



MISSY RAKES

THE
FRUGAL
MOM'S GUIDE TO
FEEDING YOUR FAMILY

*Tips, Tricks and Recipes
for Eating Well on a Budget*

There is a myth that eating cheap equals ramen noodles and macaroni, but I'm here to tell you that it doesn't have to be true. Each family's definition of a small budget is going to differ depending on location, size of family and other determining factors. According to the USDA, a family of four with children aged 2-4 is considered thrifty to live on \$131 per week. Considering that this number is for food only and doesn't include things like diapers, toilet paper and other toiletries, I feel that most people should be able to fall within this range if they put enough effort into it, unless maybe they live in a high cost of living area or have a family member with a special needs diet.

Each family's budget and resources will look different, but there are some things that anyone can do to feed their family well with less. I personally try to spend \$75-100 per week to feed a family of four with two small children including household items and I find in my area (Arkansas) it's fairly easy to do. In fact, I know if I tried harder I could get that number down even lower, but at the moment I'm comfortable with what I'm spending. So here are my top tips for feeding your family on a budget.

Eat at Home

If you're on a limited budget, you're going to have to eat meals at home simply because it costs way less than eating out. Did you know that the average American family spends over \$200 per month eating out? If you think ditching the drive-thru will be hard to break then check out

[these tips to avoid eating out](#) that are sure to help you stay within your budget. Also, check out [this list of copycat recipes](#) to learn how to make your favorite restaurant items at home!

Menu Plan the Right Way

Taking the time to plan your meals for the week is a great way to save money when implemented correctly. To get the most bang for your buck, you will need to plan meals around what's already in your pantry and *then* around what's on sale or in season. Menu planning won't save you money, however if you are buying steaks, out of season produce and other expensive items all of the time.

Cook from Scratch

Convenience food has its place, but shouldn't be relied upon all the time when you're on a tight budget because it costs more and is usually unhealthy. Anything that you can learn to make at home instead of buying will save you money. I make things like [freezer meals](#), [homemade bread](#), [ranch seasoning](#) and [taco seasoning](#) because they're better for my family and doing so saves me money.

Eat Simply

I'm a big fan of keeping my life simple, including my meals. I think people overspend on food simply because there are too many options to choose from. Sticking to the basics and eating a simple diet will definitely save you money and also help to make your life a little easier. Meals

like scrambled eggs, toast and fruit are simple, healthy and inexpensive.

Love Your Leftovers

People that don't eat leftovers really baffle me because I feel like they must be wasting so much! I specifically cook more than we need so that we have enough for another meal. In fact, we love leftovers so much that we eat them almost everyday for lunch. This saves me the time and hassle of having to plan/cook for lunches and also saves money. Leftovers work well for us because we have small children, but if you have a large family or teenage boys then leftovers may not work quite as well for your family.

Grow Your Own

If you've read my blog for long then you probably know by now that I think everyone should grow something even if it's just a basil plant on your windowsill or a tomato plant on your back patio. Anything that you grow on your own will save you money and connect you to your food. We grow a large garden and rarely have to buy produce through the summer months.

Barter

If you grow your own food, then you will more than likely have a surplus and getting together with fellow gardeners to swap produce is a great way to get more for you money! Also, if you stock up when things are on sale and

buy a few extra you could always get a couple of friends together and trade for what they have on hand.

Stock up on Sale

A great way to get the most from your grocery money is to stock up when something is on sale. To do this well, you will need to familiarize yourself with standard prices of different items in your area. Then when an item goes below that price you should consider buying enough to last until the next sale, especially if you have a coupon to match with the sale. Things go on sale in cycles such as baking supplies around the holidays and grilling items in the spring/summer. For example, around Easter I bought 10+ lbs of butter because Aldi had it on sale for \$1.89 per lb which is a great deal considering it's normally priced around \$4 per pound. Butter freezes well so now I have enough to last me for a long time. Also, don't be afraid to stock up on things like celery, bell peppers, onions, etc. since they can be chopped and frozen for when you need them.

Less Meat

Meat is one of the most expensive categories in the food budget so finding ways to use less and stretch what you have will end up saving you a good amount of money. We normally have 2 or more meatless meals each week such as homemade waffles with eggs. You can also omit the meat from most Mexican dishes and replace it with beans such as burritos, taco soup, etc. When you do prepare

meat use it sparingly such as mixed in with soups or casseroles.

Less Dairy

Dairy is another expensive category that is worth cutting down. Consider using less cheese in recipes or buying blocks to shred yourself. Also, keep an eye out for coupons and rebates on these items and stock up when they are on sale if you have a way to freeze or use them up before they expire.

Pay With Cash

Did you know that people who pay with cash tend to spend less than those who use a card? Take your budgeted amount in cash to the store and leave your cards at home. This way if you come up short you will be forced to put something back and therefore, stay within your budget.

Learn How to Freezer Cook

Freezer cooking is a great way to save time and money. Stocking up when things are on sale means you will have lots of ingredients on hand and a great way to use them is to do a freezer cooking session. I love freezer cooking because for a little bit of time and effort you have homemade convenience foods in your freezer!

Substitute Ingredients

If you're able to be flexible and creative when cooking then you will definitely save more money. If you have everything but one ingredient to make a dish consider skipping it or replacing it with something else. This way you are saving money and reducing waste. Also if a recipe calls for an expensive ingredient consider switching it out for a cheaper alternative such as beans for ground beef.

Shop Once per Week

Plan your meals, go shopping and then stay out of the store until the next week! Anytime you run in just to get milk or cheese then you are more than likely going to buy other things that you didn't even know you needed. If you run out of something then consider substituting or going without it until your next planned shopping trip. The less you go to the store, the less you will spend.

Check Sale Sections

Find your stores discounted sections and look through them every time you go shopping. You never know what you will find and if you see a good deal then stock up! Normally stores will have several different areas with marked down items so keep your eyes peeled. You will want to consider expiration dates before buying in these sections.

Shop Discount Stores

My absolute favorite grocery store is Aldi because they have high quality items at discounted prices. I can easily save 30% or more just by shopping there instead of Wal-Mart. See if you have an Aldi or other discount grocery store in your area and frequent them regularly. Also, see if you have a bakery outlet where you can find breads, rolls, etc. at discounted prices. These items freeze well so you can stock up if you find a good deal.

Dollar Tree is another store worth checking out especially since they accept coupons. They regularly carry name brands such as Nature's Own Bread and Hormel Pepperoni. Plus, they accept coupons which makes for some great deals!

I hope these tips have encouraged you to find new ways to stretch your grocery budget. If you are just starting out then I would suggest that you pick one thing to focus on at a time so that you don't get overwhelmed such as eating at home or cooking from scratch.

Below are some of my favorite frugal recipes and a free frugal foods list that you can hang on your refrigerator as a reminder of the most affordable foods in the grocery store. Happy savings and don't forget to visit [Graceful Little Honey Bee](#) for more frugal living tips and easy recipes!

Favorite Frugal Recipes

Egg Muffins

7 Eggs
1 cup shredded cheddar
½ cup Italian breadcrumbs
¼ cup bacon bits

Step 1: Mix all ingredients.
Step 2: Pour into greased muffin tin.
Step 3: Bake for 20 minutes @ 350.

Southwest Chicken Casserole

8 oz (half box) pasta, cooked and drained
1-2 cups chicken, cooked and shredded
8 oz sour cream
1 onion, diced
2 bell peppers, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 packet taco seasoning
1 cup shredded cheddar

Step 1: Pre-heat oven to 350.
Step 2: Sauté onions, peppers and garlic until soft.
Step 3: Mix all ingredients except shredded cheese.
Step 4: Pour mixture into greased casserole dish.
Step 5: Sprinkle cheese on top.
Step 6: Bake at 350 for 20-30 minutes.

Cinnamon Sugar Pancake Squares

Batter:

3/4 c. milk
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 large egg
1 tbsp sugar
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp salt

Cinnamon Sugar Topping:

1 tbsp sugar
1 tsp cinnamon

Step 1: Beat milk, oil and egg in mixing bowl.

Step 2: Mix in sugar.

Step 3: Gradually mix in flour.

Step 4: Mix in baking powder and salt.

Step 5: Pour batter into greased 8×8 baking pan.

Step 6: In separate bowl, mix sugar and cinnamon then
sprinkle over batter.

Step 7: Swirl cinnamon sugar topping with knife.

Step 8: Bake at 350 for 25 minutes.

Cut into squares and enjoy!

Bean and Cheese Freezer Burritos

12 burrito sized tortillas

2 cans refried beans

2 cans diced tomatoes and chiles (do not drain!)

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Foil and freezer bags

Step 1: Mix beans, cheese and tomatoes (with liquid from can) in a medium sauce pot over low heat until combined. You don't want it to get too hot since you will be freezing these, so only heat enough to combine the ingredients.

Step 2: Pre-cut 12 pieces of foil.

Step 3: Lay tortilla over foil and add approx. 1/2 cup filling to the center.

Step 4: Fold tortilla into burrito and wrap with foil.

Step 5: Repeat steps 3 & 4 until all filling is used.

Step 6: Place burritos in gallon freezer bags and freeze until ready to serve.

For serving: Cook frozen burrito in microwave 2-3 minutes or until warmed throughout.

Basic Sautéed Cabbage

1 head of cabbage, diced into 1 inch squares

1 onion, diced

1 tbsp vinegar

4 tbsp cooking oil

1 tsp salt

1/4 tsp pepper

1 cup chicken broth

Step 1: Mix oil, vinegar, salt and pepper in large skillet or sauce pot.

Step 2: Add cabbage and onions, sauté 5-7 minutes over medium heat.

Step 3: Add broth and reduce heat to low.

Step 4: Cover and simmer for 15 minutes.

Frugal Foods List

Old-Fashioned Oats	Frozen Fruit
Lentils	Chicken Thighs
Dried Beans	Chicken Legs
Rice	Whole Chicken
Whole Wheat Pasta	Canned Tuna
Tomato Sauce	Flour
Powdered Milk	Sugar
Carrots	Cornmeal
Apples	Corn Masa Mix
Lettuce	Baking Soda
Cabbage	Vinegar
Potatoes	Boullion Powder
Bananas	Popcorn Kernels
Garlic	Whole Wheat Bread
Onions	Tea Bags
Eggs	Peanut Butter
Frozen Vegetables	Seasonings