

28 Simple Ways to Slash Your Grocery Budget

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- 1. Set a budget and stick to it.** First things first, budgets are essential for saving. Period. You need to evaluate what you typically spend and come up with a reasonable amount for your family. If you've never made a budget, take the average of what you've spent at the grocery store over the last 6 months and then set your budget under that. The goal is to save after all, right? Start by knocking \$50 or \$100 off each month and then work to increase that number by implementing all of the tips below! When you don't put self-imposed restrictions on your monthly food expenses, you'll find that you're more willing to throw more unnecessary "luxury" items into the cart. I'm not saying that you ALWAYS restrict yourself from your favorite Ben & Jerry's or that thick ribeye, but if the cost doesn't work within your budget, you'll have to skip it and plan accordingly next month! By creating a workable budget, you are essentially planning to save!
- 2. Plan a menu.** This one's HUGE! Planning helps you avoid unnecessary impulse buying, much like a monthly food budget. It also helps you incorporate leftovers and sale items, and, when done in advance, can allow you to look for sale items for future menu meals. Menu planning is also a great way to use pantry items you already have on hand and even increases the likelihood you'll eat healthier and avoid that "what's for dinner" mad rush to McDonald's while trying to coordinate evening activities. For EXTREME savings, create a standard rotating menu that you don't deviate from. This can be 3, 5, 10 meals—whatever works for you. Shop for those ingredients and nothing else. You may want to change up the plan seasonally to accommodate the produce savings.
- 3. Shop sales.** Seems pretty simple, right? It is. Take a look at your local grocery store's weekly ad and plan your menu around the sale items. If tomatoes are a price buster, tomatoes end up on your menu. If hamburger meat is on sale, a BBQ it is! Simply planning around the cheapest ingredients for the week can save you big money.
- 4. Shop markdowns.** If you know how to time it right, you can hit the stores when they mark down meat and/or veggies. If you are good at planning on the fly, you can build your meal plan around the flash sales. I'm not talking weekly circular savings; I'm talking the clearance meat markdowns that happen weekly at most grocery stores to make room for the new meat shipments. If you pop into your local grocer a few times a week, you can normally see a pattern, as those markdowns typically happen on the same day and often at the same time. Sometimes it's even a nightly occurrence. Learn the clearance routines and then show up at the right time to stock up!

5. **Eat budget-friendly foods.** If you're trying to save money on food, you probably aren't serving up lobster and filet mignon. But boxed mac and cheese isn't a great option either! There are some foods that are healthy AND really great for tight budgets. Here's a quick list: rice, beans and lentils, chicken thighs or bone-in chicken, frozen veggies {much cheaper than fresh!}, kale, arugula, lettuce, spinach, eggs, canned tuna, bananas, oats, potatoes, canned tomato sauce and jarred salsa.
6. **Meatless Mondays.** Unless you have a hunter in the family, meat can add a lot to your grocery bill. Go for [vegan fajitas](#) for dinner or grilled cheese and [soup](#) for lunch. Adding just one meatless meal to your menu {or more if you're not big meat eaters} can result in some serious savings over time.
7. **Cook what you have.** Open that pantry; raid that freezer. See what you already have on hand and build your meals around that. Yes, you may have to have spaghetti a couple of times of week. It's less diversity, but it's also less money to use what's on hand. This is the entire reason I love canning. There are periods during the year that are like a produce void. Those weeks, I skip the stores entirely and pull jars from my pantry instead. Canned pears, canned green beans and frozen Zaycon chicken end up on the menu a lot. Using what you have also minimizes waste—which is like tossing money into the garbage.
8. **Eat leftovers.** Wasted food is wasted money. It really is that basic. When foods mold and go bad in the fridge, that's money right out of your pocket winding up in the trash. Incorporate leftovers into your menu planning so they don't go to waste.
9. **Cook from scratch.** While it seems pretty obvious that a meal prepared in your own kitchen will cost less than a dinner out, sometimes we still buy costly convenience items without realizing it! Do you buy salad dressing? You can make it! Ketchup or BBQ sauce or mayo? Their are great recipes for those, too! What about granola or granola bars or even cookies? All cheaper to make at home! Convenience foods are pricey, so if you take a few extra minutes to make your own, you'll see instant savings {PLUS, cooking from scratch is waaay healthier}!
10. **Buy in bulk.** Bulk buying can be tricky. Costco and warehouse bulk buys can sometimes cost you more in the long run than you save. There is potential to waste money in bulk buying if you overestimate what your family will use before expiration dates, but there is also great potential for savings. Knowing what bulk items your family will actually use is the trick! It's great for non-perishables, as pound for pound, it is almost always cheaper that way. I also only buy my meat in bulk these days. I like to use [Zaycon Foods](#). They have really high quality meats that cook up deliciously for a fraction of the price. I [process and prepare chicken](#) and [ground beef](#) in bulk and my freezer is stocked with inexpensive, tasty meat. Boom.

- 11. Cook in bulk.** Speaking of bulk... You can bulk cook when you find a great sale or markdown on meat or purchase in bulk from Zaycon. I love to batch prepare taco meat or shredded chicken. I'll throw a bunch of meat in the crockpot and season, chop and shred it in preparation for future meals. I've prepared 40+ pounds of chicken in one day before—I was elbow deep in chicken all day. While it might seem like quite the task, I love that I can process the chicken, cook some of it and make a bunch of freezer meals all in one day. It really saves so much time in the long run even though my kitchen is a chickeny disaster at the end of the day!
- 12. Make freezer meals.** If I had to pinpoint the number one money and time saver in my life, it would be freezer cooking. Freezer meals are the best things since sliced bread around here {which you can also freeze for the record}. Yes, it is a lot of work upfront, but that work pays you back each time you look at your bank account and each time you pull a freezer meal out and have a hot, home cooked meal in a fraction of the time. One of the reasons I love freezer meals is because the cost per serving goes way down when you buy larger quantities and split it into several meals {that, and sometimes by dinnertime I don't feel like cooking}. It does require some extensive planning and purchasing upfront, but the rewards are totally worth it! You can check out my [Complete List of Freezer Meal Recipes](#) here. There are pretty pictures for all you visual readers {like me!}, so you can see what looks awesome to you before clicking through to the recipe. I lean towards one-dish meals and casseroles, and I always think of how a dish will freeze before adding it to my list. But in addition to all those main dish meals, you can go crazy and freeze [desserts](#), [smoothies](#) and [cinnamon rolls](#) in a snap!
- 13. Do brinner once a week.** We love brinner {breakfast for dinner equals brinner at our house}. Pancakes and scrambled eggs are relatively cheap to whip up! Plus, if you rush out the door in the morning and miss out on a full breakfast, here's how you can make up for it!
- 14. Eat less.** You probably think I am joking, but after the [30 day emergency food supply challenge](#) I did last June, I realized that prior to the challenge, sometimes I overate just because there was food in front of me. If you limit portion sizes {I'm not saying go hungry!!} or cut back on sides, you inadvertently cut back on your grocery budget, too!
- 15. Cut out convenience costs.** Convenience foods, on average, cost way more than foods you have to prepare yourself. And I'm speaking about more than just that bag of Doritos. Even whole food convenience costs extra. A package of pre-cut carrots will cost you a lot more pound for pound than carrots you take home to peel and cut yourself. The same applies for pre-cut fruit and pre-bagged salad. The more you cook from unprocessed whole foods, the more you'll save.
- 16. Make your own spice mixes.** If you keep your spice cupboard stocked with the basics, you can make pretty much any spice mix and save a pretty penny.

- 17. Buy your bread at bakery outlets.** Bakery outlets are my best friend. You can save on everything in the store and pay a fraction of what you would at a retail grocery store on breads, rolls, tortillas, donuts and more. The manager's special section is my favorite because they have items marked down to \$1 {or sometimes even less!}. That's where I score the best deals! I use this [Easy Kitchen Tip Restoring Frozen Breads Freshness](#). Then my bread that I've purchased at rock bottom prices is good as new!
- 18. Eat seasonally.** I know variety is the spice of life, but if you want grapes for dinner in the middle of winter, you are going to have to pay for them. Eat from your canned fruit that you put up or choose fruits that store well, like apples. They will have a better price tag.
- 19. Preserve your bounty.** This goes hand in hand with that "eat seasonal" bit. If you are a gardener, it's the bounty in your own backyard. If you are not, it's learning to take advantage of fruits and veggies when they are in season, buying in bulk and then preserving by canning, freezing, dehydrating or proper storage {potatoes and winter squash last for ages it seems if properly stored!}.
- 20. Grow your own food.** Speaking of gardening, grow one. Seriously. Gardening is not only one of my most favorite things to do {it really is a sanity saver!}, but it really will save you buckets of money. Small scale gardens or large scale gardens; pallet gardens or square-foot gardens; seasonal gardens or green house gardens. Regardless of the size or the method, growing your own produce is the bomb dot com and will make a huge dent in that grocery budget.
- 21. Look at unit price {price per ounce, pound, etc.}.** Sometimes the "family size" isn't a better bargain. Sometimes those bulk bags of apples or oranges actually have a higher per pound price! Paying attention to the price per unit will ensure you don't impulsively pay more based on sticker price alone.
- 22. Purchase a whole cow or pig.** This takes that "buying in bulk" thing one step further. If you have the freezer space, this is a great way to save BIG. Pound for pound, you will pay about half as much per pound. That's a whole lotta Benjamins! If you don't have room for a whole cow/pig, split it with friends/family, or consider smaller bulk orders through companies like [Zaycon](#).
- 23. Buy generic.** Before you join the generic vs. name-brand debate, let me just say this: there are certain things I will always buy name-brand after much trial and error {ie. Charmin toilet paper for the win!}. But other things we are often brand loyal to unnecessarily. I've learned that knock-off pain relievers like Aleve, Tylenol, etc. work perfectly fine. So I'll always buy generic for those. Generic brand mascara however doesn't quite cut it for me. Generic sugar? Perfectly fine. Generic orange juice? I don't mind. Generic contact solution? Doesn't cut it. Generic marshmallows? Can't tell a difference. Buying the generic and often times nearly identical items can save you, on average, 50%. That can add up to thousands each year!
- 24. Use it or lose it.** We often trash useful food parts while cooking that can easily be utilized to save you money! You can [freeze your extra pot roast juices](#) for some bonus flavoring in your veggies or when a recipe calls for beef broth. You can also save the juices when you cook chicken or the veggie scraps when you make a roast or soup and [make stock out of it](#). Homemade stock is the best!

- 25. Kick the soda habit {and bottled water habit while you're at it!}** A Time Magazine study found the average American household spends almost \$900 a year on soda alone. Americans also blow \$11 billion on bottled water. Just cutting those two simple things from your shopping list will result in massive savings!
- 26. Shop top and bottom shelves.** Grocery stores put all of their most expensive items at eye level. Next time you're shopping, compare prices on the top and bottom with those on the middle shelves. It just might shock you, but it will certainly save you money!
- 27. Use substitutions.** If you are whipping up a recipe and you're missing an ingredient, take a look in your fridge or cupboards and see if there's anything that would work as a substitute. I [sub dry beans for canned beans](#) in all of my slow cooker recipes because they're much cheaper. I've also subbed butter, margarine, coconut oil and even applesauce if you're using it in a baking recipe in place of shortening. So many easy substitutions for thousands of ingredients. If you are out of something, Google its substitutions before heading out to the store to see if you have something on hand that would work!
- 28. Clip a coupon.** The days of extreme couponing hysteria are pretty much over {thank goodness!}, but that doesn't mean coupon savings have gone away with the hoarding of 92 sticks of deodorant or 84 bottles of mustard. You can still save big by using coupons! There are printable coupons all over the internet. Sites like [coupons.com](#) have hundreds of coupons for grocery store products. Or even easier than printing coupons? Try a digital coupon. Stores like [Target have coupon apps like Cartwheel](#) for store coupons. Or you have apps like [Ibotta](#), [Cellfire](#), [SavingStar](#), or [Shopkick](#) to get thousands of digital coupons to use at grocery stores.

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