $1.50 a pound.
- **White:** This long grain rice is high in starch, and it has a sticky consistency. It's great for stir fries, rice pilaf, and casseroles. It's one of the cheaper types of rice, and it's popular in both Mexican and Asian cuisine. You can get white rice for about a dollar a pound.

Properly Storing Rice

Most rice has an indefinite shelf life, except for brown rice. Brown rice has a higher oil content so it lasts three to six months in the pantry. Brown rice will last six to twelve months in the fridge, and it'll last twelve to eighteen months in the freezer. The biggest concern for storing rice is keeping it free of dust, insects and any other contaminants. Store rice in a cool, dry area. Place it in an airtight container or in a heavy-duty, re-useable freezer bag.

If you're worried about dust or bugs, you'll want to store them in the fried or freezer in a sealable, airtight container. If bugs are found in your rice, you'll have to discard the entire package. If you're trying to check to see if brown rice has spoiled just look for an off odor or an oily texture. Cooked rice will last in the fridge for four to six days. It'll last in the freezer for six months.

Rice Cooking Tips

Make sure that you always bring your water to a boil before you add your rice. You also need to cook rice with a lid. The rice should absorb all the water and cook evenly, which is why many people use a saucepan and not a pot. If you're cooking without a lid, you'll need to add more water to keep it from becoming crunchy. However, if you add too much water your rice will become mushy. You can add two teaspoons of vinegar to boiling water when cooking rice to give it a sharper flavor, or you can add the same amount of lemon juice.

You can also add two to three drops of hot sauce to perk up the flavor. Other people prefer to cook rice in chicken broth instead of water. For additional flavors, you can cook it in beer, wine, or fruit juices. However, if you cook with either beer, wine or fruit juices, you can't replace more than half of the amount of water needed with this liquid. You'll still need water to cook it! Once your rice comes to a boil, do not stir it or it will become gummy. To reheat your rice without it drying out, add two tablespoons of water to each cup before microwaving it or cooking it in a pan.

Sour Ham Over Rice

Serves: 6
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.48
Ingredients:

- 16 Ounces Apricot Halves, Canned ($0.70)
- 1 Cup Chicken Broth ($0.60)
- 1/3 Cup Sugar ($0.40)
- ¼ Cup Vinegar ($0.40)
- 2 Green Bell Peppers, Sliced ($1.80)
- 3 Cups Ham, Cooked & Sliced ($3.25)
- 3 Tablespoons Soy Sauce ($0.30)
- ¼ Cup Cornstarch ($0.15)
- 3 ½ Cups Cooked Rice ($1.30)

Directions:

1. Drain your apricot halves and reserve the syrup.
2. Put a saucepan over low heat, and add in your apricot syrup, ham, bell pepper, vinegar, butter, sugar, ¾ cup broth, and soy sauce. Bring to a boil, and reduce the heat to low.
3. Cover your pan and allow it to simmer for ten minutes.
4. In a bowl, whisk ¼ cup chicken broth and cornstarch together. Make sure it’s mixed well.
5. Add the cornstarch mixture into your saucepan and remove the lid. Stir constantly, bringing it to a simmer. Cook for two minutes or until it thickens.
6. Add in your apricots, cooking for a minute more.
7. Serve over rice.

Cheesy Rice Strata

Serves: 12
Time: 9 Hours 5 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.58
Ingredients:

- 3 Cups Cooked Rice ($1.25)
- 2 Cups Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($1.20)
- ¼ Cup Red Pimento, Diced ($1.80)
- 2 ½ Cups Whole Milk ($1.40)
- 4 Eggs ($1.00)
- 1 Teaspoon Black Pepper ($0.05)
- ¼ Teaspoon Tabasco Sauce ($0.15)
- ½ Teaspoon Dry Mustard ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Get out a nine by thirteen-inch dish and spray it down with cooking spray. Spread half of your rice in the bottom, sprinkling a cup of cheddar cheese over it.
2. Sprinkle your red pimento over the cheese, and then spread the remaining rice and cheese over the top. Sprinkle a cup of cheese over the rice, and then get out a bowl.
3. Mix your milk, eggs, dry mustard, Tabasco sauce, and black pepper. Whisk until well blended and pour it over the rice in a baking dish. Cover and refrigerate for eight to twelve hours.
4. Heat your oven to 325, and then bake for forty-five minutes.

While Rice & Asparagus Casserole

Serves: 6
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.77
Ingredients:

- 2 Teaspoons Onion, Chopped ($0.10)
- 1 Tablespoon All-Purpose Flour ($0.10)
- 1 Tablespoon Unsalted Butter ($0.15)
- 2 Cups Wild Rice, Cooked ($1.20)
- ½ Cup Sour Cream ($0.60)
- 1 Cup Whole Milk ($0.60)
- 2 lbs. Fresh Asparagus ($6.00)
- ¾ Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($0.70)
- 6 Bacon Strips, Cooked & Crumbled ($1.10)
- Sea Salt to Taste ($0.05)

Directions:

1. Start by trimming your asparagus. Trim them into two-inch pieces, and heat the oven to 350. Spray an eleven by seven-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Get out a saucepan, placing it over medium heat, adding in your butter and onion. Sauté the onion for three minutes. It should become tender.
3. Stir in your salt and flour, cooking for one minute. Continue to stir, so it doesn’t burn.
4. Continue to stir and add in your milk slowly, and then cook for two minutes. The sauce should thicken as it boils.
5. Remove the pan from heat, allowing it to cool for two minutes.
6. Add your sour cream, mixing until smooth.
7. Spread your wild rice on the bottom of your casserole dish, and lay your asparagus over it
8. Spoon the sauce over the asparagus and sprinkle your cheddar cheese. Top with sauce, sprinkling with cheese and bacon on top.
9. Bake for a half hour.

Red Rice Dinner

Serves: 8
Time: 30 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $0.92
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Tomato Sauce ($1.20)
- 2 Tablespoons Sugar ($0.45)
- 2 Cups Rice, Uncooked ($1.00)
- 1 ½ lbs. Ham, Cooked & Diced Fine (3.50)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil ($0.40)
- ¾ Cup Onion, Diced ($0.45)
- ½ Cup Green Bell Pepper, Diced ($0.45)

Directions:

1. Place a saucepan over medium heat, and add your green bell pepper, oil, and onion. Sauté for five minutes. Your vegetable should start to brown
2. Add in your ham, cooking for another four minutes. The ham should begin to brown.
3. Add in your water, sugar, salt and tomato sauce. Stir well, and then bring it to a boil.
4. Stir in your rice and reduce the heat to low. Put a lid on the saucepan, and simmer for fifteen to twenty minutes. The rice should be tender and fluffy.
5. Remove it from the pan, and fluff before serving.

Rice Chili

Serves: 6
Time: 35 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.23
Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Water, Cold
- 1 ½ Teaspoons Sea Salt, Fine ($0.08)
- 1 Cup Long Grain Rice ($0.50)
- 4 Tablespoons Unsalted Butter ($0.40)
- 1 Cup Onion, Sliced ($0.45)
- 1 Cup Green Bell Pepper, Chunked ($0.90)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Minced ($0.05)
- 1 ½ Tablespoons Chili Powder ($0.07)
- ¼ Teaspoon Crushed Red Pepper ($0.04)
- 1 Ounces Diced Tomatoes, Canned ($0.60)
- 4 Cups Kidney Beans, Cooked ($1.75)
- ½ Teaspoon Sea Salt, Fine ($0.05)
- 1 ½ Cups Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($1.80)
- ¼ Cup Green Onion, Chopped ($0.70)

Directions:

1. Get out a large saucepan and put it over medium heat. Add in your water and a teaspoon of salt. Bring your water to a boil before adding in your rice with a tablespoon of butter.
2. Secure your lid, allowing it to simmer for fifteen to twenty minutes. Most of the water should be absorbed, and your rice should be tender.
3. Get out a large saucepan, placing it over medium heat. Add in three tablespoons of butter, onion, and green bell pepper. Sauté your onion and green bell pepper for five minutes.
4. Add in ½ teaspoon of salt, red pepper, chili powder and garlic, stirring constantly. Cook for a minute before adding in your tomatoes with the juices.
5. Put a lid on the pan, and simmer for ten minutes. Add in your kidney beans, allowing it to simmer for another ten minutes.
6. Spoon your kidney bean chili over the rice, sprinkling with cheddar cheese

and green onion.

Zucchini & Rice Casserole

Serves: 6
Time: 45 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.64
Ingredients:

- 4 Cups Zucchini, Sliced Thin ($2.20)
- 1 Cup Onion, Chopped ($0.60)
- 1 lb. Ground Turkey ($2.00)
- 1 Clove Garlic, Crushed ($0.05)
- ½ Teaspoon Basil ($0.04)
- 1 Teaspoon Basil, Dried ($0.06)
- ¼ Teaspoon Black Pepper ($0.05)
- 2 Cups Rice, Cooked ($0.50)
- 1 Cup Tomato Sauce ($0.60)
- 1 Egg, Beaten ($0.25)
- 1 Cup Cottage Cheese ($2.25)
- 1 Cup Cheddar Cheese, Shredded ($1.20)

Directions:

1. Place your zucchini in a saucepan. Cover your zucchini with water and put the pan over medium heat. Cook for six minutes, then remove it from the heat. Drain the water from the pan.
2. Add your ground turkey over medium heat, and mix in your garlic, onion, salt, basil, oregano and black pepper. Stir until it’s broken up and crumbled. It should be browned.
3. Cook for seven minutes and drain off any excess grease.
4. Stir in your tomato and rice, mixing well.
5. Get out a small bowl and stir your egg and cottage cheese together.
6. Take to a nine by thirteen-inch baking dish, spraying it down with cooking spray.
7. Heat the oven to 350, and then layer half of your zucchini on the bottom of the baking dish.
8. Spoon your ground turkey mixture over it.
9. Top with cottage cheese and layer the remaining zucchini on top.
10. Cover with foil and bake for twenty minutes.

11. Sprinkle your cheese on the top and bake for five minutes.
12. Allow it to sit for five minutes before serving.

Pork Fried Rice

Serves: 4
Time: 25 Minutes
Cost Per Serving: $1.54
Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Green Peas, Frozen & Thawed ($0.55)
- 6 Ounces Boneless Pork Chop, Diced ($1.60)
- ½ Cup Broccoli, Chopped Fine ($0.75)
- ¼ Cup Green Onions, Chopped ($0.60)
- 2 Tablespoons Butter, Melted ($0.35)
- 3 Cups Rice, Cooked ($0.85)
- 3 Tablespoon Soy Sauce ($0.25)
- ¼ Teaspoon Garlic Powder ($0.05)
- 1/8 Teaspoon Ground Ginger ($0.05)
- 2 Eggs, Beaten ($0.50)
- ½ Cup Carrot, Diced ($0.60)

Directions:

1. Place a skillet over medium heat, adding in your pork chop, carrot, broccoli, green onions, butter and green pas. Sauté for five minutes. Your pork should be tender, and your vegetables should be tender. Remove the pork and vegetables from the skillet, placing them in a bowl.
2. Add in your rice and stir until it's heated all the way through. Put the rice to the side, and then add in the egg. Stir well. Your eggs should be lightly scrambled.
3. Stir your eggs and rice together, and then add your pork and vegetable mixture back to the skillet. Stir well.
4. Add in your garlic, ginger, and soy sauce, combining. See if it's heated all the way through before serving.

Cheap Meat Substitutes

Meat is the most expensive part of your meal. While you can cut down, you can also substitute it on occasion.

Cauliflower

Cauliflower isn’t an inexpensive vegetable, but it is less expensive than meat. You can get it for as low as $2 a head, which makes it perfect to substitute in. Or, get it from a farmer’s market for even cheaper. It’s fibrous and has a complex texture. It soaks up spices and marinades so you can flavor it with the same things too! It can be marinated, sautéed, grilled, and baked. You can even mash it as a potato substitute if you want to go healthy too.

Wild Rice

You can’t use this for patties easily, but it is full of protein and fiber. It’s great if you’re stuffing vegetables such as squash and bell pepper. It’s also good for wraps and casseroles. Look for wild rice in bulk buys to get it as little as eighty cents a pound!

Eggplant

Like cauliflower, eggplant can have a meat-like consistency when fried, sautéed, or baked. Just like cauliflower, you can mash it too. It's an excellent filler for pasta. You can also smash it and form it into patties and balls. Locally grown eggplant may be as little as $2, and a large one at the store may cost $3.

Tofu

This is the meat substitute that everyone knows about, but there are different types of tofu. All of them are mildly flavored and protein rich. They soak up flavors, and they add filling to your meal. You can crumble it, cube it, mince it, or even make kabobs out of it. You can get tofu for as little as $2.50 a pound.

Egg

If you're going for a meatless meal, try egg instead! It's cheap at only twenty cents an egg, and you probably already know how to cook it. It's full of healthy fats and calcium.

Chickpeas

These are high in protein and have a meaty texture. They're cheap too! You can use them in salads, wraps, sauté, or bake them for pasta dishes. They can be put in pot pies, curried, and even fill casseroles. Buying this from a bulk bin is cheaper, but you can get these for as little as $2.50 a pound.

Mushrooms

These have a mild flavor with a hearty texture. They're decent on protein, and they can be baked into sandwiches, wraps, or even on pizzas. A small container of mushrooms can cost one to two dollars in most places.

Jackfruit

If you're lucky enough to live somewhere you can get jackfruit, it's worth trying. It's from India, but a lot of farmer's markets around the US carry it now. It's fibrous and shreds easily. It has a tender consistency, and many people season it like pork to get pulled pork sandwiches. It can also take on the marinades for chicken. If you're lucky enough to have it at a local market, you'll likely find it under four dollars, but it's much more expensive at chain stores.

A Guide to Tofu

Let’s take a better look at tofu. Tofu is a broad term, and it goes in a lot of different dishes. However, you may hate tofu if you don’t know what you’re buying or what it’s best for. So here’s the breakdown.

Silken Tofu

This is an undrained and un-pressed tofu, and it has high water content. It results in a custard-like texture. It will be labeled soft, firm or extra firm. It's creamy and well blended in desserts, pudding, salad dressing, dips, smoothies, and sauces. It can also be an egg substitute if you're baking. If you're going to buy silken tofu, then buy it in plastic tubs and not boxes. The box tofu is only sometimes cheaper, but it lacks in taste.

Regular Tofu

Regular tofu is pressed and has a spongy texture. It comes in various types, and most of the water is already pressed out. The softer it is, the more water it has.

- **Soft:** It's a Chinese equivalent of silken tofu, but it's a little less smooth. You can use it like you would silken tofu, and it's often cheaper.
- **Medium:** This is dense yet delicate. It's best when used in soup, and it can be served cold. However, it's usually interchangeable with firm tofu.
- **Firm:** This absorbs flavors great without breaking down, making it great for stir-fries or pan-fried meals. It's good as a substitute for ricotta cheese, and you can braise it.
- **Extra Firm:** This holds its shape well, and you can cube or slice it. You can fry it in a pan or even deep fry it. Or, bake it, grill it, or crumble it to use like ground meat.
- **Super Firm:** This tofu has a high protein content, and it won't fall apart easily. Sadly, it's not suitable for grilling or baking because it can dry out too quickly. You can use it in place of cheese also.

Preparing Jackfruit

If you've just now heard of jackfruit and went looking because it's a cheap meat alternative, then don't worry. This chapter will teach you how to prepare jackfruit to make the most of this exotic fruit.

Step 1: Cutting It

Lay your newspaper down, and get a sharp, long serrated knife. Slice it down the middle so you have two large chunks. For now, the skin should be on.

Step 2: Boil It

Boil your jackfruit for forty-vie minutes. The inner flesh should be soft but stringy. If you have a pressure cooker, you can usually put it in for ten minutes to make it quicker. If seeds fall out, discard them.

Step 3: Peel It

Once it’s cooked peel off the skin. Toss out the seeds and pods surrounding them. The seeds pods can beaten, but most people don’t like the texture. Shred the fruit and freeze it for future use.

Bonus Jackfruit Curry Recipe

Serves: 2
Time: 1 Hour
Cost Per Serving: $1.99
Ingredients:

- 1 Teaspoon Oil ($0.05)
- ½ Teaspoon Mustard Seeds ($0.05)
- ½ Teaspoon Cumin Seeds ($0.03)
- 2 Bay leaves ($0.16)
- 2 Red Chilies, Dried ($0.30)
- 5 Cloves Garlic, Chopped ($0.20)
- 1 Small Onion, Chopped ($0.25)
- 1 Inch Ginger, Chopped ($0.18)
- 1 Teaspoon Coriander Powder ($0.03)
- ½ Teaspoon Turmeric ($0.03)
- ¼ Teaspoon Black Pepper ($0.05)
- 2 Tomatoes, Pureed ($0.80)
- ½ Teaspoon Sea Salt, Fine ($0.05)
- 1-1 ½ Cups Water
- 20 Ounces Jackfruit ($1.80)

Directions:

1. Heat your oil in a skillet over medium heat, adding in your mustard and cumin. Once they start to pop, cook them for one minute before adding in your red chilies and bay leaves. Cook for a few more seconds before adding in your salt, ginger, garlic, and onion.
2. Cook until your onions are tender and translucent, which will take roughly five minutes. Stir to avoid burning.
3. Add in your black pepper, coriander, and turmeric before adding in your jackfruit and tomato.
4. Mix well and cover. Allow it to cook for fifteen minutes before uncovering. It should thicken, and then shred the jackfruit s desired.
5. Add in your water, covering your skillet. Allow it to cook for fifteen more minutes and serve over rice as desired.

Couponing to Stretch Your Budget

You probably already know what coupons are, so we'll start with the types of coupons, how to use them, and how to pair them with sales! If you use coupons correctly, you can stretch your budget with ease, and some people even get free groceries!

The Coupon Language

Here's a quick rundown so you can understand common terms.

- **BOGO or B1G1:** Buy One Get One Free
- **B2G1:** Buy Two Get One Free
- **Blinkie:** A coupon that you get from a red coupon dispenser in grocery aisles, also known as a blinkie machine.
- **Catalina:** A manufacturer coupon that prints out at the register. These are triggered by what you buy, and they often come in long strips. Your cashier should hand them to you with your receipt, and they're commonly red and white. However, some stores do print them in color now.
- **CPN:** Coupon
- **SASE:** Self Addressed Stamped Envelope
- **SMP:** Specialty Marked Packages
- **SS:** SmartSource Coupon Inserts
- **SAE:** Self Addressed Envelope
- **RP:** RedPlum Coupon Inserts
- **OOP:** Out of Pocket
- **MM:** Money Maker
- **TMF:** Try Me Free
- **WYB:** When You Buy
- **EXP:** Expiration date of the coupon
- **X:** Expiration date of the coupon
- **GC:** Gift Card
- **MBG:** Money Back Guarantee
- **MIR:** Mail in Rebate
- **ECB:** ExtraCare Bucks from CVS

Basic Rules

Coupons do come with rules, and you can't abuse those rules to get ore off.

- **One Per Item:** You can only use one coupon per item purchased. For example, if you have two coupons that say $0.40 off a box of mac and cheese, then to use them both you'll need to buy two boxes of mac and cheese. However, there are exceptions to this rule.
- **Expiration Dates:** Make sure that your coupons aren't expired. Stores will not take a coupon if it's expired because they won't get their money.
- **Size Requirements:** If a coupon says it's for a product that is sixteen ounces or larger, you have to get something that is sixteen ounces or larger to use it.
- **One Coupon Per Purchase:** This doesn't happen as often, but you need to be careful. Make sure that if a cashier tells you that it's one coupon per transaction that it says it on your coupon. Otherwise, you can call over the manager to make sure the cashier isn't making their own rules.
- **Coupon value may not exceed the value:** This means that you cannot get money back from these coupons.
- **No Cash Value:** You cannot trade these coupons in for cash.

You'll also want to understand your store's coupon policies as well.

Where to Get Them

This will depend on what types of coupons you're looking for. If you're looking for Sunday inserts, look at your local paper stands, and ask neighbors, friends, and family to save them for you. You can also collect them from recycling bins. You can online buy them from an online clipping source, such as a person selling them on Facebook or eBay. Below you'll find a list of where to look.

- **Sunday Newspaper Coupon Inserts (Red Plum, SmartSource, General Mills & Proctor and Gamble:** The Sunday paper, friends, family, neighbors, online clipping services, eBay, online trading boards, paper recycling bins
- **Printable Coupons Online:** SmartSource, Coupons.com, Red Plump, Individual Manufacturer's Websites, Store Websites, Home Made Simple, Couponsurer.com, Albertsons.com, Coolsavings.com, Eversave.com, Kroger.com, BoxTops4Education.com, BetteryCrocker.com, Pilssbury.com, Eclip.com, Target.com, ValPak.com, CVS.com, CellFire.com
- **Magazines:** All You (a magazine that has about $100worth of coupons per issue), Baby Magazines, People
- **Digital Coupons:** CellFire.com (digital and printable coupons), SavingStar (fully digital), CVS
- **Mailers:** P&G Everyday Savings Booklet, Home Made Simple (a P&G website), RedPlum
- **Specialty Marked Packages:** Often offered on boxes or other products
- **Peel Off Coupons:** Check packages and peel them off to use right then and there at the register.
- **Hang Tags:** These hang off the top of the bottle or package.
- **Demo People:** If someone is giving out samples or demonstrations, they usually have coupons as well.
- **Mail:** You can actually write your favorite brands and ask them to send you coupons.
- **Digital Coupons:** You can download a couponing app and use it for your location
- **Facebook Pages:** Many Facebook pages will offer coupons as well
- **Members Only:** If you go to a manufacturer's website, they may have a

member only section. If you sign up for an account, they’ll often give you a coupon.

Organizing Your Coupons

If you want to coupon effectively, you have to be organized. It's best to keep a coupon binder, which you can get or under ten dollars, and it's well worth the investment. You'll also need to organize your coupons for the trip to the store so that you aren't lugging around an entire folder and fumbling at the register. An extended file organizer is the best option at about five dollars. Three ring binders are also an easy, cheap option, but you'll want baseball card storage inserts. Categorize your coupons by types in whatever you choose. Use the following categories.

- Baby Products
- Baking
- Beverages
- Bread
- Body (Lotions & make UP)
- Candy
- Canned/Jar Products
- Cereal
- Cleaning
- Cat Food
- Cookies
- Crackers
- Dairy/Cheese
- Dental
- Deodorant
- Dessert
- Frozen Foods
- Household
- Hair
- Instant dinners
- Laundry
- Meat
- Rice
- Snacks
- Medicines
- Oil/Shortening

- Pasta
- Pets
- Paper Products
- Plastic Bags
- Seasoning
- Soaps
- Soup
- Tampons/Pads

Rewards Programs

If you shop at a lot of chain stores, you'll want to see if they have a rewards program. Some superstores have them too! They often involve a card that you scan each time you check out, but others require you to have a phone number that can be typed in at the keypad. If it requires a card, you'll likely have to fill out an application that's tried to your address, email address, and phone number. If you forget this card, usually your phone number will suffice, but you may not get all of your points for it. Next, we'll take a look at the most common rewards programs. However, if you don't see your store on the list, you should still ask.

- **CVS ExtraCare Card:** CVS provides excellent deals every week, and you get two percent back on every purchase, including prescription purchases. They also have weekly and even monthly ExtraBucks Rewards if you purchase select items. Sadly, alcohol purchases won't count for your two percent back. When you sign up with CVS, you'll get extra coupons emailed to you too. If you sign up for their Beauty Club and Diabetes Club, you'll get even more coupons and offers. For example, the Beauty Club will give you an extra five dollars in ExtraCare Bucks with every fifty dollars you spend. There's also a coupon center in CVS that's at the front of the store which will give you additional coupons to use.
- **Walgreens Register Rewards:** These coupons print separately from your receipt, and they are basically Catalinas. You can use them like cash for your next purchase but read them carefully because some restrictions apply.
- **Target Rewards:** You don't get a rewards card at Target, but they do have rewards and deals. They have a weekly circular that features them, and often it means if you buy a certain number of products you get a target gift card. You get the gift card after you've finished the qualifying purchase. You can use coupons on those products!
- **Wal-Mart Rewards:** There's no rewards card for Wal-Mart either right now, but they do have an Everyday Low-Price program and a Rollback program, which you can combine with manufacturer coupons to save more. They even allow for overage. You can also lower your cost by price matching at the register. Essentially, if there is lower price advertised at another store, you can show it at the register. You'll need a physical sale advertisement or proof for the price adjustment. You may want to check out the website The Krazy Coupon Lady because she does a lot of coupon

match-ups for Wal-Mart.

- **Manufacturers Rewards:** As stated before, you'll want to sign up for any rewards program for your favorite brands if you can. A few notable manufacturer's rewards program include My Coke Rewards, Pampers Gifts to Grow, and L'Oréal Gold Rewards, but they're harder to find for grocery brands.
- **SE Grocer Rewards:** You'll get points for buying specific items on sale, and every 100 points is a dollar off. You can use them once you get 200 points. You can also get bonus rewards, and they'll give you an extra coupon on your receipt that you can scan. The coupon varies, but they're often 5X the points, 200 points if you spend $20 or more, or 200 points on $5 of fresh meat. Winn Dixie gives you Catalinas too as well as fuel perks.

Stacking Coupons

Stacking coupons is essential to stretch your grocery bill. You can often get items for free or next to nothing if you stack coupons correctly. If you manage to do this correctly, you'll be handing the cashier a full stack of coupons when you're ready to check out. Other times it's as simple as using two coupons per purchase. You'll need to reference a coupon database if you want to eliminate hours of searching through your coupons. CouponTom.com is a good one.

With this website, all you have to do is type in the product or brand into the search box, and it'll give you various results that you can use. To stack coupons successfully, you'll want to pair sales on the products, manufacturer's coupons and store coupons whenever possible. You can also see if you can pair a mail-in rebate with it. For example, if Walgreens is having a sale on mac and cheese where it's $0.50 a box instead of a dollar, and you have a WYB coupon for 4 of them, you'll only pay a dollar for four, which means you get each one for $0.25.

If you're pairing manufacturer's coupon and a store coupon, you will use both on the product. The manufacturer may give you $1 off of four, but the store may be giving you $2 off of a purchase of $10 or more. As long as you fulfill both requirements, then you get the money off. You may also have a store that doubles manufacturer's coupons, but this usually only happens if the coupon is under fifty cents. Kmart is one of the main stores to do this.

Conclusion

Cooking on a budget should be a lot easier now that you know the ins and outs of substitution, meatless meals, and $2 meals! There's no reason to worry about your budget if you use the tips and tricks in this book. Often when you find a cheaper way to shop and budget your meals, you're trading off time, so don't rush into adding every tip and trick into your routine. Instead, try to find out which ones work for you, and slowly adjust your routine over time. This way you're more likely to stick with whatever you add into your weekly regime.

About the Author

Ash Mahoney is a full-time college student at Bowling Green State University and an aspiring author. Always looking for how to save money at home, Ash feels cooking on a budget and health eating don't have to be mutually exclusive. That's why Ash enjoys sharing ways to save money on groceries and other tips in his books. Catch his first release in the short read of Cooking on a Budget: A Short Read on Simple Strategies & Solutions that Work for Saving Money & Eating Healthy, available at every major online retailer.

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Would you like a free copy of my short audiobook *Cooking on a Budget*? Head over to **Bit.ly/Cooking-Budget** to get it with a 30-day trial of Audible.

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