



DINING ON A DIME

Eating Better for Less

August/September

Calculating the Cost of Convenience

Do you make your grocery store purchases based on taste, convenience, cost or nutrition? You probably consider all of these factors! This issue of *Dining on a Dime* compares the cost of some popular family foods. Prices of ready-made packaged products and their homemade counterparts are shown below. The column on the right shows how much you would save on four servings of the better buy. Read on — the results may surprise you!



Food Item	Cost for one packaged serving	Cost for one homemade serving	Which is the better buy?	How much would you save on 4 servings?
Beef Stir Fry (6 servings)	\$1.44	\$0.68	Homemade	\$3.04
Pizza (6 servings)	\$1.02	\$1.70	Packaged	\$2.72
Vegetable Tray (4 Servings)	\$1.12	\$0.53	Homemade	\$2.36
Muffins (12 servings)	\$0.44	\$0.07	Homemade	\$1.48
Lasagna (16 servings)	\$0.84	\$0.61	Homemade	\$0.92
Beef Chili (6 servings)	\$0.92	\$0.78	Homemade	\$0.56
Bean Burritos (12 servings)	\$0.32	\$0.40	Packaged	\$0.32
Potato Salad (12 servings)	\$0.34	\$0.27	Homemade	\$0.28

Source (Accessed 7/26/06): Prices based on those at www.safeway.com

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Don't Let the Good Go Bad

Nobody likes to find rotten fruits or vegetables in their refrigerator. Enjoy the tastes of the season by keeping your purchases fresh. Buy the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables



that you and your family can eat within the storage limits shown in the table below. Fresh foods from a garden generally will keep longer than items purchased at a grocery store. Read on for more tips to help you get the longest storage life for your fresh fruits and vegetables.

Keep Them Cool and Dry

- Wait to wash vegetables until just before using them.
- Some foods (including onions, oranges and potatoes) should be left out of the refrigerator completely. Store these items in mesh bags in dry, cool, dark spaces for up to one or two weeks.
- Some fruits and vegetables (such as apples, bananas, melons and tomatoes) do best if left to ripen on a counter before being refrigerated. Once ripe, these foods should be stored in the refrigerator for optimal freshness.
- Crisper drawers are the coldest and the most moist section of the refrigerator. Store berries, broccoli, carrots, corn, grapes, lettuce heads, and pre-cut fruits and vegetables in the crisper drawers.
- Most refrigerated vegetables last longest when they are stored in a resealable plastic bag that has six to eight small holes poked in it. The plastic holds in moisture, and the holes let in some oxygen so the vegetables can “breathe.” Line the inside of the plastic bag with dry paper towels to keep excess moisture from spoiling the vegetables.

Fruit/ Vegetable	Storage Time	Fruit/ Vegetable	Storage Time	Fruit/ Vegetable	Storage Time
Apples	1 month	Carrots	1-2 weeks	Greens	3-5 days
Asparagus	2-3 days	Cauliflower	1 week	Herbs	2-3 days
Bananas	2-3 days	Corn	1-2 days	Lettuce	5-7 days
Beets	2 weeks	Grapes	3-5 days	Peaches	5 days
Berries	2-3 days	Green beans	3-5 days	Pears	5 days
Broccoli	3-5 days	Green onions	3-5 days	Radishes	2 weeks

Source (Accessed 6/27/06): Safe Storage of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Texas Cooperative Extension, http://fruitandvegetablesafety.tamu.edu/Consumers/Safe_Food_Storage.pdf

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Shopping Lists Save Time, Money

Are you looking for an easy way to save \$1,000 or more a year? Use a shopping list! Why? The average shopper spends 40 percent more on impulse purchases when shopping without a list. If you spend \$50 each week at the grocery store, there's a good chance that \$20 of those purchases are unplanned. That adds up! You're also likely to spend 50 cents more for every minute you are at the grocery store beyond the first 30 minutes. In this case, time is money! Save your time *and* your money by using a shopping list.



How Can You Get a “Master” Shopping List? It’s easy!

- The easiest way is to use the major food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, milk and dairy products, and meat and beans) as the headings on your master shopping list.
- A better way is to go to your favorite grocery store with a blank piece of paper. Go up and down the aisles that you shop and record general headings that describe your food purchases, using the informational signs located in each aisle as a guideline. Sample headings you might include are: fresh fruits and vegetables, baking items, rice and pasta, canned and boxed foods, beverages, household supplies, bakery products, and refrigerated and frozen foods.
- Write any food items that you purchase every week (for example, bread and milk) under the proper heading on your master list. Photocopy the master list, or print it from a computer, for use as a weekly shopping list.
- Keep your weekly shopping list in a central location. Ask family members to add to it as needed, to avoid running out of items and return trips to the store.

Shopping List	
Fresh fruits & vega apples bananas Watermelon cabbage onions	Baking items Flour cinnamon nuts
Rice & pasta macaroni brown rice	Canned / Boxed Tomato sauce peanut butter green beans
Breakfast foods oatmeal	Beverages tea
Household supplies bleach paper towels	Bakery products Bread tortillas
Refrigerated foods Milk chicken	Frozen foods Orange juice Corn Pizza

Plan on Sales

- Check out the weekly grocery ads to see what items are on sale, especially the meat and produce sales. Base your weekly menu around these special deals. For example, if the grocery store is selling tuna at a lower-than-usual price, you might decide to serve tuna casserole and tuna salad sandwiches that week.
- Check your kitchen to make sure you have the rest of the ingredients you need to complete the recipe, and add any necessary items to your list.

In & Out Quickly

- Plan to shop during the least busy times. Weekdays or early morning tend to be less crowded, which lets you get in and out of the store quickly.

Source (Accessed 6/19/06): [Cook It Quick! Use Grocery List to Save Time, Eat Healthier](http://www.lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciqb.htm), University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County, www.lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciqb.htm

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The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your local SRS Service Center or call 1-800-221-5689.



Dining on a Dime's Cooks' Corner

Stuffed Zucchini (Makes 4 servings)

Ingredients

- 2 medium fresh zucchini, halved lengthwise
- 2 teaspoons cooking oil
- 1/2 medium onion, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 3/4 cup shredded feta or part-skim mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup chopped fresh tomatoes, or canned with no added salt

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 475 degrees.
2. Using a tablespoon, scoop out zucchini center, forming "boats" with 1/4 inch borders. Arrange boats, cut sides down, on a baking sheet. Bake 15 minutes. Meanwhile, coarsely chop the zucchini centers. Set aside.
3. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add onion and pepper. Cook 5 minutes. Add chopped zucchini. Cook 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool for 5 minutes. Stir in cheese and tomatoes.
4. Turn zucchini boats cut sides up. Fill with the vegetable and cheese mixture. Bake 20 minutes. Serve hot.
5. Cover and refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Each portion (1/2 zucchini) provides: 110 calories, 7 g fat, 7 g carbohydrate, 7 g protein, 10 mg cholesterol, 125 mg sodium and 2 g dietary fiber.



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