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SAT., AUG 29, 2009 - 12:50 PM

Groceries: Shop with skill

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Monthly grocery bills total \$588 for thrifty, \$764 for low cost, \$954 for moderate cost and \$1,158 for liberal meal plans espoused by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as nutritious for a household with two adults and two young children.

Here are some tips to make the most of your grocery dollars:

1: Avoid aisles.

LINKS

- [Recipes](#)
- [Back-to-school economics: Money-saving tips](#)
- [How to get your money to work for you](#)
- [Clip art -- Thrift is in](#)
- [Video: Go on a discount shopping trip with Angie Hoag and learn from a pro.](#)

Spend more of your grocery dollars on fresh food and less on marketing, packaging and convenience products by shopping the store perimeter.

2: Search high and low.

Look above and below eye level for less expensive brands on grocery shelves. Costlier sugary cereals, however, will be at children's eye level. To compare costs among brands and package sizes (large is not always cheaper), check unit pricing posted on shelves.

3: Do it yourself.

Prep whole carrots instead of buying ready-to-eat baby carrots, assemble salads from scratch rather than dumping out bagged versions, brew tea for iced tea in lieu of popping canned beverages and more.

4: Shop your kitchen.

Play "Iron Chef," creating meals from ingredients on hand: a pasta salad with Italian dressing and leftover meat, vegetables and cheese; egg-based dishes such as stratas and frittatas or stir-fries with rice and leftover meat and veggies.

5. Check the spice price.

By weight, spices likely are the most expensive purchase in supermarkets and may be worth a trip to a specialty store such as Penzey's Spices or a grocery co-op bulk aisle.

EXPERTS' TOP TIPS

Consider larger packages

For frequently used items, choose larger packages if the per-unit price is less and you can store it safely. For example, white rice in a 100-pound bag at Asian Foods costs less than 34 cents per pound, about a third the cost of a 5-pound bag of rice at a Madison supermarket.

Average annual savings

\$66

Pool your buying power

The Self Help and Resource Exchange (SHARE) nonprofit food buying program, www.sharewi.org or 800-548-2124, found that its July "Big Value Package" saved \$26.62 over comparable items at a grocery store.

Average annual savings:



Advertisement:

About this series:

Every week, the State Journal features tips and stories designed to help you save money.

Saving Saturdays runs weekly through Oct. 10.

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MOST VIEWED

\$320

Stock up on cyclical deals

Wait for the bottom of pricing cycles on frequently used items that store well, such as 10 packages of pasta for \$10 or 10 cans of beef ravioli for \$9.50.

Average annual savings

\$150

Avoid waste

A University of Arizona researcher estimates Americans toss out 14 percent of the food they bring into the home. To prevent waste, shop with realistic menus in mind, buy fresh food to use within a day or two (and the rest frozen or canned or plan to shop again in a few days) and size meals for minimal leftovers or make enough to freeze for a second meal.

Average annual savings:

\$988 to \$1,945

Sources: Gayle Coleman, UW-Extension nutrition education program specialist; U.S. Department of Agriculture; University of Nebraska Extension; University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University.

Here are some Web sites that can help you save money on groceries:

For the Environmental Working Group's advice on when it's worth buying organic produce (or produce grown following organic methods, as is common among many farmers' market vendors), check the "Dirty Dozen" list at <http://www.foodnews.org/>

For the cost of food at home, go to www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCost-Home.htm , which details costs of various USDA food plans by age/gender group.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program offers a searchable database for lower-cost recipes, <http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/>

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