



Frugal Real Food Meal Plans

helping you eat real food on a budget



- meal plan
- shopping list
- prep list
- saving tips & more!

Tiffany Terczak

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If you find an error, have a suggestion for improvement or have a question about a recipe, please contact Tiffany at tiffany@dontwastethecrumbs.com

Facebook: [Don't Waste the Crumbs](#)

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This portion of Frugal Real Food Meal Plans is the first half this month's meal plan. Before you work through any meal plan, it is HIGHLY recommend that you read through this portion entirely, including sections on:


- Notes About
- How to Use the Plan
- Best Practices
- Save more

These sections are KEY to understanding the meal plan and how it works. Once you have completed this portion of the meal plan, please log into the Member Homepage and download this month's meal plan!

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Dear Friend,

Seven years ago my husband and I were greatly in debt. So much so, that if you added up all the money we owed, we could have bought a nice starter home!

We cut and trimmed every expense imaginable, and it did make it easier to pay the bills. But it wasn't until we created a grocery budget that we were finally able to get ahead and starting putting money into our savings account every month.

While those first few years were tough, they taught us that eating healthy doesn't have to mean spending a lot of money. It's now my passion to share what I've learned with you, so that you too can eat real food on a budget.

I've been sharing tips on frugal real food and natural living on my blog Don't Waste the Crumbs since April 2013, and the response has been amazing.

Readers are creating grocery budgets, saving on food and feeling more in control of their finances. For the first time, they are empowered and realize that it truly is possible to feed their families real food without going broke.

But the real food journey is a bumpy one, and I know sometimes we need more help.

So we created Frugal Real Food Meal Plans.

The concept is simple: We wanted you to feel like a good friend was helping you plan your meals, helping you grocery shop and spot good deals (and tell you to pass up bad ones) and helping you cook healthy meals that use affordable, common ingredients, without sacrificing taste.

We have included every possible tool and money saving tip we use and could think of in Frugal Real Food Meal Plans. We realize that while it's not possible to shop with you, Frugal Real Food Meal Plans is the next best thing.

I want you to feed your family wholesome, nourishing food without going broke.

It's my passion to help you to do it, one baby step, and one meal plan at a time.

Tiffany

notes ABOUT



notes ABOUT: the plan

Frugal Real Food Meal Plans is all-inclusive, providing you every tool possible to feed your family wholesome foods without overspending. It's designed so that even a home chef with a bare kitchen can follow the plan, lists and recipes, and by the end of the month have fed the family wholesome food within a very reasonable grocery budget.

Here's what's included in the meal planning package each month:

A Full Month of Dinners...

Strategically designed to help you eat better, waste less and save money.

12 Breakfasts...

Using items from the shopping list to prevent food waste.

12 Lunches...

Helping you feed your family without having to rely on leftovers.

4 Healthy Dessert Ideas...

To satisfy the cravings without sacrificing nutrition.

Frugal Recipe Modifications...

Skipping the expensive ingredients, yet still making a great meal.

Monthly Shopping Lists...

Helping you buy in bulk to save without having to clip coupons.

Weekly Shopping Lists...

Provide fresh produce each week, plus the opportunity to replace pantry staples.

Price Points for Each Item...

Show immediately whether an item is affordable, or if you should substitute.

Bi-Monthly Prep List...

Allows you to work smarter by combining tasks and working in bulk.

Tips for Community Meals...

Make hosting company and sharing at pot-lucks easy and affordable.

Tips for Freezer Meals...

Identify which meals are perfect to make extras for later.

Slow Cooker Meals...

Are included weekly, reducing your work load in the kitchen.

Tips for Saving Even More...

Specific to each month and season, helping you to stretch every single dollar.

Planning Printables...

Allowing you to personalize the plan and make it work best for your family.

notes ABOUT: the food

What is real food?

This meal plan uses a wide array of whole foods from every food group. Here's our definition of real food:

Living things that grow in the ground, or animals that eat things that grow in the ground, to which nothing is done to alter their whole form that a home cook could not accomplish in their own kitchen.

Many people believe that if food isn't organic, soaked, sprouted or grass-fed, then it's not real food. While these qualities (plus local, pastured and non-GMO) are desired, they are not required in order to eat a real food diet.

These traits fluctuate greatly from region to region, and for some families, are difficult to afford or even more difficult to find. In addition, some families place a greater emphasis on quality meats over quality dairy, or whole grains over organic produce.

You will need to decide what quality of food is best for your family. However, one thing is for sure:

You won't find processed foods in this meal plan.

With frugality in mind, there are certain aspects that make this meal plan different from others:

- Meals are made from scratch with simple, affordable ingredients.
- There are lots of vegetables, used frequently as simple side dishes.
- Meats are often an accompaniment, rather than the main star of the meal.
- Meatless meals are intentional, in order to stretch grocery dollars.
- Whole grains and legumes add vital nutrients to simple meals.

This meal plan contains simple nourishing foods, on a simple, affordable budget.

notes ABOUT: the shopping lists

Each recipe in this meal plan has been reviewed with a fine-toothed comb, and frugal substitutions have been made for you. This means you're not wasting money on ingredients you'll only use once, and not spending money on ingredients you really don't need.

Links to the original recipes have been provided, and you are welcome to visit the original recipe, especially if you are confused on the instructions. However, know that the ingredients might have been altered.

Set-up of the Calendar

Each month has been broken down into four weeks. Days that occur before the first Sunday are tacked onto week 1, while days that occur after the last Saturday are tacked onto week 4.

Bulk Shopping Lists

There is one bulk shopping list, designed to be shopped at the beginning of each month. This shopping list includes items from the following categories:

- canned and dry goods
- staples and condiments
- meat
- frozen
- beverages
- spices
- baking

Shop from your pantry FIRST before leaving home for the store. Make substitutions anywhere and everywhere possible, and even consider making some items from scratch if you already have the ingredients at home to do so. Items on the shopping list that can be made from scratch have been noted with **, and the recipes are in the "staple: RECIPES" section for your convenience.

Weekly Shopping Lists

There are four weekly shopping lists, one for each week of the month. This list covers items from the following categories:

- produce
- dairy, eggs and cold case

Similar to the bulk shopping lists, shop from your pantry **FIRST** before leaving home for the store. Make substitutions in the meal plan so you are intentionally using the food you already have, taking special care with perishable items.

If you have an abundance of fresh produce already at home, use it to your advantage. Either plan it for your meals, or cook and freeze it for easy meals later. Make it a goal to waste as little as possible, since food in the trash is really wasted grocery dollars.

Price Guide

Next to each item listed you'll find an approximate price. Collectively, this is the price guide, and the price listed is what you should aim for when shopping.

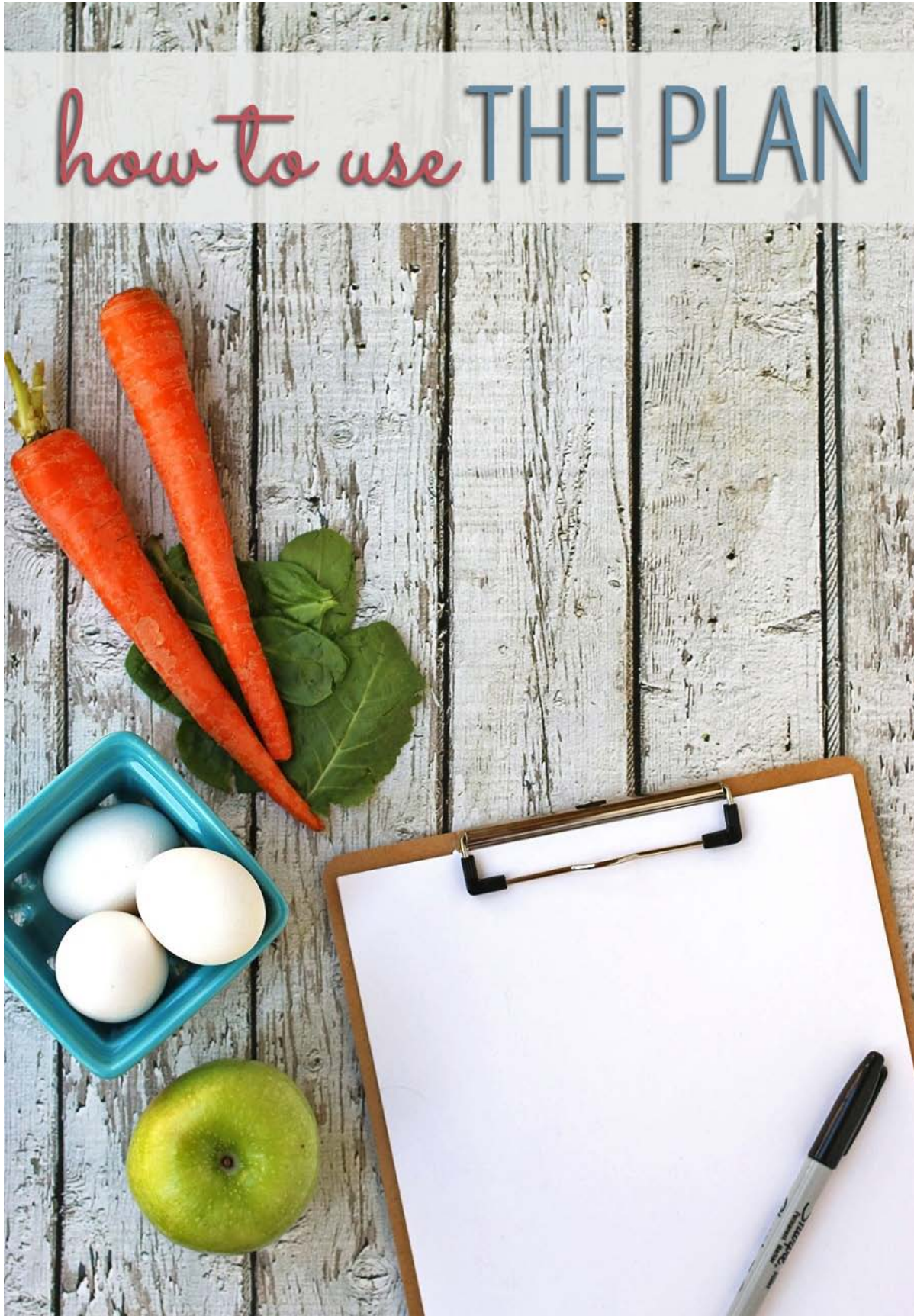
Prices can vary greatly from region to region, so you might not find this exact price. However, it's a good starting point and a gauge that will allow you judge whether or not the price in-store is fair or a bit on the expensive side.

notes ABOUT: the prep lists

A few minutes of work now can save lots of time later, but coming up with several hours to dedicate to prep work isn't easy. For this, the prep task lists have been organized so that you can use them however suits you best.

There are two main prep lists. The first covers weeks 1 and 2, and a separate prep list covers weeks 3 and 4. You can choose to complete the first list at the beginning of the month for weeks 1 and 2, and then the second list mid-month for weeks 3 and 4, OR you can complete both lists together at the beginning of the month.

Since time always seems to be limited, each item on the prep lists has been prioritized with the "due date" as to when the item is needed for the meal plan. This allows you to work through the list as your schedule permits, and know what must get done now, and what can wait if you run out of time.



1 Login to get the new meal plan.

Each meal plan is available on the 25th of the month *before*. For example, February's meal plan is available January 25th. This give you ample time to review, plan and shop according to YOUR schedule before the month even begins.

The meal plans will be available on the Member Home page, and we'll send you an email each month as a friendly reminder to login to download it.

2 Customize the meal plan with your family.

We believe in flexibility, so review the meal plan and re-arrange the days, or even swap a meal with a family favorite. Review it as needed for dietary needs and allergies.

Match it up with your family calendar so you can cook good, yet affordable food, for company and gatherings. Re-arrange the days as needed, ideally so that less busy days can be used to get ahead, leaving minimal work in the kitchen for the busier days.

When you've finished reviewing dinners, do the same for breakfasts and lunches. Many families have their own favorites for breakfasts and lunches, so don't feel obligated to use the suggestions provided. However, your month will run smoother and your grocery budget will be lower if you at least have a general idea of what you'll be eating for these meals each week.

Once you've compared the meal plan to your schedule, download the "BLANK CALENDAR" resource from the Member Home page to modify it to your own family's needs.

Note: This ePlanner was created using the connected-meal method, meaning ingredients for one meal might include leftovers from a previous meal. Be sure to take this into consideration when re-arranging meals!

3 Update the Shopping Lists

The shopping lists include everything you see on the meal plan, but they don't include any changes you might have made. Be sure to add, remove or update the quantity of items on the shopping list to account for your customization.

This includes allergy substitutions, omitting meals from the plan or making doubles of a meal for the freezer or company. One key way to saving on groceries is only buying what you need, so the shopping lists should be accurate.

4 Take inventory.

Eating what you already have in the house can easily slash your grocery spending in half, so before you go shopping, download the "INVENTORY" resource from the Member Home page. Complete these pages before beginning a new meal to ensure you're eating the food you already have on hand.

5 Review the weekly circulars.

You don't have to invest but a few minutes to see which stores have the best deals in your area. In any given week, one store will have one cut of meat marked several dollars higher per pound than another cut of meat. It's in your best interest to know where to find the best deals in your area!

To help you keep track of what stores routinely have the best price on real food staples, download the "PRICE LIST" resource from the Member Home page. Each time you go shopping, reconcile your receipts with your ongoing price list and then use these lists to help you plan your shopping trips each subsequent month. In the end, you'll have a guide showing you where to find the best deals for real food in your area.

6 Shop the kitchen FIRST.

Sticking to a good list is imperative to saving at the store, but it still won't save you money if you already have the item at home!

The shopping lists includes quantities for each ingredient, showing you how much of each item you need. shop from your kitchen FIRST and cross off items you already have, and adjusting quantities for the items you still need. This allows you to save every penny possible, and only spend money on the items you really need.

Chicken tacos might become beef tacos, and you might have buttered corn instead of buttered peas, but in the end, you're feeding your family nutritious meals and spending less money doing it.

7 Shop the Grocery Lists Using the Price Guide.

Knowing you aren't buying food you already have, and where to go for the best deal, AND that you have an accurate list for the majority of the month, you are now prepared to go shopping.

Price points for each item are included on the shopping list so you can see the estimated cost of the item. Although prices will vary depending on where you live, the stores in your area and the current season, seeing what you can expect to pay for an item will immediately help you determine whether or not something is a good deal at your local store or market.

8 Work through the prep list according to your schedule and available time.

The prep lists are provided for you as a way to help you maximize your time and energy in the kitchen. You don't HAVE to do any of them, but you'll be amazed what you can accomplish in just 30 minutes, and even more amazed at how much time this will save you later in the week!

best PRACTICES



best PRACTICES: leftovers

It's difficult to plan for every possible incident of leftovers in the house, so here are two very simple ways to reduce unwarranted cooking and avoidable food waste.

Eat leftovers for lunch.

Many of the dinner recipes provide enough food for leftovers the next day, and these leftovers should always be eaten first as either breakfast or lunch. If, for whatever reason, there aren't enough dinner leftovers to cover the planned lunch the next day, there are additional lunch ideas provided in the meal plan that can be made with ingredients already purchased for this month's meals.

Eat leftovers for dinner.

If there is ever an abundance of leftovers in the fridge, STOP following the plan for a night and declare "leftover buffet." When the fridge is clean, start following the plan again. Repeat this as often as necessary.

Bonus! Make leftovers on purpose.

Cooking once and eating twice is one sure-fire way to reduce time in the kitchen, especially for breakfast and lunch. Consider doubling these recipes to help you during busy seasons, but be sure to adjust the shopping list and budget accordingly!

...

You will truly be amazed at how much money you can save when you commit to eating the food you've already bought and paid for!

best PRACTICES: planning

Eating real food on a budget usually means making most foods from scratch. This can be time consuming, and on days where every hour seems to already be accounted for, the idea of cooking from scratch can be stressful.

I doubt Winston Churchill was referring to meal planning when he said "He who fails to plan is planning to fail," but it rings true in our case nonetheless.

Spending a few minutes to prepare for the month, week and days ahead can save an enormous amount of time, money and stress later. Here are the best ways you can plan ahead to ensure your month in the kitchen runs as smoothly as possible:

Before the month begins:

Take 30 minutes to complete the following:

- Take inventory of your fridge, freezer and pantry. Download the "INVENTORY" resource from the Member Home page to help you with this.
- Substitute produce in the kitchen that is about to go bad for ingredients needed in week 1.
- Shop from the kitchen and cross off items on the shopping list that you already have.
- Consider making some items on the shopping list from scratch if you already have the ingredients needed to make it. (i.e. coconut milk, salsa, etc.)
- Review the prep list for the first half of the month and review the recipes for each day's meals. Add additional items to the prep list as desired, in order to save time later in the month.

••• *If at the beginning of the month you find several ingredients in your kitchen that are on the verge of going bad, delay starting the meal plan until these items have been eaten. Pick up the meal plan on the corresponding day and go forward from there. Since you might have extra ingredients on hand (for the meals you skipped at the start of the month), consider making those specifically for the freezer or inviting company over for dinner.*

Before the week begins:

Take 20 minutes and check for the following:

- Meals planned for each day line up with the time you have available to prepare them. Don't forget to check for baked breads and side dishes!
- Ingredients needed for the meals are in the kitchen.
- Substitute produce that is about to go bad for items on the weekly shopping list, add additional items to your weekly shopping list that you have used up, or add tasks to your weekly prep work as needed.
- Ensure appropriate prep work has already been done, or will be done in time for the meal.

Also, be sure to:

- Review the breakfast options and decide which to add to your rotation of favorite breakfast items like baked oatmeal or scrambled eggs.
- Review the lunch options and decide which to add to your rotation of favorite lunch items like pasta salad or sandwiches.

Before you go to bed each night:

Take 5 minutes to:

- Review the meals for the following day to ensure you have soaked flour, thawed meat, soaked oats or completed other appropriate night-before tasks as needed.
- Double check that an item you need for a meal isn't already in the fridge so you aren't cooking more food than needed and creating unnecessary food waste. (i.e. pizza sauce or shredded cheese)

best PRACTICES: substitutions

Very few recipes are written in-stone and in most cases, you can substitute one item for something similar without altering the final dish too much. Some substitutions have already been made in the recipes for you, based on the ingredients needed in other recipes. However, there is still plenty of wiggle room to tailor this ePlanner to your own preferences and grocery budget.

Do you hunt? Or fish? Raise your own poultry and eggs?

Do you grow your own garden, participate in a CSA or a garden-share?

Use these resources instead of spending more money on food. Swap out game for beef, homegrown tomatoes for the canned variety and sauté community grown mushrooms instead of carrots as a side dish.

Always try to substitute before buying more food.

Here are a few common substitutions you can make in almost any meal:

- o organic potatoes ←--→ conventional sweet potatoes
- o yellow onions ←--→ white onions
- o zucchini ←--→ any variety of summer squash
- o pumpkin ←--→ any variety of winter squash
- o ground beef ←--→ ground turkey
- o homemade bread ←--→ store bought bread
- o buns ←--→ sliced bread
- o limes ←--→ lime juice
- o yellow mustard ←--→ Dijon mustard ←--→ brown mustard
- o lemons ←--→ lemon juice
- o kosher salt ←--→ table salt (reduce measurement by half)

Be sure to use the "FRUGAL SUBSTITUTION" resource from the Member Home page to help you make best use of the resources you already have!

best PRACTICES: community meals

We believe that hosting company and participating in fellowship with friends and family is important, and should not be overlooked because of the grocery budget. Here are three tips for practicing hospitality within your grocery budget:

Look for meals with ample servings.

Soups, stews and the like tend to serve at least 6 people by their very nature. Start with these types of meals when you know you'll be hosting additional guests.

Add a salad and/or fresh bread.

Salads are inexpensive to prepare, and homemade bread costs as little as 50¢ per loaf. Adding both to a frugal meal can really stretch each serving without sacrificing cost or nutrition.

Use extra ingredients.

Inevitably, there will be *something* that you have leftover at the end of the month. Save up these extra portions and use them to feed a crowd next month. By keeping track of your inventory, you'll easily be able to see what you have ample of in the kitchen.

There are certain meals in each meal plan that are ideal for practicing hospitality. These are annotated on the main meal plan calendar with a C, and they're also listed in the "highlights" section of the meal plan.

best PRACTICES: hungry bellies

Although this plan is designed to feed the average family of four, this doesn't take into consideration the seemingly bottomless tummies that come with growth spurts, teenagers or hearty eaters in general. Keep these individuals in mind as you're reviewing the meal plan and coordinating with your family schedule. Consider doubling simple dishes like fried rice, main meal salads or serving a small side salad with soups.

Other options for "beefing up" meals include:

- a simple, easy-to-prepare vegetable (i.e. peas, corn, green beans, etc.)
- doubling the starch
- doubling the beans
- adding a side of buttered rice
- adding beans as a side, or in the dish
- adding dinner biscuits or another bread
- adding rice to salads
- adding a garden salad to the meal

Every family is different, and chances are you won't have to add much, but these are just a few ideas in case you run into these issues.

... *It's worth noting that real food contains more nutrients than processed food. Because of this, it takes MORE processed food to satiate and satisfy the body than it does real food. As you transition to a real food lifestyle, you just might find yourself satisfied and nourished with LESS food! A pleasant side effect of eating less food is not spending as much at the grocery store!*

best PRACTICES: items not included

It's impossible to plan for the personal preferences that are unique to each family, so inevitably there will be some items that are not included in the shopping list. The meal plan is designed to include wiggle room so there are funds available if you desire to purchase them, but be sure to plan your budget accordingly and prioritize your shopping list when the budget is lean.

Some of the items not included on the shopping list are:

- Beverages. Unless used as an ingredient in a meal, beverages like milk, coffee, tea, juice, etc. are not included in the shopping list.
- Coffee Creamer / Sweetener
- Snacks. Your first option for snacks should always be fresh fruit. Not only is it healthier than processed snacks, but it's more affordable too. Aim for fresh, seasonal fruit that is \$1/lb.
- Additional Sides Listed in "best PRACTICES: Hungry Bellies" section

In addition, there are many pantry staples that are common in several recipes and even used beyond the meals as written. These pantry staples are listed in a separate section of the meal plan, and this ePlanner has been designed to include wiggle room for you to purchase them as needed. As always, plan your budget accordingly.

best PRACTICES: breakfasts

This meal plan comes with 12 specific breakfasts chosen based on ingredients you're already buying for dinners. These breakfast ideas are entirely optional, but are included in the shopping lists. If you choose to come up with your own plan for breakfast, be sure to plan your budget accordingly and update the shopping lists.

To help you keep the grocery bill in check, here is a list of standard breakfast options that can be made with items commonly found in the kitchen pantry and fridge. As a bonus, these meals can also be prepared without spending a lot of money:

- simple eggs (prepared in your favorite way: scrambled, baked, poached, hard boiled, etc.)
- breakfast burritos (homemade tortillas + mashed beans + scrambled eggs + cheese + salsa)
- egg omelets & scrambles (using leftover meat and/or cheese and/or veggies)
- hash browns (plain, with eggs and/or with veggies)
- toast + smoothies (1 cup yogurt + 1 banana + 1 cup spinach + 1 cup other fresh/frozen fruit)
- bacon/sausage + cheese biscuit sandwiches
- breakfast porridge
- granola bar + fresh fruit
- yogurt parfait (granola + yogurt + fresh fruit)

Remember to keep your budget in mind throughout the month. If it's the end of the month and you only have two eggs left, a batch of pancakes will go much farther than a pan of scrambled eggs.

best PRACTICES: lunch

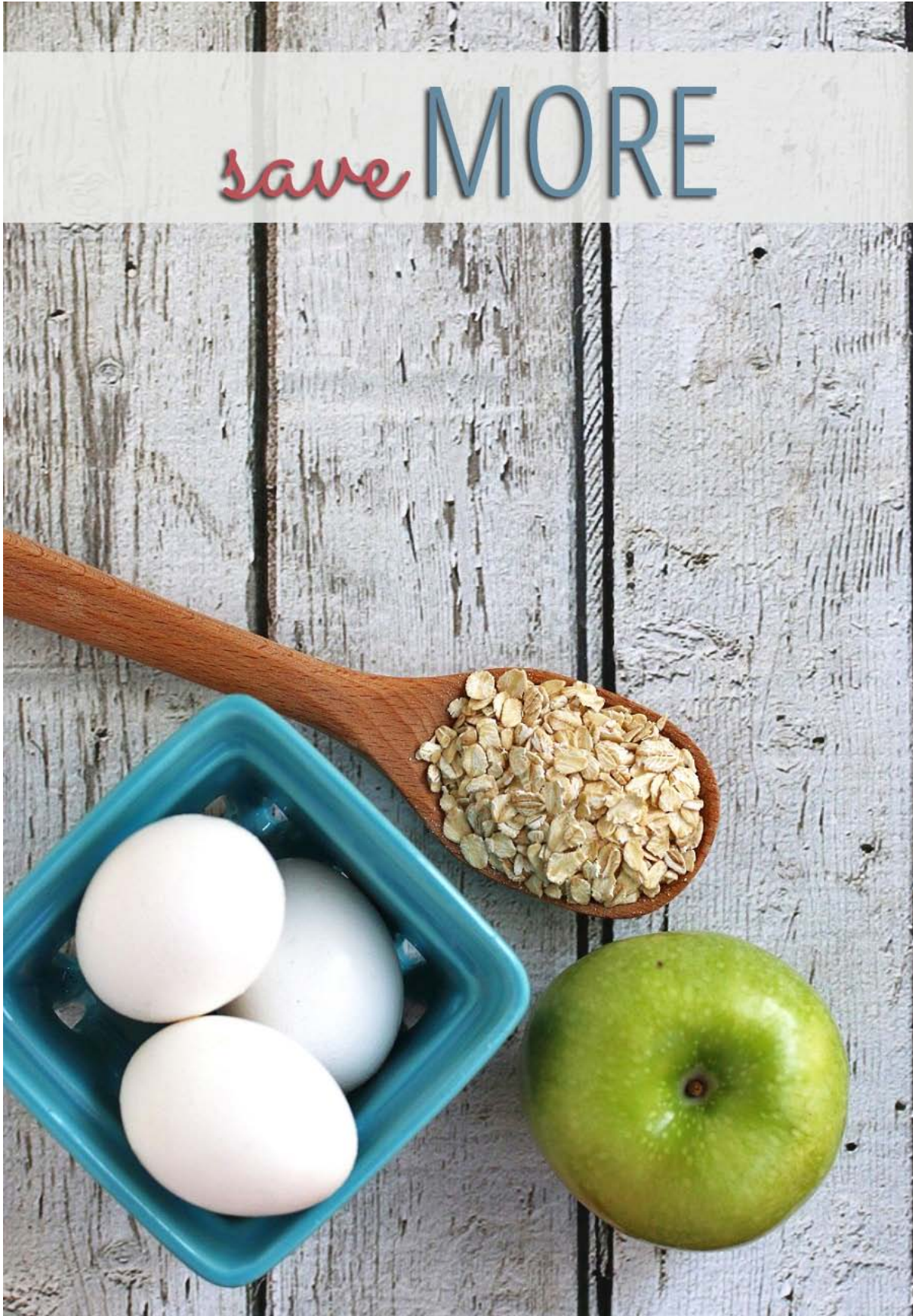
Similar to breakfast, this meal plan comes with 12 specific lunches chosen based on ingredients you're already buying for dinners. These lunch ideas are entirely optional, but included in case there aren't enough leftovers from dinner to feed the family lunch. If you choose to come up with your own plan for lunches, be sure to plan your budget accordingly.

Remember that the goal of meals is to nourish the body. Lunch doesn't have to be fancy. In fact, some of the most nutritious meals are incredibly simple.

When there aren't enough leftovers from dinner, use the list of breakfast ideas on the previous page, plus these ideas below AND the 12 specific lunches planned to come up with a lunch menu that best suits your family.

- sandwiches or wraps
- rice bowls
- salads
- nut butter + fruit crepes, wraps or on rolls and biscuits

Make it a goal to not let any food go to waste, and use lunch to meet that goal. Not everyone needs to eat the same thing, and "leftover buffets" are perfect for Saturday afternoons. Eating what you've already cooked is one of the best ways to save money on groceries.



There are so many ways to trim money off your grocery budget, that it would be impossible to list them all here. However, these simple tips are the ones that will make immediate and big impacts on your grocery budget.

Review these tips often, and incorporate as many as you can to get your grocery budget as low as possible!

At Home

1. Follow the meal plan as often as possible.
2. Keep current inventories of the fridge, freezer and pantry.
3. Limit the trash to just one bag per week.
4. Remember that it's never a good deal if you don't need it!
5. Switch to cloth napkins.
6. Commit to 48 hours without grocery shopping. You'll be surprised at how well you can eat when you don't think you have any food!
7. Start a garden - even if it's just one item or herbs!
8. Limit special meals that call for expensive ingredients to just once each month.

In the Kitchen

1. Eat what you've already purchased before buying more.
2. Eat leftovers often.
3. Eat dessert less often.
4. Use butter wrappers for greasing pans.
5. Save bacon grease and use it for cooking.
6. Save fruit scraps and make a batch of smoothies at the end of the week.
7. Save vegetable scraps and add to homemade stock.
8. Consider making homemade rice milk and substituting in recipes that call for milk.
9. Cut out all snack-y foods and eat fresh fruits and vegetables instead.
10. Make a double portion of low-cost meal stretchers like rice, beans and eggs.
11. When serving condiments to meals like tacos or baked potatoes, serve $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of each. This is often more than enough when you're serving several condiments at the meal.
12. Eat one meatless meal each week.

Before You Leave

1. Shop your fridge, freezer and pantry FIRST.
2. Shop the weekly sales and substitute appropriately.
3. Shop lesser known stores like ethnic stores, dollar stores or local farm stands.
4. Compare the price of homemade items to store-bought items and make it from scratch when it counts the most.
5. If you're missing an ingredient for a meal THIS week, but have everything you need for a meal NEXT week, swap the meals on the meal plan and adjust the shopping list accordingly.
6. Create a price book and know what stores have the best deal for the items you buy most often.
7. Compare the prices in local stores to online stores.
8. Save up and buy the dry goods you use most often in bulk.

At the Store

1. Price match brand-name items.
2. Don't be brand-loyal if store-brand is cheaper.
3. Buy only what's in season.
4. Aim for \$1 per pound for conventional produce, \$2 per pound for organic.
5. Don't buy juice (unless needed in a recipe).
6. Look for a discounted bin for produce, or ask a sales associate if they will mark down bruised produce or about-to-expire dairy.
7. Shop local dollar stores for spices.

Most Importantly

Subscribe to my blog - DontWastetheCrumbs.com - to continually learn more ways to save money on real food!