The Cheapskates Journal July 2013

From Cath's Desk

Hello Cheapskaters,

If it's July, it must be Christmas, or at least our annual Christmas in July edition. If you belong to the BO group (and that's Born Organized, not what you were thinking!) then you are most likely finished with your Christmas planning, shopping, making and wrapping and shaking your head at the rest of us who are thinking "Christmas? It's months away!".

Christmas may well be months away, but if you want to own your Christmas and be able to actually relax and enjoy the festive season, you really do need to start now.

You need to start now if you are planning on a handmade Christmas (zip over to my blog to find out about my handmade Christmas challenge). You need to start now if you are on a tight gift and entertainment budget. You need to Start Saving in July if you find Christmas shopping, planning, wrapping and entertaining stressful in December.

With today being the first day of a new financial year, it's a great time to review your Spending Plan. Remember, it's a spending plan, it's not written in concrete, it's meant to be fluid and it is meant to change as needed to suit your income and outgoings. I've booked time this week for Wayne and I to sit down and go over our Spending Plan, you should take some time this month to go over your budget and make any adjustments too.

We have a lot of brand new members. If this is your first Journal, I hope you enjoy it. You can read it online, here in the Member's Centre, or you can print it to read at your leisure. I don't mind how you read it, as long as you do. It will keep you focused on your dreams, goals and plans for living life debt free, cashed up and laughing.

Have a great month everyone.

Happy Cheapskating,

Cath

5 Choices That Waste Your Tax Refund

It's that time of year, when tax returns and refunds are on most peoples' minds.

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The average tax refund is around $2,300; that's a nice chunk of change! However, it's a dilemma every year for many people. Should you invest it? Should you enjoy it?

While there are several good ideas on how to put that money to use, let's look at several things that it's best to avoid:

1. Spend it all on an insignificant purchase.

You worked hard for that money. Consider using it for something that's meaningful to you or increase its value with a wise purchase. If you invest that tax refund, it can have a significant effect on your retirement.

Consider all the things you've purchased over the last 5 years that got you really excited at the time. Would you rather still have those things or would you rather have all that money back?

If you prefer to spend it, spend it on something you'll remember forever. Putting it in your bank account and spending a little here and there isn't likely to result in something meaningful.

For example, if you've never seen the ocean, take off for the beach. If you've always wanted to see Europe, maybe now is the time to go. Buy a piano if your dream is to learn to play.

Make the ROI more than the investment. If you have to go shopping, consider increasing the value of your item by buying something that will pay you back. For example, maybe solar panels for the house are in order: you'll get an installation rebate, help support the environment, dramatically cut the cost of electricity and increase the value of your home.

2. Ignore the possibility of paying down your debt.

While you might not be able to guarantee that you'll make 10% on the money you invest, you can guarantee that you'll make 15% on any money you use to pay off debt that has a 15% interest rate. And that 15% is both tax-free and 100% risk free. Pay your debts.

3. Create more debt.

This is one of the worst things you can do. Try to avoid spending your refund as a down payment on a major purchase that will only bring you more debt, like a new boat. You'll only create more financial challenges for yourself later on.

4. Forget about self-improvement.

While this topic might be far from your mind when you receive your tax return, self-improvement could be your ticket to the life you've always dreamed of.

Consider taking a class or hiring a mentor.

Maybe you could use a computer to start a business.

Perhaps you need a new set of clothes to go out and find a great new job.

5. Use the money to fuel an unsustainable lifestyle.

If you're desperate for your refund so you can get caught up on your bills, that's a sign that you're currently spending more than you make on a lifestyle you can't afford. Resolve that you'll get your financial life under control so you don't have to spend next year's refund on your bills.

A tax refund is a great opportunity to strengthen your financial life. In the future, when you look back on your choice, spending the money on something meaningless or something that creates more debt usually makes you feel as if you wasted it. Consider your options carefully so you can make a decision that gives you pleasure later on as well as right now.

A Thoughtful Moment

And Finally……

Paraprosdokians are figures of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected, and frequently humorous. Winston Churchill loved them.

"Where there's a will, I want to be in it."

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"The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on my list."

"Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak."

"If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong."

"We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public."

"War does not determine who is right - only who is left."

"Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad."

"To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research."

"I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you."

"In filling out an application, where it says 'In case of emergency, Notify:' I put 'DOCTOR'.

"Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they are sexy."

"You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice."

"I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure."

"To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target."

"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car."

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"You're never too old to learn something stupid."

"I'm supposed to respect my elders, but it's getting harder and harder for me to find one now."

From Neil Whittaker's newsletter

Saving Story

How I Saved $1,000 in Just One Hour

How much have you saved? $1,000

How long did it take? 1 hour

What inspired you to save, what was your motivation?

I retired from work this year in January. My husband is in the construction industry and work has been sparse. Having received some e-mails about what Cheapskates could help me with I took the plunge.

How did you save?

One of our biggest outlays is our private health cover. I had our cover with HCF. I decided to check out iselect and started doing a check up on line and was getting a bit bogged down so I decided to print off some of the other funds comparison sheets and go over them later in the day. I received a call from a very helpful young lady from iselect offering to assist me not long after I logged out of the site. At the end of the call I had saved $1,000 per annum by switching to an online provider called health.com.au. Some of the extra benefits are better than we were receiving from our previous fund. You may give up a bit of time to do the comparison but it is well worth it.

Winsome Walter

Websites:

www.iselect.com.au

www.health.com.au

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Start Saving in July to Avoid the Christmas Cash Crunch

Yes, it's July, and that means our annual Christmas in July feature. If you are reading this article with interest it means you are in one of two categories: done and dusted, with Christmas 2013 planned and prepared, or wondering why on earth I'm talking about Christmas now, it's still 6 months away!

If you are not in the "done and dusted" group and you haven't finished your shopping, wrapped and labelled the presents and worked out a menu with a detail shopping list, keep reading. You need to because otherwise come December 25 you'll be stressed and tired and quite possibly way over budget.

The best way to get a jump on holiday shopping is to begin with a holiday savings fund. This will ensure that you have the money that you need for holiday shopping before the very last shopping day!

Rather than trying to squeeze Christmas shopping into the budget in December, get a jump on your planning early and you'll have a much better experience.

What is a Christmas Savings Fund?

Simply put, a Christmas savings fund is money saved specifically for Christmas shopping. You can put money away for gift giving, entertainment, food, decorating and any other aspect of the Christmas season beforehand. This will ensure that you're not scrambling to find bargains at the last moment when you should be enjoying yourself instead!

Try these tips for starting your own Christmas savings fund:

1. Make a list. Start with basic categories, like Entertaining, Gifts, Greeting Cards and Food. From here, you can make a list of what you need to buy for each category. List with as much detail as possible, as this will benefit you in the long run.

Give each category a thorough list of items. For the Gifts category, include every gift recipient you plan to give a gift to. Then plan what to give each person or set a spending limit for each gift.

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Your Food list can include categories for different events and a full list of the groceries and other food items that you need for each event.

2. Formulate a budget. Now that you have thorough lists for each need during the festive season, assign a rough estimated price to each item and formulate a budget. How much money do you need to fulfill all of your goals for the holiday season?

3. Figure out a savings plan. Now that you know how much you need in total, you can figure out how much you need to put away every month to achieve your goal. Divide your total by the number of months left until Christmas. That's how much you need to save each month.

Alternatively, break your totals down into smaller chunks. For example, you can put away $20 per month for food for three months, or $75 for gifts per month in the lead-up to Christmas.

4. Put it into action. Now put your plan into action. As you save money, keep a tally of what you've saved and where each saved dollar is going to go. This will help keep you on track from month to month as you prepare for the holidays.

5. Tweak as necessary. You may need to tweak your plan for various reasons. Your budget needs may change, or the amount of income you're bringing in may change. If this happens, just tweak your plan to address the changes and keep going.

The closer you get to your savings goal, the better off you'll be in the long run. Keep close track of your numbers so you can make tweaks and changes as soon as the need arises rather than after the fact.

A holiday savings fund will simplify the holiday planning process. The more details you put into your plan, the better the results will be. A holiday savings fund can be a lifesaver, preventing you from becoming overwhelmed at the last minute.

If you plan and prepare ahead of time for the parties, meals, decorations and gifts, then you can ensure that you have the money early enough to make it happen.

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Growing Herbs in Winter - Create a Tasty Indoor Garden

The winter months bring shorter days, darker nights and colder moments. Suffering from the winter blues does not have to be the case this winter if you try your hand at growing herbs indoor this winter.

Growing herbs indoor in winter is a task that will bring some life back into the sleepy, quiet times these months can often bring. Taking something from seed to full bloom in the dead of winter is sure to spark some life into those cold, dark days.

The scent of fresh herbs and the flavour they will add to your winter meals along with the joy and ease of growing them will delight you as it gives you something to focus on other than how cold it is outside.

Winter was made for herbs. They flavour soups, stews and casseroles. They ease colds and soothe sore throats. They freshen stale winter air. If you've looked at the price of them at the supermarket or greengrocer you know just how fiscally smart it is to grow your own, especially when it is so easy.

Where to Start

Find a space where there is ample sunlight and decide whether or not you want to try your hand at first or really go full gusto and grow these herbs for use in all your cooking.

Then decide whether or not you will be entertaining the idea of growing from seeds or smaller seedlings or cuttings to start. Of course, seedlings will take less time and effort compared to seeds.

If you are beginning with seeds, small containers or miniature pots will suffice. You can then relocate those seeds as they grow along the way. I use egg cartons to get my seeds started, planting one or two seeds in each "pod".

For an assortment of herbs, you may wish to use an elongated window box that can easily fit on a windowsill with plenty of sun.

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What to Plant

Take some time to think about those favourite winter meals and pick and choose which herbs you wish to begin with so that you may add them to your favourite hearty meals.

Some herbs that grow well indoors during winter are parsley, basil, mint, oregano, chives and garlic chives, rosemary, and thyme. Add a pot or two of spring onions (I know they're not a herb) and your winter seasonings are taken care of.

If you don’t have your own compost, visit your local garden store and ask a specialist to assist you in obtaining the best potting mix for your needs. Some soil mixtures have added ingredients mixed into their potting mixture, which may not be desirable for your own personal herb garden. Once you have determined the best potting mix for your needs, you can purchase your choice of pots and plants.

Once you have your choice of potting mix, your pots and your choice of herbs, place your potting mix into the bottom of the pot covering about three inches from the bottom, place your herbs in, and cover with more potting mix. Pat the soil gently but firmly around the herbs to keep them straight. Leave about one to two inches from the top for watering purposes.

If choosing seeds to start with, then fill the pots to just about an inch or two under the top, add the seeds, and cover lightly with more potting mix. Water the seeds trying to keep them as moist as possible without overwatering. When you begin to see them poke through the dirt, you can then make plans to transplant them to take the next step of transplanting them to a little bigger pot.

If using herb plants, then water sparingly. Overwatering is not good for herb plants and should be avoided.

Don't make the mistake of putting a number of plants in the one pot. Herbs don't like to be crowded. Plant one to a pot, and if planting in a larger pot or planter, just have the one herb in it. Those pots planted with a variety look great but the herbs don't like it and they won't thrive or last the winter and on into summer.

When herbs begin to grow several inches, you can then begin to snip and use. This will encourage new life to grow on your herb plants.

Finding a sunny spot, the right potting mix, the right pots and the right choice of herb for your needs will give your winter home a touch of spring adding new life to those winter doldrums.

Busted: Five Budget Myths that may be Holding You Back

It's the start of a new financial year and a good time to sit down and review your Spending Plan. But before you do, you might be surprised to learn how many myths there are about budgeting. These myths keep otherwise sane people from managing and controlling their money.

Instead, it controls them.

It's a terrible sight to see. Let's take a look at 5 budgeting myths – learn the truth and gain control over your finances.

Myth #1 Budgeting Means Giving Up

Many people believe that budgeting is to money what dieting is to eating. Not true. Actually, when you create a spending plan you may learn that you have much more money to spend than you thought. A spending plan is nothing more than a very organized plan for what you want your money to accomplish for you.

Myth #2 You Only Need a Spending Plan if You're Struggling Financially

Not true! Spending plans help anyone, whether you have financial freedom or not, achieve your financial goals. I'll say it again – a spending plan is simply a plan for your money. What do you want your money to do for you each month? What do you want to spend it on? What do you want it to accomplish?

Myth #3 You Need to Be Detail Oriented to Create a Spending Plan

Well, you do need to know how much you make and how much you spend each month but that's not what I'd call detail oriented. If you can create a list and keep your receipts for a month you can create a spending plan.

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Myth #4 You Need a Consistent and Predictable Income to Create an Effective Spending Plan

As more and more contractors and self-employed individuals enter the market this myth just keeps growing in strength. The truth is that if you're self-employed then a spending plan is imperative. Good cash flow is essential for survival and success and the only way to control the cash flow is with a good spending plan. You can create a workable and effective spending plan on a variable income. Making Ends Meet guides you through the process of creating a workable spending plan.

Myth #5 You Need Software or a Complicated System to Budget

Actually, the most effective spending plans are often created with free downloadable worksheets, spreadsheets or good old fashioned pen and paper. Controlling your money and creating a plan for it doesn't have to be complicated and it shouldn't be. But it does have to be something you can and will use. Choose the system that works best for you, make it easy and then just do it!

Budgeting is smart money management. If you want to control your money, instead of it controlling you, get busy and start tracking what you make and what you spend. Then create a plan to make your money work for you.

The Swear Savings Jar System

It's the start of a new financial year so I thought it time to come up with a fun, simple and effective way to save.

There's no need to completely adjust your lifestyle in order to save for either a short or long-term savings goal. You can slowly, but steadily add to your savings by using the swear saving jar system to add to your savings each and every day of the week.

Remember the "swear jar"? You may have had one at home or at the office. It was the jar you dropped your fine into if you swore or cursed.

Well the savings jar is a modified version of the swear jar.

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Instead of dropping money into the jar each time you curse, you drop money into the jar each time you mention (or have recurring thoughts of) your savings goal. As long as your savings goal is important to you, you're going to express quite a bit of verbal lust, and then enjoy the game as you focus on your savings!

If your goal is less than $500, you may be able to use an average sized jar or cereal canister. However, for a more sizeable goal, many people prefer to use an oversized flowerpot or a large tin can (a recycled 500g or even 1 kilo coffee tin is good) to stash their savings.

How to Implement the System

First and foremost, it's important to understand that simply dropping coins into a jar will take you ages to achieve your savings goals. You may want to up the ante and start placing notes into your jar.

Generally, $5 notes are small enough that you may be able to comfortably drop one into the jar once or more each day without feeling a financial pinch. But if finances are tough, you can start by placing $1 into your jar each time you mention your goal.

Three simple rules will see your swear savings jar grow each day:

1. Choose your denomination. Choose your denomination between $1, $2, $5, $10, $20, $50 and $100 and stick to it.

If you need to drop $10 into your jar and only find that you have smaller notes, place as many notes as necessary into the jar until you reach $10. Its okay to place different notes into the jar as long as you're putting in the amount you planned.

2. Set a minimum. If your goal is something you wouldn't talk about on a daily basis (such as a new verandah), set a minimum deposit for each day.

For example, if your denomination is $20, vow to drop a minimum of $20 into your jar at the end of each day, regardless of whether or not you mention your goal. At the end of just the first month, you'll have saved a minimum of $600 into your jar. Emptying the coins from your purse or wallet each evening will help you reach your daily limit quickly.

3. No cheating. Make it a strict rule that you must make a deposit into your jar each time you mention your goal. If you let yourself off the hook once, you're more likely to do it next time and thereafter.

If you routinely talk about your goal throughout the day and feel that a $5 or $10 donation to the jar is a bit steep, it's best to stick with a $1 denomination. If you talk about your goal five times per day, you'll still have $5 at the end of the day and up to $150 at the end of the month.

The swear saving jar system works because it's user friendly and risk free. Yes, you may be placing a considerable amount of money into the jar, but it will motivate you to ramp up your efforts as you see your savings mounting every single day.

Unlike financing the purchase you're saving for, if for any reason you were to encounter a financial emergency you'll be able to dig into your savings jar and continue your efforts once you're on a positive financial footing.

And best of all, again unlike financing the purchase, you'll actually own it when you get it!

Dear Cath

Q. I have been reading through the Member's Centre and I understand the concept of the 10-10-80 plan for dividing up our money, but I don't know the practicality. Do I use our gross income? Or is it worked out on our nett income? *Sharon Fraser*

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A. Working with gross income can get confusing and complicated and is hard to track. You get your nett income into your hand (or bank account), so work on that - the money you actually get.

Organize your spending plan on the 10-10-80 principle:

10% to give (charity, church, etc.)

10% to your Emergency Fund (you can split this 50-50 to Savings and Emergency accounts once you have a fully-funded Emergency Fund)

80% to live on (this goes into your Peace of Mind account and should include debt repayment).

Any extra money you get in (garage sales, overtime, bonuses etc.) can be split between debt repayment, building up your emergency fund and fun money, after all everyone enjoys a treat now and then.

Q. My husband and I are in our 30s and we are barely making it from day to day. When a crisis comes up, whether it's the car breaking down or the refrigerator on the fritz, we struggle to find the money to manage it and usually end up whacking it on credit. How can we prepare for the future when financial crises keep cropping up? *Donna Watson*

A. The good news is that you are trying to problem-solve your finances now so you can be successful later.

If you want to live comfortably and securely throughout your golden years, it's important to aggressively manage your dollars now. Look for ways to save each day.

Feed your emergency fund from every pay until you have enough to live for six months without working. Then, you'll be prepared for unplanned financial events. If you never have to use this fund, leave it in its own account accumulating money over the years.

Use this fund only for the type of events you described (or in the event you're out of work) and then replace those funds to the six months mark. You'll never have to draw on your credit card again to fund a money crisis because you'll have your emergency fund.

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Make deposits to retirement accounts regularly. Put the maximum amount allowed into your superannuation. Speak to your paymaster about boosting your super contributions with salary sacrificing.

Use separate financial accounts to avoid confusion. Instead of using one “pot” for all savings (retirement, living and emergencies), maintain separate accounts to avoid tapping savings or emergency money for other uses.

Earmark dollars for specific accounts each payday and have them automatically deposited into those accounts. Make saving a habit and when retirement time rolls around, you’ll be well and truly prepared.

On the Menu

A Mexican Cooking Fiesta in Your Kitchen

In the 1980's it was Taco Bills who introduced Mexican food to Australian families, and it was a huge hit. Mexican style restaurants popped up everywhere and taco shells and even taco kits were introduced to supermarket shelves. Soon tortillas were added to the supermarket range, along with taco seasoning, burrito seasoning, enchilada seasoning, refried beans and a whole range of different salsas and corn chips.

And Australians developed a liking for the spicy and easy-to-make tacos and enchiladas.

Mexican cuisine is colourful and flavourful, influenced by the cuisines of Spain, India, Europe and even the Caribbean. While these influences are responsible for the amazing variations in Mexican food and the recipes differ from region to region, the basic ingredients and styles of cooking are the same.

So how did Mexican cooking become what it is today? What sets it apart from other styles of cooking?

Colour Pops

The use of a wide selection of vegetables gives a Mexican meal a pop of colour and flavour at the same time. Mexican cooks rely heavily on the use of tomatoes, chillies, capsicums, radishes and

broccoli, just to name a few. Avocadoes, corn and papaya are also important staples of many Mexican dishes. The use of so many vegetables with such brilliant colours increases the nutritional value, making Mexican food extremely healthy.

Tips and Techniques

Mexican cooks do quite a bit of sautéing and roasting while they create these masterpieces. Fire is of utmost importance and helps to unleash the flavours inside tomatoes, onions, garlic, capsicums and a number of other ingredients. Chillies are roasted over an open fire, not only to loosen the skin, but to give them a sweeter taste. Slow simmering is another technique used in many Mexican dishes. You can throw all your meat and vegetables in a pot along with spices and seasonings of your choice and let it simmer all day until it's time to eat. Doesn't that sound like slow cooker cooking fits right in?

Spices

Chipotle chilli powder, ancho chilli powder and chilli powder blends are all staples in Mexican dishes. These spices add not only heat but flavour to meat and vegetables, as well as sauces and soups. Garlic is also a staple and used in many bean recipes and sauces. Although oregano seems to be more Italian than Mexican, it is used in combination with other spices and is often an ingredient in homemade chilli powder blends (including MOO Taco Seasoning). There is a wide variety of spices used in Mexican cooking, some for heat and some for depth of flavour. Choosing the right spices can make all the difference between a so-so Mexican dish and a real knock out.

Slow Cooker Meals Mexican Style

You can turn just about any Mexican dish into a slow cooker sensation if you just know the right ingredients and technique. A few favourite recipes such as taco soup, chicken and white beans, shredded pork and enchiladas all can easily be changed from stove top to slow cooker.

Forget the notion that Mexican food is simply bean burritos and quesadillas. There is much more to enjoy with this simple cooking that yields intense results. You can turn any meal into a Mexican feast with the right type of authentic Mexican ingredients. Experiment with a variety of recipes and see what you can create in or out of your slow cooker, and you'll be an expert in Mexican cuisine in no time.

Slow Cooker Lentil Mex Chilli

Ingredients:

1kg dried lentils, rinsed and sorted

6 cups water, boiled

5 garlic cloves, crushed

1 large onion, diced

2 tbsp cumin

2 tbsp chili powder

1 tbsp dried basil

2 cans diced tomatoes

180g tomato paste

500g frozen corn kernels, thawed

Method:

Boil the 6 cups water in a saucepan, and then pour into the crockpot set on HIGH. Add the lentils to the crockpot, stir, then add the remaining ingredients and stir again to combine. Cover and cook on HIGH heat for 15 minutes, then turn heat down to LOW and cook for 6 to 7 hours. You can add more water if it gets too thick. Serves 6 to 8.

Chicken Enchiladas

Ingredients:

1 tbsp vegetable oil

500g fresh tomatoes, de-seeded and diced

1 onion (preferably white), diced

1 chilli, de-seeded and finely diced

2 cloves garlic, crushed

3/4 teaspoon ground cumin

Kosher salt and black pepper

1 cup cream

1kg cooked chicken meat, diced

1 can diced tomatoes, drained

1 1/4 cups grated cheese

8 corn tortillas

1 jar salsa

Method:

Heat oven to 200 degrees Celsius. Heat the oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Add the fresh tomatoes, onion, chilli, garlic, cumin and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a food processor, add the cream, and puree. In a large bowl, combine the chicken, tinned tomatoes, 1 cup of the cheese, ½ cup of the tomato sauce and ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Warm the tortillas according to the package directions. Spread 1 cup of the remaining sauce in a 20cm x 30cm baking dish. Roll the chicken mixture in the tortillas and place them in the dish, seam-side down. Top with the remaining sauce and cheese. Bake until beginning to brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Serve with a drizzle of salsa over each enchilada.

Easy Guacamole

Ingredients:

1/2 white onion, finely diced

1 jalapeno (seeded for less heat, if desired), finely chopped

1/4 cup fresh coriander, finely shredded

salt and ground black pepper

2 ripe avocados, diced

2 tbsp fresh lime or lemon juice

Method:

In a large bowl, combine the onion, jalapeño, coriander, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Using the back of a fork, mash the vegetables until they begin to release their juices.

Add the avocados and lime juice and stir to combine. This recipe makes 2 cups.

Spanish Rice

This was the first Mexican style meal I ever made, way back in the 1970s when I was at school and it has been a favourite ever since. I serve this as a side dish with grilled meat or chicken, as a meal on its own garnished with a little coriander and as part of the filling in burritos. What can I say - it's versatile as well as quick, easy and tasty.

Ingredients:

1 tbsp vegetable oil

2 cups uncooked brown rice

1 onion, diced

1/2 green capsicum, seeded and diced

4 cups water

1 can diced tomatoes

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 tbsp chipotle pepper - more or less to taste

Method:

Heat oil in a deep fry pan over medium heat. Sauté rice, onion and capsicum until rice is browned and onions are clear and softened. Stir in water, chipotle peppers and tomatoes. Season with chili powder and salt. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes or until rice is cooked and liquid is absorbed.

Quotes of Note

My experience has shown me that the people

who are exceptionally good in business

aren't so because of what they know

but because of their insatiable need to know more.

~~Michael Gerber~~

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Opportunities don't happen,

you create them.
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~~Chris Grosser~~

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Your work is to discover your work and then,

with all your heart, to give yourself to it.

~~Buddha~~

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Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes.

It is best to admit them quickly,

and get on with improving your other innovations.

~~Steve Jobs~~

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Act as if what you do makes a difference.

It does.

~~William James~~

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Living the Cheapskates Way

Retire Sooner With These Strategies

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There is no denying it, we are all getting older. For some of us retirement is looming on the horizon, for others it's yet to appear on the radar. It doesn't matter how old you are, retirement will happen at some stage of your life. And you need to be prepared - financially and emotionally - to enjoy it.

For some Australians it will be a case of working until they are well past retirement age because they haven't planned properly and taken advantage of the many saving opportunities available to them.

So do you find yourself feeling like you won't ever have enough money to stop working? If so, it's time to perk up. You can retire sooner than you think by making some changes now.

Use these strategies to retire sooner than you ever dreamed of:

1. Identify activities that bring you joy and then create an income stream doing them.

When you retire, you'll have more free time to fill up. Why not do it engaging in activities you love and earning some money at the same time? Start your "cottage industry" now, while you're working, just to try it out. Here are some examples:

If you like to make birdhouses for your yard, make extra to sell at local craft fairs or gardening shops.

Perhaps you get a kick out of being around elderly people. Start your own Elder Assistant business, charging families to "visit with and assist" elderly parents for a couple of hours a week.

Ruth Morris is a retired nurse in Sydney who does "sleep-overs" three nights a week for an elderly lady. She has dinner with her husband and then goes to her client's home around 7pm, where she has her own room with a TV and is able to use the kitchen to make a cuppa. She is up after a good night's sleep, ready to go home when the day nurse arrives at 7am. It suits her perfectly and fits with their social calendar while boosting their income.

Maybe you've developed a real love of gardening and taking care of your lawn. Consider mowing lawns in your neighbourhood or planting bushes, weeding and doing other gardening tasks for neighbours for a price.

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John Campbell is a very active 80 year old with a love of gardening. He has six clients he visits once a fortnight to mow lawns and trim edges. It keeps him fit in the outdoors he loves and as he says it "keeps me sane and from sitting in front of the idiot box".

· The key is to think of ways to charge others to do what you love to do.

2. Think of creative ways to cut your expenses related to work right now. Consider the obvious costs, like carpooling, using public transportation and carrying your lunch to work. Reduce every expense possible connected to your current work to reap the most savings and benefit your future retirement.

3. Open your mind to an adjusted lifestyle where you do more with less money. This is the thing most people find hardest to accept -more time to have fun, less money to spend doing it. You can retire sooner if you learn to live more inexpensively now and the financial adjustment won't be hard at all - you already know how to live life to the fullest the Cheapskates way.

- Purchase generic groceries.
- Shop farmers' markets for fresh produce.
- Only buy meat that's on sale.
- Concentrate on "buy one get one free" offers at the grocery store.
- Do your shopping at a discount grocery retailer.
- ·Have Meatless Mondays.
- Be more flexible about what you choose to eat, based on what's on sale.
- Reduce the level of cable television you pay for.
- Get rid of your telephone land line and only pay monthly fees for your mobile phone.

4. Live in a smaller house than you can afford. Your kids will eventually grow up and leave. Concern yourself with living conservatively and paying off the mortgage after you ensure all other bills are paid off. In a smaller home, you'll live comfortably with fewer expenses.

5. Retain part-time employment now. Save 100% of what you earn from your second job and save it for retirement. Remind yourself daily that how you live, work, and save now will determine when you can retire and how you'll live then.

Remember Mrs Sparkle? She was in her 70s and still working part-time to supplement her income. She's still cleaning the same offices twice a week. "It keeps me young" says Mrs. Sparkle. "I like to keep busy and I love chatting to the employees as they come and go. They've become friends and I think the social interaction is a big part of why I enjoy my little job. I think I'll just keep working until I drop, I really enjoy it".

6. Vow to learn how to delay gratification. Go back to the old-fashioned way of living where you save up to buy something. This way, you spend only cash to get what you want. The delay in time that it will take for you to accumulate the money to pay for the item will help you determine how much you actually want the item.

When you're truly committed to a goal of retiring sooner, you'll keep your focus and follow through with these six strategies. You'll quit working before you know it and love your simpler lifestyle!

Cheapskates Tip Store

MOO Parcel Packaging and Save!

Approximate $ Savings: $6-$10 per parcel

Christmas 2012 I had a few pressies I needed to send in the post. Some of my items needed to be boxed, wrapped in satchels etc. Purchasing cardboard packaging and satchels from Australia Post, Office Works or even Big W can become quite costly. I had this idea to save all my boxes i.e. small, medium and large, for any items I had purchased during the year. I also saved plastic fashion bags. I used these cardboard boxes to package my Christmas gift items. I then took my plastic bags (please note these are not like the plastic bags you get at Woolies or Coles but rather the type of bags you get if you shop at Millers, Katies etc.) and turned the bags back to front so the store name/logo didn't show and wrapped them around my cardboard box containing the gift item. I then taped the parcel securely and wrote the address on front. If the inside of the bag was black, I just taped a label on the front and wrote the address so that it could be seen but most of the bags I used were of a light colour. I found that I saved around $6-$10 for each item by providing my own packaging. I only had to pay for the cost of the postage at Australia Post!

Contributed by Margaret Ellis

Be Inspired by Charity

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Approximate $ Savings: $6 per day

A couple of weeks back I participated in the Live Below the Line challenge - if you haven't heard of it it's when you only have $2 to spend on food and drink each day for 5 days. The idea is to raise money and show people what it is like to live at the extreme poverty line like so many do. This challenge not only got me cooking again it also killed my diet coke habit! I went from 3+ cans a day to none. And I've managed to keep it that way! I didn't want to let me team down during the challenge week so that got me through the worst of the withdrawal. Now all my change is slowly being built up and soon will be going to the bank.

Contributed by Laura Birch

Free Compost Bin or Worm Farm

Approximate $$ saved: $40 - $70

My fiancé and I enjoyed a "compost and worm farm workshop" today for FREE. I found on the council website they run all sorts of workshops to better knowledge yourself around the garden. The trainer was quite humorous and full of so much knowledge there wasn't much he didn't know. My fiancé and I have been using a worm farm for a few months and had no idea, today cleared up all queries and gave us so much more confidence in making our own fertilizers and compost. Each household has a choice of a worm farm (the rectangle one) or compost bin (220 litre). They don't supply worms, but suggested a few places where it is much cheaper than Bunnings. Can't wait to start our compost and help our poor worms.

Contributed by Renae Hutchison

If You Are a Small Adult Size in Clothes Check Out the Kids Section!

Approximate $ Savings: $3.50 from an $8.50 purchase

With the winter weather hitting I went shopping for some warmer clothes. I found that adult ladies size 8 track pants and jumpers are the same as the children's size 16. Not only are they the same size but I can't tell the difference - well part from the tag! Adults' jumper: $8.50, Kids' jumper: $5 (I paid $4 on special). Saving of $3.50 (or $4.50 in my case).

Contributed by Deb Holliday

For an Extra Large Dog Bed

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Approximate $ Savings: $245

I have a large breed dog who needed a new comfy dog bed. After scouring online and at pet and discount department stores for a cost effective option, I found that nothing was big enough or even remotely in my price range. I had a brain wave, buy a single doona, fold it in half, stitch it together and make a cover with old surplus fabric. It was done in an afternoon, with the help of my mother's fabulous sewing skills. I was lucky Mum had a fabric cupboard full of fabric scraps, but otherwise you could use a flannel sheet or doona cover fastened together with Velcro etc. Total Cost $17, for the Kmart single doona.

Contributed by Kristy Wilkinson

No More Mushy Mushrooms

When you buy mushrooms, put them in the brown paper bags, usually provided where you shop, then place the paper bag into a plastic freezer bag before putting in the fridge drawer. This will extend the life of the mushrooms for at least another week.

Contributed by Frances Mavropoulos

Paper Sticks for Fire Starters

When I was very young in England old newspapers were used to make paper sticks.

Method:

With two sheets of newspaper laid flat on a table proceed to fold diagonally from left hand bottom corner in roughly 5 cm folds, finishing at top right corner (large newspapers are the best).

Fold the long folded paper in half, hold at the fold and using both hands cross the right length over the left length then the right over the left continuously until you come to the end, this should give you a plait of paper. The tighter you can fold and plait the longer it will burn.

Make at least 6 of these to use as the base of your fire. Putting light kindling on top light by placing a lit match at the ends of a couple of the plaits. Once they start burning the flame will slowly travel up the plait igniting the kindling sitting on top of it. Once the kindling is alight larger pieces of wood can then be placed on top.

Contributed by Mary Rivett

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Laundry Rules

Just a tip for when doing your laundry: we always hang our laundry out on the clothesline then once dried we fold the laundry into the basket to save on ironing and electricity. Where you can always buy clothes and other laundry items that you do not have to iron. Wash them then dry them on the line so that you have a crease free garment to fold straight into your basket. Another tip is if you have a pergola at the back of the house hang a rope from the beams to use as an undercover clothesline and there you have another clothesline you can use when the weather is wet.

Contributed by Esther Simioni

Kill Rose Aphids

Use cold dishwashing water from your sink to spray on roses on roses. It kills aphids although you will still need to remove the dead aphids from leaves. Also growing a garlic plant among roses prevents aphid infestations. I have tried both these methods of pest control and they do work, especially the garlic.

Contributed by Gwen McCaughan

Classic Christmas Table Decorations

Use a white table cloth that you can buy any time of the year, and Christmas paper. We all have a stash of Christmas paper, so take a nice one and fold it in half and lay down the centre of the table. That is your runner. Then take nice glasses and place a tea light candle in them; place down the table. Run some Christmas beads along the table, around the glasses. I picked up some Christmas muffin papers, they were cardboard with no bottom, and they fitted over a wine glass. With the tea light lit they looked like small lamps on the table and were very pretty.

Contributed by Karen Witek

Simple, Inexpensive and Pure Oil Spray

We buy our oil in bulk and as it comes in large tins it was hard to judge how much we needed when coating the pan/tray etc. This can become very wasteful very fast. Therefore a tip from the beauty section was adapted to my kitchen. Using a spray bottle that has a fine mist setting, fill with oil and use in the kitchen for all your oil needs. The squirt setting works well to reduce waste however cannot cover a large area like a mist spray can.

Contributed by Mel McIntosh

Editor's note: I use a spray bottle for oil too. The squirt setting is fine, just use a pastry brush (or your fingers if they're clean) to spread the oil in your cake pan or baking dish. *Cath*

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Electricity Savings Using Solar

Approximate $ Savings: $400 a quarter

As a family of 7 our electricity bill used to be around $1,000 a quarter. I invested $40 for a pack of 20 solar lights from the hardware. During the day I leave them in the sun in the slots of up-turned milk crates. Then in the evening I bring the crates in and place the lights throughout the house. These are particularly useful in the hallways and upstairs. We rarely need to turn the lights on. It only takes a few minutes of my time each day. As we are on a smart metre system this saves electricity use during the peak time. By the time the solar lights begin to fade we are all asleep. Also, as we have solar panels on the roof that feed back into the grid to offset our bill, we clean the panels every few months to ensure we get maximum benefits. When the panels build up with dirt they are not as effective. Our bills have decreased to around $600 a quarter and the solar generation has increased.

Contributed by Anne Davis

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