

Ideas for Thrifty Menus

During these tough economic times, many families are concerned about rising food costs. Here are some tips on how to stretch your food dollars through meal planning.

Use Less Meat, Poultry and Fish

Although meat is an excellent source of protein and many nutrients, most Americans over-consume protein foods. Use smaller portions of meat, poultry and fish, and fill your plate with vegetables instead. Make casseroles with chicken and rice, ground beef and pasta or fish and a dressing mix.

Ground beef, turkey or chicken can be stretched in many recipes and used creatively: spaghetti sauce, stuffed peppers, hamburgers, pasta casseroles and tacos. To stretch the meat when making stuffed peppers or tacos, include beans for your protein.

Buy whole chicken and cut it up yourself. If you serve baked chicken one day you can use the leftovers for making chicken soup and stew for the next day. Add frozen or canned vegetables for nutrition and flavor. They often cost less than fresh and can be bought on sale.

Use canned beans and peas in casseroles and soups to increase protein to reduce cost. For example, use less meat and more beans in lentil and pea soups, tamale pies, taco salad, Spanish rice and pasta casseroles. Also, think about including peanut butter with meals, not just for peanut butter sandwiches.

Use More Whole Grain

Whole-grain products are excellent sources of nutrients and phytochemicals that we need for good cardiovascular health. Many people think that grain products are high in calories and fattening, but it is what we put on our grains that add the calories, such as butter and cream cheese. You can use whole grains for making hot cereal for breakfast, in casseroles and as a side dish. Combine whole grains with vegetables in casseroles such as spinach and rice, pilafs with brown rice and whole grain pasta with zucchini or

squash. Build your meal around whole grain and vegetables while using meat as a condiment and flavoring.

Use More Seasonal Vegetables and Fruits

Although many fruits and vegetables are available around the year, vegetables and fruits have growing seasons and it is during these times that they are available at the lowest prices. Produce harvested locally is offered at the best prices in stores.

Vegetables and their availability by month	
January	Mushrooms
February	Mushrooms
March	Mushrooms
April	Greens, Mushrooms, Turnips
May	Asparagus, Greens, Mushrooms, Peas, Spinach, Turnips
June	Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens, Mushrooms, Peas, Snap Beans, Squash, Spinach
July	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Corn, Cucumbers, Greens, Mushrooms, Peppers, Potatoes, Snap Beans, Tomatoes
August	Greens, Lima Beans, Mushrooms, Peppers, Potatoes, Snap Beans, Tomatoes
September	Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplants, Greens, Lima Beans, Mushrooms, Peppers, Pumpkin, Snap Beans, Spinach, Squash, Tomatoes, Turnips
October	Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Greens, Mushrooms, Pumpkins, Spinach, Sweet Potatoes, Turnips
November	Greens, Mushrooms, Sweet Potatoes
December	Mushrooms

Fruits and their availability by month	
January	Bananas, Grapefruit, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel), Tangerines, Tangelos
February	Bananas, Grapefruit, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel), Strawberries, Tangerines, Tangelos
March	Bananas, Grapefruit, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel), Strawberries, Tangerines, Tangelos
April	Bananas, Grapefruit, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel), Strawberries
May	Apricots, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Grapefruit, Grapes, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Valencia), Peaches, Strawberries, Watermelons
June	Apricots, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Lemons, Oranges (Valencia), Peaches, Strawberries, Watermelons
July	Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Lemons, Oranges (Valencia), Peaches, Strawberries, Watermelons
August	Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Lemons, Oranges (Valencia), Peaches, Pears, Prunes, Strawberries, Watermelons
September	Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Lemons, Oranges (Valencia), Peaches, Pears, Pomegranates, Prunes, Strawberries, Watermelons
October	Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupe, Dates, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel and Valencia), Pears, Pomegranates, Prunes, Strawberries, Watermelons
November	Bananas, Cantaloupe, Dates, Grapefruit, Grapes, Honeydew melon, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Oranges (Navel), Pomegranates, Strawberries, Tangerines, Tangelos
December	Bananas, Cantaloupe, Dates, Grapefruit, Kiwifruit, Lemons, Tangerines, Tangelos

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