

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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Cheap eats

Even when the economy is booming, it's wonderful to save money. When things get tough, it becomes a necessity.

Happily, low-cost food is often healthy food. Sprouted greens can be had for the cost of a few seeds or grains [see "Grow your own greens" in the middle column on page 3.] Fresh vegetables are frequently less expensive than frozen or canned.

Meals can often be made from ingredients found tucked away in your cupboards, so buy an extra can or two when you do have money to go shopping.

How do you economize with food? That's the question several **Yummy Northwest** readers answer in this timely issue.



FIND WAYS TO PRESERVE YOUR OWN FOOD.

Tips

For us, saving money is in our bones. We don't buy it unless we need it and it's on sale. We have several stores nearby, so we learn who carries what at the best price.

These days soup and bread are king—and always have been. When money was tight I used to make rice and beans with veggies. It's healthy, cheap, and filling. Broccoli, carrots, garlic, rice, and black beans. (But some coworkers weren't crazy about the garlic heated up in the microwave.)



Blogging for food

Blogs can be an excellent source of information about preparing food in economical ways. The following are a few of the many you can read.

FatFree Vegan Kitchen blog.fatfreevegan.com

If you have a garden or access to fresh, inexpensive vegetables, this blog will show you many unique ways to prepare them.

Frugal Abundance frugalabundance.com

Learn to cope with a "feast or famine lifestyle." The writer must also deal with several health issues in her family, including diabetes, gluten intolerance, and autism.

Hillbilly Housewife hillbillyhousewife.com

Information here includes shopping strategies, cooking secrets, "make your own convenience foods," and realistic menus for a family of four with a weekly budget as low as \$45.

Vegan Lunch Box veganlunchbox.blogspot.com

Inexpensive and/or reusable lunch containers are often showcased and reviewed on this blog. For example, the March 23, 2009, entry lists several alternatives to plastic baggies.

Tips for other people to save money on food bills:

Just the usual: use coupons, stock up on sale items, eat less (impossible for kids), buy generic, and never shop when hungry. In store, item in hand, ask yourself, "Do I really need more junk food in the house?" Often the answer is no.

~ S., Portland, Ore.

1. Buy frozen, if you're planning to cook vegetables like spinach. Freeze things like chopped onion and bell pepper. Try to use vegetables in season. This might mean fewer salads in the winter, so think about using cabbage instead. I can actually put cabbage into almost anything (except maybe omelets).

2. Speaking of omelets, or for me, frittatas (much easier), you can make anything into a frittata, and you don't need lots of eggs. Quick, too.

3. Lentil soup is one of our favorites, too. I serve it over rice and add a sprinkle of parmesan.

4. I also buy turkey backs, chicken backs, and other odd parts for soup. There's a good amount of meat on these "scrap bones." Nothing like split pea with a ham bone.

5. When there are sales on canned goods, take advantage. Always good to have your pantry stocked with tomatoes, corn, and strangely enough, canned potatoes!

6. Cook at least twice as much rice as you need. Rice freezes well; make packets of one or two portions so that they can be added to other stuff—this is a tip from my Japanese sister-in-law. She also cleans leftovers out of her refrigerator every week and turns it into a huge dinner with many small plates.

7. Saving money on food means thinking about your food and taking the time to plan and cook. My favorite meal is pot roast (also one of Mom's best); not an expensive cut of beef, but you have to treat it well, and it takes time to cook properly. A perfect meal for multitasking, like reading cookbooks.

~ J., Seattle

When times are tight, I become a vegan. I give up all meat and dairy and eat more healthfully and cheaply. I've realized that whole grains, such as barley, brown rice, and quinoa, are a great and frugal way to get enough protein. As are beans. I also become familiar with the bulk section of my grocery store. I get a couple of pounds of brown rice or barley and lentils, and I get rolled oats for breakfast. I also buy veggies that are hearty and filling, such as squash, sweet potatoes and yams, carrots, beets, and other root vegetables. I stay away from nuts when times are tight because they can put quite a dent in your wallet, especially those in the bulk section. Also, I drink only water.

I eat lots of lentil soup when I don't have much money. I make a large simple stew with beans, root vegetables, and barley, and freeze the majority of it in small bowls. I thaw the bowls throughout the week for a healthy and filling meal. It can sometimes last me two weeks.

Tips for other people to save money on food bills:

- Use the bulk section of your grocery store.
- Before you go shopping, see what you have in your cupboards and pantry, and make the most out of what you already have.
- Samples, samples, samples.

~ K., Seattle



COLORFUL FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ARE FULL OF GOOD NUTRITION.

To tell you the truth, I don't save money on food except by shopping at Costco for certain things (extra virgin olive oil, tuna fish, frozen veg, etc.—all good value). I don't enjoy shopping or thinking about shopping for groceries. And I don't like to cook! So my frugality comes out in other ways.

But I do have a book to recommend: *How to Cook a Wolf* by M.F.K. Fisher. As I recall, it was written during a time of poor economy to advise on inexpensive cooking. (When the wolf is at the door . . .) [Ed. note: For more about this book, see middle column, this page.]

~ S., Ilwaco, Wash.



Relearning the old ways

Frontier House: Food on the Frontier
pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/essay6.html

This description of how pioneers ate in the nineteenth century contains specific memories from folks who settled in what is now Sweet Grass County, Mont.

Great Depression Cooking with Clara
greatdepressioncooking.com

Be sure to watch the YouTube videos of Clara cooking up delicious, inexpensive food. Clara, now in her 90s, recalls the dishes she ate during the Great Depression in the 1930s.

How to Cook a Wolf by M.F.K. Fisher

Written during World War II, this book suggests ways to provide adequate nutrition with limited food resources. Fisher quotes her grandmother after she listened to young housewives discussing economical cake recipes: "I see that ever since I was married, well over fifty years ago, I have been living on a war budget without realizing it! I never knew before that using common sense in the kitchen was stylish only in emergencies."

In her chapter, "How to Practice True Economy" (which might have been equally well-placed in the chapter titled "How to Be Cheerful Though Starving"), Fisher advises occasionally taking a moment to contemplate luxury. Even if it is beyond your reach at the moment, "[y]et now and then it cannot harm you, thus to enjoy a short respite from reality."

I eat rice and beans if money's tight. Or I make soup with whatever's around. Or I go through the cupboards and use up all the miscellaneous canned things, etc., that I usually ignore. It's amazing how many meals can be found that way. If you're a meat-eater, use a slow cooker to cook cheaper cuts of meat and make them tender.

~ G., Palmyra, Pa.

I shop for sales and buy in bulk when I find a good deal on something. My freezer is full of meat and fruit that I've bought on sale over the months. I very seldom buy anything prepared—mostly I use the "shop the perimeter" strategy. Though I do stock up on things like pasta, tuna, and canned olives where there's a super sale on them.

Eat soup. You can get beef bones and ham hocks really cheaply (stock up when they're on sale!), and in-season soup vegetables are usually pretty inexpensive. If you don't have any cheap meat in the freezer, lentils and split peas are good for protein.

And another suggestion for an inexpensive, healthy, and tasty meal: stir-fry. When I want a quick meal, I just chop up whatever veggies I have in the fridge (usually broccoli, onion, celery, and/or cabbage), add some protein (usually meat—I try to keep cold, cooked meat available), and stir fry with some soy sauce. You only need to make what you'll eat, and you can use in-season veggies. Good stuff. [See also **Yummy Northwest**, November 2008.]

Tips for other people to save money on food bills:

How about getting a couple of chickens [Ed. note: or ducks] (but not a rooster)? They lay a lot of eggs, and eggs are great food. Many cities allow you to keep a couple. And if you're a gardener, they have the added advantage of eating slugs and producing fertilizer.

You can freeze eggs if the hens get ahead of your appetite. I haven't actually done it myself, but all the instructions I've seen are to break them into a dish and mix them lightly (to break the yolk into the white). Here is some great info: whatscookingamerica.net/Eggs/FreezingEgg.htm.

~ O., Seattle

I save money on food by making large quantities of something (chili, curry, pot roast, etc.) on Sunday and then eating it for lunch the rest of the week. When I don't think I have any food in the house, I always get a meal out of the Clean Out the Fridge Soup recipe. [See **Yummy Northwest**, November 2004.]

Also: Eat out less.

~ G., Bellevue, Wash.

The biggest ways we save money on food is by using coupons on double or triple coupon day, and by scouting out the sales flyers and snagging the 2-for-1 things that we use a lot. I recently saved nearly \$80 just by buying things I normally buy at the regular price anyway.

~ M., Huntersville, N.C.

I put veggies over cooked quinoa (my favorite), pasta, or rice, for just about every supper. Sometimes I add a vegetarian gravy, roasted nuts, grated cheese, or crumbled goat cheese over it. It makes a very filling meal, and one cooking of the various ingredients can stretch up to three meals.

Fresh fruits are expensive—especially organic fruit—so I buy small, imperfect apples in bulk for “everyday” eating, and kiwis, pears, bananas, etc., for “special.” I have a friend who has blueberry bushes, and she shares the bounty with me; they get frozen and enjoyed all winter until the next crop is ready.

~ C., Astoria, Ore.

I try very hard not to buy on impulse. I buy enough to feed four people, even though we are only two, and freeze the other portions for later.

Rice! Rice with almost anything is a great filler and extender. Make a full pot for a meal and save the leftovers to add to soup, tuna salad, sautéed with almost anything.

Tips for other people to save money on food bills:

Shop for sales, clip coupons (but only of items you already use), compare prices, buy generic. Never, ever shop when you're hungry. Stick to your shopping list (I admit I can never do that one).

Also, eat what you have in your cupboard. If a can of soup or box of instant something-or-other has been gathering dust, either eat it now or give it to a food bank. And clean your fridge weekly. Those leftovers aren't going to taste any better next week.

~ M., Woodinville, Wash.

Buy the best quality food you can afford. That will mean more fresh produce and locally grown meats. You'll need to do more food preparation at home, but you probably will discover it's fun and relaxing.

Throw away those tempting coupons that come in the Sunday newspaper or in your mailbox; quite often they are for highly processed, salt- and sugar-laden, chemical-laden, over-priced stuff that will make you sick in the long run. That doesn't really save you money, does it?

~ R., Seattle



Grow your own greens

Sprouts are a nutritious and inexpensive food item you can grow all year 'round.

Place a tablespoon or two of seeds or grains in a quart jar, cover the opening with a piece of cheesecloth or nylon stocking held in place with a rubber band, fill with warm water, and let sit overnight.

In the morning, drain off the water, rinse with more warm water, and then place the jar in a cool, dark spot. In the evening, rinse again with warm water.

Rinse seeds with warm water twice a day until sprouts have two leaves. They are then ready to eat. (Use in sandwiches, salads, omelets, stir-fries, etc.—or eat by the handful.)

You can use almost any seed or grain—look for these among the spices and grains in your supermarket's bulk section. Don't be afraid to experiment. If you don't like the taste, or if the seeds don't grow, toss them outside for the birds to feast on.

I've enjoyed sprouting and eating alfalfa seeds, mung beans, and wheat kernels.

For more information, go to green.yahoo.com/blog/huddl/ergreenhome/9/how-to-sprout-seeds-for-inexpensive-and-tasty-nutrition.html.

~ Mary Rosewood

When I worked on a cooking show in Los Angeles, and since I'm a “foodie” anyway, I used to buy lots of food and ended up wasting a lot of it because I needed to always have the perfect item—if I couldn't have that perfect type of French feta, I certainly wouldn't think of using cottage cheese! Now I save money by trying to eat the food I have in the house as opposed to going to the grocery store every time I want to make a special meal. Now I use what I have, and I have found that some of my simpler meals are the most successful anyway.

In addition to that, I try and make things that make good leftovers—stews and creative 4–5 ingredient “chili” (such as turkey garbanzo) that we can eat for several days. Also, I make less of the entrée (meat, etc.) and try to always have salad on hand. So instead of reaching for seconds, I will have salad, which usually fills me up, and then I have leftovers for the next day. And I buy as few processed foods as I can—fresh meats, vegetables, and whole grains are a better value. Also, fortunately, inexpensive red wine is plentiful!

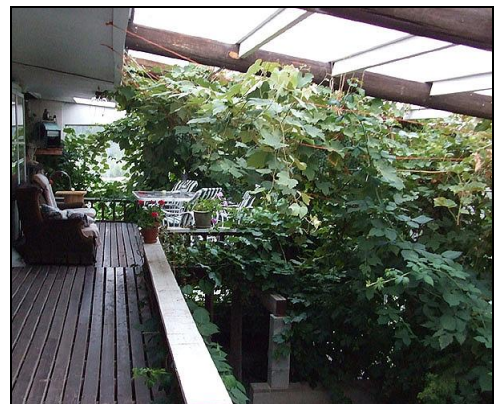
We have a greenhouse garden, and I manage to not spend any money on vegetables from the grocery store from June to the end of November.

My favorite meal is pinto beans (cooked in a slow cooker or from a can) and rice cooked separately and served in one bowl with shredded cheese, cabbage, onions, shredded carrots, cilantro (or whatever fresh vegetable I can cut up fine enough to make a topping—I've used kale, fresh garlic, etc.), and homemade salsa and/or sour cream.

Tips for other people to save money on food bills:

Grow your own herbs. Eat less meat; for example, if you use it in something like stir-fries or stews, you can use less but still get enough protein and still have lots of flavor.

~ K., Stevensville, Mont.



THIS INDOOR GREENHOUSE IN STEVENSVILLE, MONT., PROVIDES ABUNDANT FOOD AS WELL AS A RELAXING PLACE TO EAT.

I grow herbs in containers on my deck—I love picking rosemary and mint whenever I want them. And I've had the best luck with Sun Gold cherry tomatoes!

I watch the grocery/drug stores for sales. Unless an item is on sale these days, I don't buy it—well, almost always. I rarely clip coupons because I don't use most of the products that have coupons.

We use lots of peanut butter—big jars of Jif from Costco!

Bake a potato and top with whatever . . . when there aren't many leftovers in the fridge (a dab of this, a spoonful of that), carrots, broccoli, spinach, all work just fine. And if the potato is really big, it's good for two meals.

My son makes the best black bean soup and split pea soup! When he makes a pot of soup, that's what we eat for a few days—until it's gone. And his recipe for brown rice and onions is wonderful! [Ed. note: See Nice Rice recipe in middle column, this page.]

I got a pot roast at a sinfully low price at Safeway, and I put it in a slow cooker with red wine and balsamic vinegar. Delicious! Does it count as frugal when you add wine??

There is an Orowheat discount store nearby. I stock up on bread, rolls, sandwich buns, and Boboli pizza crusts about once a month; having a freezer available really helps.

We don't go into Costco without a list. And so far, we have followed it fairly well. Don't go when you are hungry, and always check out the samples at Costco.

We are eagerly waiting for the local farmers markets to open. Until then, we really should head into town some weekend for the Fremont/Ballard markets that are open year round. [Ed. note: See yummynorthwest.com/farmersmarkets.htm for a list of farmers markets.]

~ L., Kirkland, Wash.

Make things from scratch instead of using processed foods. You can get a whole pack of noodles and a big hunk of cheese and some cream and make a whole lot rather than what you get in a little box of macaroni and cheese. And you're not getting all those preservatives and all that salt and all that kind of stuff. In the store you see those packages of frozen vegetables to steam in the microwave. You can get a head of broccoli and a head of cauliflower and you can steam those in your microwave and still have leftovers for what you pay for that package.

~ A., Big Timber, Mont.



Nice Rice

Whether this qualifies as “frugal” or not depends on what you have in your cupboard. But keep in mind that the white wine and tamari sauce are used as seasoning, and rice is fairly inexpensive.

About 2 cups cooked brown rice (1/2 cup, uncooked)
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 red onion, chopped
1 tablespoon tamari sauce (see note)
1/8 cup white wine

Put olive oil in a skillet on medium-low heat and stir the onion as it slowly cooks; be careful not to burn the onion. When it is caramelized (brown), add the tamari sauce and cook for a couple of minutes. Deglaze the sauce with the white wine (that is, slowly pour wine into pan to loosen what's stuck to it). Then stir into the rice.

This is really good with meatloaf or pot roast, or warm up about a quarter of a cup the next day and add to vegetable soup or stir into mixed greens for a salad.

Note: Tamari sauce can contain wheat or be wheat free. It has a high sodium content, but not much is needed. For more information about tamari sauce: care2.com/greenliving/tamari-shoyutamari-shoyu-soy-sauce.html and epicurious.com/tools/fooddictionary/entry?id=4873.

[Ed. note: Although the creator of this recipe recommends using tamari sauce, you can substitute soy sauce or teriyaki sauce.]

Shop local restaurant supply stores such as Cash and Carry or Winco. They have no membership fees and one can buy by the case, which saves money. Also, shop local farmers market-type markets.

I like to keep on hand boneless, skinless chicken breasts: fresh, frozen, or canned. Wild or brown rice is good as well. One can make almost anything with these. Chicken fajitas, enchiladas, soup, chicken casserole, chicken salad, chicken sandwiches, chicken lasagna, chicken pot pie, chicken and rice, to name a few.

Clip coupons, when something is on sale. Check the unit price and buy the max. Buy store brands as opposed to well-known brands. In many cases the ingredients are the same, you just pay for the name-brand label. Do not drive ten miles to save three cents. I know many that do, thinking they are saving money but then spending it on the gas to get there.

~ M., Ravensdale, Wash.

As a single person who doesn't enjoy cooking, I have a real challenge with frugality. Too often I end up ordering takeout, which is much too expensive. When I buy the raw ingredients to cook, I usually end up with half a head of something (broccoli, cauliflower, etc.) rotting in the vegetable bin with a couple of limp carrots—I just don't use them up fast enough. Add in the half-used condiment and dressing bottles that pile up, and it's a real waste of money.

When I'm organized enough to think ahead, though, I like to order meal delivery from a service like Lucky Palate [luckypalate.com], which specializes in vegan food. I can get a delicious entree and side dish for about \$13, which is usually enough for two or three meals. The food is delicious, I just have to reheat it, and there's absolutely no waste.

I know there are other delivery services in Seattle, and unless you're going with a gourmet service, it's probably less expensive than takeout, restaurants, and a refrigerator full of wasted food.

~ M., Seattle

About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com. View archives at yummynorthwest.com.