

Slash Your Monthly Food Budget

There are some pretty easy ways to cut your grocery bill. Here are some simple things to do to trim the fat from your food costs.

1. **Plan menus.** If you plan menus, you accomplish a couple of things. First, you won't have the panic of trying to figure out what's for dinner. Second, you have a specific grocery list that keeps you from impulse buying. Don't forget to include breakfast, lunch and dinner menus, which will also keep your excess spending in check. Bonus tip: Plan so that one day's leftover ingredients can be used for meals on the following day.
2. **Use coupons.** Clip coupons you get with your newspaper. Many stores will double coupons. Sometimes you can stack coupons (use a store's coupon with a manufacturer's coupon) for added savings. If you watch sale circulars and plan your shopping trip, you can save up to 75 percent on your grocery bill!
3. **Eat less meat.** Cutting back on meat could help you save money and may, in some situations, be healthier. Beans are a tasty and generally healthy meat replacement.
4. **Don't be a brand snob.** Try other, cheaper brands. Store and generic brands can sometimes be better than brand names.
5. **Be cool.** Purchase frozen vegetables and fruit to keep from throwing away fresh ones when they go bad – and therefore wasting money. Also, frozen juices are often much cheaper than their counterparts in containers.
6. **Cultivate your green thumb.** One website claims investing \$10 in seeds can yield, on average, \$2,500 in vegetables every year. Plus, you can create vegetable-based, rather than meat-based, recipes.
7. **Be prepared.** No matter how well you plan your menus, you're going to have nights when you just don't feel like cooking or something else comes up. It's good to have some quick meals on hand, like frozen pizza, canned soup or the ingredients for grilled cheese sandwiches. You probably have coupons for these items!

If you follow these tips to cut your budget, you can save enough money that a splurge night on dinner out won't break the bank or the budget!