

Eat brilliantly on a **budget**

With food and fuel prices rocketing, we're all really feeling the pinch.

Food writer

Clare Hargreaves shares her top tips for eating well while still cutting costs

Cook from scratch

If you buy processed food, you're paying someone for the processing. The same goes for takeaways. With the exception of some low-grade processed foods with minimal food value, you'll almost always save if you cook from raw ingredients. I also make my own muesli – much cheaper than boxed stuff.

Make a batch

When preparing supper, I often make extra for another meal, or for my work lunch – it's more economical than buying sandwiches or ready-made salads. Curries, stews and soups are ideal and you can freeze them for another time.



Choose cheap cuts

I don't eat meat every day – I make it a bit of a treat. I enjoy trying meats that can be surprisingly cheap, such as pork belly, lamb's liver, neck fillet of lamb, rabbit and pheasant. I often cook the last three with pot barley as pot roasts. If you roast a whole bird, like a chicken, use leftover meat to make a risotto, pie or curry, and the carcass to make soup.

Buy direct

Shopping at markets, farm shops or through box schemes can save you pounds, especially on fresh, unprocessed foods like fruit, vegetables, eggs and meat. The farmers are likely to get a better price, too.



Grow your own

Gardening can be therapeutic and give you the freshest fruit and veg. But if you don't have the time or space, it's definitely worth growing herbs. They're easy, flavoursome and a great money-saver.

I cultivate parsley, chives and thyme in pots on my patio, as well as more unusual, hard-to-buy herbs like chervil and tarragon.



Pulses and grains

These are nutritious and cheap – especially if you buy them dry. My storecupboard staples are Puy lentils, chickpeas and pot barley. For flavour, I throw in scraps of pork, chorizo or leftover meat stock. I often mix brown lentils or aduki beans with mince to make it go further in a moussaka or shepherd's pie.

A favourite is inspired by my friend Pam, who used to live in India. She makes a wonderful dhal using frozen spinach, lentils, onions and spices – it costs less than 50p a meal, and it's healthy.

Use up leftovers

If I have milk that's turned sour, I will pop it into soda bread or scones. I whizz up any leftover bread to make breadcrumb crumbs. Then, of course, there's bread & butter pudding – the ultimate thrifty pud. If you don't have time immediately, simply freeze the bread until you do.

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Shop around

Check out Asian supermarkets, which often sell fresh herbs, spices and nuts far cheaper. It's also worth trying less well-known brands from your supermarket. Co-operative ventures will sell quality/ethical food for far less than a supermarket.

Buy in bulk

I buy most of my dry foods loose from bins at my local health shop – better value than small packets. I also buy cases of tinned tomatoes there. Some supermarkets do bulk buys on items like rice and pasta. I make my own bread, so I club together with friends to buy stoneground wholemeal in bulk, at 86p per kilo including delivery.



Don't bin it

In the UK, the average family throws away £50 of perfectly good food each month. I've found the best way to avoid wasting food is to buy little and often (and I don't need to use the car, which saves money too). If you do a big weekly shop, plan your meals carefully and monitor the contents of your fridge.

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