

DOLLARS & SENSE

EDITION 12, VOLUME 1



Saving on Groceries— A How To Guide

Food; this vital commodity often accounts for the largest part of our monthly expenses. Procuring enough food for both our loved ones and ourselves has always been one of the primary objectives of humankind.

While our ancestors would brandish their weapon of choice and venture into the forest to hunt wild animals or gather naturally occurring plants, today we mostly find the sources of our nourishment in specialized shops. Different products are available at different prices, to suit the needs of the entire population.

Completely removing the need for food is an impossible task. Just like a car won't work without fuel, our bodies need the right amount of nutrition to function correctly.

Self-sustainability can help offset the cost of what you spend at the grocery store but, unless you own a large farm or ranch, producing everything you need to feed your family in its entirety would be a rather challenging endeavor.

However, there are several things you can do to save some money while you keep yourself well fed and healthy. In this article, we'll explore some of the possibilities you are left with when shopping for groceries.

Plan Ahead To Reduce Food Loss And Waste

This might sound like the most obvious suggestion you have ever read, yet you would be shocked to know just how much food is left uneaten in our fridges every day.

Often done in a rush due to our extremely busy lifestyles, grocery shopping only rarely involves extensive planning.

With nothing more than a fuzzy idea of what we're going to eat throughout the

week, we enter the store and grab the first things that look or sound appealing. After all, we will have plenty of time to think about the menu once we get home.

Planning our meals in advance can significantly help when we want to save on food. Our next grocery run will have us pick up exactly what we need, leaving the rest on the shelves. The result is a lighter bag of food that will be used and not wasted, but that will not be the only advantage we are gaining.

Planning also allows us to diversify our food intake. Different meals and foods mean that our body will receive a larger range of nutrients and prevent us from getting bored of a particular food item.

For people who often have little time to follow a proper diet, creating a meal calendar can improve their quality of life, help them remain healthier and leave them with more money to invest in other activities!

Go For The Generic Brand Version Of Your Favorite Food

Have you ever stopped to read a label or the side of your favorite food's packaging? Along with nutritional values, expiration dates, and recipes the product can be used in, you are likely to find an address or contact information for the factory or distribution center from which it originated.

Take a closer look, and you might discover something that has the potential to save you a fortune. It is extremely likely that your favorite products and their off-brand counterparts are a lot more similar than you think.

In fact, more often than not they both come from the same production

(Continued on page 2)

Saving on Groceries—A How To Guide

(continued from p.1)

facility. They might even belong to the same batch. The two boxes that you are holding in your hands contain, essentially, the same food sold at different prices.

When you're buying something coming from a well-known brand, you are not only paying for the product itself but also financing advertisement and distribution campaigns. These expenses all weigh in on the final price.

Generic brand groceries are not so adamantly advertised and will, of course, cost less. When shopping, remember that although the box might be different, its contents are the same. As you are not eating the package but what is inside of it, generic brands are as qualitatively good as larger brands would be.

Prepare Your Own Food, Dressings and Garnishes

In Italy, home to one of the largest and most famous culinary culture in the world, there's an old saying. "Anche l'occhio vuole la sua parte", which can be roughly translated to "even the eye wants its part." These words highlight how food should not merely taste good but also look appealing.

This traditional wisdom might be the reason why elegant dishes include dressings and are often garnished with an array of different herbs, fruits, and other consumables. Sauces, spice mixes, and garnishes can be bought to save time. While this helps to ensure that your creation looks and tastes wonderful, it will cost you a pretty penny.

While many of us buy our garnishes, spice mixes, and even entire entrees premade, the truth is, most of these are incredibly easy to prepare ourselves. By looking up recipes on the

internet and purchasing the ingredients separately, you could save quite a bit of money.

Additionally, preparing your food from scratch gives you the chance to know exactly what you are putting in each dish, creating the opportunity for a healthier version of your favorite dish and often cooking it yourself provides greater quantities of food, leaving you leftovers and saving you even more.

Experiment With New Recipes And Combinations

The worst has happened! You have bought more food than you could consume and your groceries are now slowly turning bad in your fridge. The stench of less-than-fresh fruit and vegetables welcomes you every time you approach your fridge.

As time passes, you find yourself wondering whether you should throw the whole lot away. But wait, there might be another solution to the problem. After all, you spent good money on those items and watching as they inexorably rot away both angers and saddens you.

It is this scenario that provides you with the opportunity to expand your culinary knowledge and add a few new recipes to your belt. You might even find a favorite dish. The principle behind this way of thinking is that while food in less than optimal conditions might not be suitable for some preparations, it can still be used for others. For example soups, in particular, are an excellent way to use up a large volume and variety of vegetables that may not be in their prime.

Let's take an old tomato and a banana as another example. The former could be turning dark and soft and would look awful in a salad. The latter might start looking bruised and won't be as appealing to eat fresh, as it once was. Neither of the above should be a good reason to toss your food away.

(Continued on page 4)

Have some fun cooking together as a family!

Some of the best memories are made in the kitchen! Take some time this month to teach a child to cook, make a meal together as a couple, or experiment with new and tasty ethnic dishes. Use these cold winter months indoors to get cozy over a steaming bowl of homemade chili or practice decorating cookies with style. Here are some great places to get some new inspiration:

- Watch Master Chef or Master Chef Junior online. These fun TV shows are creative and a hit with the whole family.
- Visit Pinterest and type your favorite food into the search bar to see the hundreds of recipe ideas to share.
- Check out some of the highlights on one of the recipe sites online: allrecipes.com, myrecipes.com, epicurious.com, food.com, simplyrecipes.com, bettycrocker.com, or tasteofhome.com
- Invite a friend with a different ethnicity from you to show you how to cook food from their families country of origin.
- Visit a popular cooking blog for video tutorials and tips like thegirlwhoateeverything.com or thestayathomechef.com
- For a great list of seven kid-friendly recipe sites check out this link: <http://www.popsugar.com/moms/Kid-Friendly-Cooking-Websites-22588589>

Warranties, Are They Worth It?

With the holiday season rapidly coming to an end, it is likely that you have heard the word warranty multiple times while purchasing or receiving gifts and other items. While the term is slightly overused by sellers and buyers alike, its full meaning remains somewhat unknown to the majority of people.

A warranty is a legal obligation for the manufacturers of a range of different products. The items have to meet certain quality standards so as to ensure that they can function as intended for at least a particular amount of time from the moment they are sold.

Warranties state that if the product in question were to stop working, the manufacturer or dealer would take care of replacing or repairing it at no additional cost to the final user. These contracts feature a few clauses, though, and often won't cover damage deriving from an improper use of the item or ordinary wear and tear.

In layman's terms, a warranty is a safety device for your new item. If, for instance, your shiny new tech gadget were to suddenly refuse to work as intended, the brand that created it would have to take care of the repairs or provide you with a suitable replacement. Of course, dropping your phone from the 10th floor of your apartment complex or dipping your new media player in a bucket of cold water won't be valid reasons to request free maintenance.

Should You Buy A Warranty Extension?

When sold, the largest part of high-value products will come with some form of warranty. Tech gadget and other electronics are usually guaranteed to work for at least a year, while larger items such as cars or appliances might be protected longer.

Still, several shops will allow you to extend your warranty by paying an additional amount of money. The terms of service will vary from place to place and might include free repairs, eligibil-

ity for a replacement, a discount on spare parts or the possibility to send your defective item to an affiliated shop that should, in theory, perform the repairs at a lower price.

Whether you should consider paying for extended warranty or not mostly comes down to your lifestyle and to the use you intend to make of your item. Most professionals, for instance, end up swapping their personal phone for a new one every year to keep up to date with current technologies and trends.

In such a case, paying for extended warranty might be an unnecessary expense. Before doing so, consider taking a few moments to analyze and plan the life of your purchase.

If you think the item you are buying is worth the additional protection or you feel like it could break easily, extending its warranty might be a winning move. Electronics, as well as appliances and tech gadgets, turn out to be extremely hard and expensive to repair once they break, after all.

Your ability to fix the item in question yourself, at the risk of incurring more damage also come into play when making the decision to buy a warranty. Is your knowledge of the item proficient, and are you confident you can make the repairs yourself?

With specialists charging exorbitant rates for a repair, some owners have turned to trying their luck with soldering guns and screwdrivers.

Spare parts for the majority of common appliances and gadgets can be found online. Once you have acquired them, a bit of practice might save you a small fortune.

When To Insist On Getting A Warranty

The scenario in which you are most likely to be unprotected against scams is, of course, when buying used goods. Especially when dealing directly with

a previous owner, the risk to be sold a defective item is a lot higher than it would be brand new.

In these cases, insisting or directly asking for a warranty is a must. A used car sold at a much lower price is appealing, but having to spend additional money to fix its problems over the course of the next six months would be an unpleasant experience. The same goes for appliances, electronics, and the majority of other goods.

Dealing with used items is a lot more

Only buy used items from someone whom you can trust. You might have to spend a bit more, but you'll be sure of the quality and durability of what you are acquiring.

complicated than it seems. As the merchandise has been inevitably subjected to wear and tear, most sellers won't feel like guaranteeing that it will be perfect.

Reading the terms and conditions you are to abide by before finalizing the purchase becomes vital. Vehicles, for instance, will often only be protected against damage to "lubricated parts" such as the components that make up their engines and accessories. A failing light or braking system are thus not covered and repairing them might end up costing you as much as you paid for the whole car.

As a rule of thumb, only buy used items from someone whom you can trust. You might have to spend a bit more, but you'll be sure of the quality and durability of what you are acquiring.

(Continued on page 4)

Saving on Groceries—A How To Guide

(continued from p.2)

Your first step is to make sure that what you are saving is not rotten or otherwise unfit for consumption. Food that is old and unattractive is far different than rotten and moldy.

Next, press your unsightly tomato in a saucepan with a touch of olive oil, a few spoonfuls of ground meat and several slices of onion, and you have the base for an excellent spaghetti sauce. If you can't use it fresh, simply pour it into a plastic container and store it in your freezer.

The next time you get home from work later than expected, you'll simply have to defrost the sauce, boil some water,

add salt, cook your desired amount of spaghetti, and pour your Italian creation on top of them. You will have saved time and money!

The bruised banana can make an excellent, sweet base for a smoothy or be used to make a hot fresh loaf of banana nut bread! If you don't have the time to make it immediately, just peel the banana and freeze it in a freezer bag for later use.

Find The Deals

You should always keep an eye out for special offers. Food with a long shelf life can be bought when offered at a lower

price, stored in a pantry or freezer, and consumed at a later date. This method lets you save some money and also ensures that you always have a small amount of food in your home in case of emergency.

Supermarkets and grocery stores might, from time to time, sell products that are nearing their expiration date at a much lower cost than what their original price tag says.

While these should be bought only if you intend to use them as soon as you get home, you will purchase an entirely edible piece of food while spending less!

It Is All Up To You!

There are a plethora of other ways to save money on groceries while you keep eating well and stay healthy. The way you manage and use your supplies, as well as how often you decide to go shopping, will affect the amount you end up spending on food every month.

A more cautious and planned approach to shopping, coupled with more reasonable expenses and attempts to save as much food as possible is a tried and true solution to saving money on your groceries. ■

Warranties, Are They Worth It?

(continued from p.3)

ing. Referring to specialized shops that deal in antiques or to E-commerce sites such as Ebay or Amazon might also be best, as these usually offer extensive customer protection plans.

A Matter Of Risks And Rewards

Ultimately, purchasing an extension of your warranty or insisting on receiving one is a matter of personal choices.

Just like you'd do with your car or health insurance, you are investing money for a chance to avoid spending more money in the future.

The warranty you were so eager to extend might save you from a headache, but there's also the possibility that your gadget will run as planned for the amount of time the warranty would have covered.

When making a choice to warranty or not to warranty, it is important to take into consideration the following.

1. The initial cost of your item (This will determine the cost of an entire replacement).
2. The parameters of its use (How long do you need or expect it to last? Will it be used rarely or often?).
3. The average cost to fix common problems (For example the amount of things that may break in a car and cost to fix it, is much more expensive and likely than the cost to repair a radio).

As a final piece of advice, all purchases should be carefully considered before you invest your hard-earned savings. Everything made by people will eventually break, and the probability of forking over additional cash for a repair or replacement is assured, it is simply a matter of when. It is important to always carefully consider whether your purchase is necessary, that you have the funds to maintain it and that it is priced right. Remember, the best way to save money is to resist the urge to spend money. ■



If you know of someone who would benefit from this information, please pass this newsletter along.

This publication is the property of Family Financial Education Foundation. All rights are reserved.

For more information about our services or how we can help you with your debt management program, please contact Family Financial Education Foundation at www.ffef.org.

Family Financial Education Foundation

ACCESS EDUCATION SYSTEMS

724 Front Street, Suite 340

Evanston, WY 82930

contact: (877) 789-4175

www.ffef.org | info@ffef.org

Monday-Friday: 7:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Saturday: 8:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

