

Bare Bones Groceries

The 2007 Grocery Challenge



Are you ready for the Challenge?

Can you spend under \$20 for groceries for one week and still eat well? Are you ready to meet the challenge?

Way back in 2002 we published the original The Cupboard is Bare and There's Nothing to Eat shopping list and menu. This shopping list and menu were originally intended as an emergency stop-gap for those times when there was absolutely no money to spare for anything, including food. It was meant to be a bare bones plan to get you through until the next pay day. The list was revised in 2003, with some additions to the shopping list and the menu.

As an emergency list, it covers breakfasts, lunches and dinners using minimal ingredients that would cost around \$20 if you had to buy them.

Since then, once or twice a year I secretly take up the challenge to spend less than \$20 on groceries for the week and honestly the family don't even realize. In fact most of the time they are eating meals that are very similar to our normal eating habits. Loads of fruit and veg, bread and cereals, dairy and minimal meat so they don't even notice anything different.

I do though. I save a lot of money just by very carefully planning our meals for one week.

This challenge is one that you should be able to quite easily take up for a week. In fact I'm pretty sure that most Australia and New Zealand based Cheapskaters could probably stick to it for two to four weeks without any hardship if they had to.

What's the secret?

The secret to surviving on a \$20 a week grocery budget is creativity. Start with your pantry, fridge and freezer. Do an inventory and make a list of the ingredients you have on hand. List everything – flour, sugar, condiments, tins of beetroot, peas, corn, packets of noodles, the jellies hiding in the back of the cupboard, soup mixes, crackers, cereals, bread, meat, fish, chicken, fruit, vegetables, butter or marg, eggs etc so you know what you have to work with. You may find you won't need to go to the supermarket or corner shop at all.

Once you know what you have to work with you can menu plan. Start with ingredients you already have and try to plan meals that use those ingredients without having to buy anything extra. For example if you have a tin of salmon, an onion, eggs, flour and milk you can make a Salmon Impossible Pie to have hot or cold for lunch or dinner. Make it in a large pie dish for dinner, in smaller muffin pans for lunches. You haven't spent a cent; you already had the

ingredients on hand. Login the Member's Centre and print off a blank menu planner, ready for you to use.

Keep going, making a list of ingredients you may need to buy. If you have mince, cheese, onions, garlic and spaghetti you have just about everything you need to make a spag bol or pasta bake. Add tomato soup to your shopping list and you have another meal. For this week, try making your spag bol with tomato soup at 99cents a can rather than a jar of pasta sauce at \$1.59. You'll have 60 cents to spend on something else.

The Bare Bones Shopping List

Using the original shopping list and menu plan as a base I have over the years come up with my own \$20 a week grocery list and menu. This does of course rely on having some food in the pantry and fridge although they are mainly sauces, herbs and baking supplies.

If your cupboards and fridge are already bare this shopping list will get you through the week. It is a very basic list and not at all something I would recommend as a long term eating plan but for a week to save money and use up food you have it works.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Price</i>
<i>Eggs</i>	<i>600g</i>	<i>1.99</i>
<i>SR Flour</i>	<i>2kg</i>	<i>1.48</i>
<i>Mince</i>	<i>1kg</i>	<i>3.99</i>
<i>Macaroni</i>	<i>1kg</i>	<i>0.98</i>
<i>Cheese</i>	<i>500g</i>	<i>2.50</i>
<i>Margarine</i>	<i>500g</i>	<i>0.99</i>
<i>Milk</i>	<i>2L</i>	<i>2.00</i>
<i>Potatoes</i>	<i>4kg</i>	<i>1.98</i>
<i>Onions</i>	<i>1kg</i>	<i>0.99</i>
<i>Carrots</i>	<i>1kg</i>	<i>0.89</i>
<i>Rice</i>	<i>1kg</i>	<i>0.99</i>
<i>Total</i>		<i>\$19.10</i>

These prices are Aldi prices and the whole list cost just \$19.10!

Although the prices may not be as low where you live, there are many ways to bring down the amount spent on groceries.

The Tip Store has hundreds of great ideas for saving money on groceries.

If you need more inspiration read Shrewd Shopping or Super Shopper (in the Article Archive) for some great tips.

This shopping list provides enough basics for a family of four for one week. It's not gourmet cooking but it is filling, tasty and almost nutritional.

Menu Ideas

Breakfast Menu

1. Damper, Egg, Fruit
2. Scrambled Eggs over Damper
3. Fruit Smoothie, Potato Cakes
4. Cheesy Muffins
5. Pancakes, Fruit
6. Potato Pancakes
7. Creamy Rice Pudding

Lunch/Dinner Menu

1. Savoury Mince over mashed potatoes or damper
2. Vegetable pasta bake
3. Baked Potato and Vegetables
4. Scalloped Potatoes and Vegetables
5. Mexican Meatballs and Rice
6. Vegetable Soup
7. Potato Pie
8. Fried Rice
9. Rice rissoles

This menu is very limited, but this is a grocery list with a purpose! It's an example of a very basic grocery budget and how well you can live on it for a week. Using your imagination you could create some gourmet delights that may become family favourites. Get ideas on mixing and matching ingredients from *Substitute Cooking* in this month's Journal to see how easy creativity in the kitchen on a very limited budget can be.

Now are you up for the 2007 grocery challenge? Login to the Discussion Board and join us on the Great Grocery challenge and watch **your** grocery savings grow.

Feed your family like royalty for peanuts!

Mega savings can be made by buying discounted/reduced for quick sale items in meat, dairy, fresh produce, deli departments in local big name shops. Go early morning/late night for bargains, bulk buy, freeze, plan menu daily/weekly.

We never eat boring meals, instead we have steak, roasts etc with all the trimmings each day for a fraction of cost! Shop with a view to freezing/cooking meals monthly!

I buy asparagus year round for \$1 kilo, cook/freeze into soups, quiches. Pre-prepared salads for .80 cents - \$1. Potatoes in jackets for \$1, zap in Micro! Coleslaw .50cents and add to baked spuds for quick meal or salad. Roasts at 50% off, chicken fillets at \$4 kilo, freeze these into portions, cheese, cream, yoghurt, pasta and sauces, garlic bread, orange juices etc close to use by date, reduced, freeze, use later.

Nightly specials are cooked chooks \$2, rolls, bread .50cents, cakes .50 - \$1, fresh pizzas \$3. Shop about 9pm for these! Learn to spot the reduced/discounted sticker each supermarket uses and LOOK OUT for them!

My fridge/freezer/pantry are FULL of these items. Gather recipes from friends, Internet etc and find new ways to use your bargain buys. Don't let your imagination go stale! Hundreds of ways to cook/use your ingredients, turn them into healthy, scrumptious meals/snacks everyone will rave over! No more boring cheap cuts, meals with flavour/variety for mere cents!!

Sample menu:

Asparagus Cream soup cost \$2. French Stick with butter cost .50cents.

Chicken in Mustard Cream sauce with Garden Salad cost \$8.

Cheesecake topped with Black Cherry cost \$2.

That feeds 4- 6 hearty appetites and no complaints!

Next night try asparagus steamed, creamy mashed potato, Corn on cob cost \$2.

Lamb chump chops cost \$18 tray of 22, equals \$9 for two meals!

Baked bread and butter pudding cost \$2.

Quick meal night is stir fry, use up all odd fresh vegies, buy fresh Asian noodles, slice up 1 chicken fillet thinly, and make a sauce using honey, soy, garlic, onion and cook!

Add chicken stock to leftover stir fry and make noodle bowl soup Asian style!

- Contributed by Pauline Cameron-Lyons

Bare Bones Recipes

Baked Beans Supreme

Ingredients:

50 g of bacon, chopped
1 onion, chopped
Large tin of baked beans
440gm tin of crushed pineapple
3 tablespoon of tomato sauce
2 tablespoon of sugar

Method:

Fry bacon and onions together. Combine rest of ingredients in saucepan simmer well and serve.

Baked Potato

Ingredients:

1 potato per person
60g grated cheese
60g butter
30ml milk

Method:

Scrub potatoes and bake slowly until tender. Cut in half lengthwise and scoop out the centre leaving a shell. Mash the hot potato from the centres with the cheese, butter and milk until the cheese has started to melt. Spoon back into the potato shells. Return to oven and bake further 5 minutes to completely melt the cheese.

Basic Meat Sauce

This recipe is just that - very basic. But you can glam it up if you want to by adding extra ingredients and serving it with various accompaniments. My family loves this basic meat sauce, and I use it at least once a week.

Ingredients:

500g mince
1 tin tomato soup
1 tin crushed tomatoes
1 large onion chopped
pinch mixed herbs
1tsp crushed garlic

Method:

Brown the mince and then rinse under hot running water to remove any excess fat. Wipe out the fry pan. Spray pan with cooking spray and brown onion and garlic. Add mince, herbs, tomato soup and crushed tomatoes. Simmer 20 minutes.

This makes 4 generous serves, total cost \$3.36 = \$0.84 cents per serve.

This sauce can be used as a base for a variety of dishes such as:

Spaghetti Bolognese:

Cook a packet of spaghetti noodles, and serve with the sauce on top.
Total Cost \$3.91 = \$0.98 cents per serve

Pasta Bake:

Cook a packet of spiral noodles (49 cents from ALDI) and stir through the meat sauce. Put in a baking dish, sprinkle with 100g grated cheese and bake until the cheese is melted and golden.
Total Cost \$4.56 = \$1.04 per serve

Lasagne:

Layer meat sauce with lasagne noodles in a baking dish, sprinkle with grated cheese and bake according to the directions on the noodle packet.
Total Cost \$6.05 = \$1.26 per serve

Whiz the Mince

If you need to stretch your bolognise sauce or any other mince dish, give the mince a whiz in the food processor, add a little water or stock and tomato sauce. I tried this and extended the sauce to feed 8 people instead of 4. It was a little thin but with pasta the bellies were full and everyone said it tasted great.

- Contributed by Carole, Wiley Park

Cheesy Muffins

Ingredients:

1 cup SR flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 cup cheese (grated)
¼ cup powdered milk
¾ cup water

Method:

Sift flour, powdered milk and baking powder. Add cheese and then mix in water with a wooden spoon. Stir until just combined, don't over mix. Drop into greased muffin tins and bake in a moderate oven (180 degrees) for 20 minutes.

Can be eaten warm or cold. Can also be frozen.

Corn and Rice Quickie

Ingredients:

2 cups rice
1 large onion, chopped
1 tsp oil
1 tbsp Marmite
1 300g can creamed corn

Method:

Boil or steam rice. Heat oil in large pan and sauté onion until tender. Stir in rice and Marmite and mix well. Add corn and heat through.

Any leftovers, as long as they aren't too moist, can be added. You can substitute a tin of savoury brown lentils for the creamed corn if desired.

Damper

Ingredients:

3 cups SR flour
½ tsp salt
1 ¼ cups milk (skim works best for this recipe if you have it)

Method:

Sift flour and salt into a large bowl. Add milk. Using a knife, mix to a stiff dough that leaves the sides of the bowl. Turn out onto a floured board and shape into a mound. Bake on a greased oven tray in a hot oven for 30 minutes until cooked. Before baking always cut across the dough 3 or 4 times.

Elaine's Easy Pastry

Ingredients:

1 cup SR Flour
1 cup plain flour
2/3 cup margarine or lard
½ cup hot water
½ tsp salt

Method:

Cream the margarine or lard. Add the hot water gradually, beating until the mixture is creamy and white. Sift the dry ingredients together and add to the margarine mixture. Using a knife mix until pastry leaves the sides of the bowl. Turn onto a lightly floured board and roll thinly.

Fried Rice

Ingredients:

3 cups cold, cooked rice
1 tablespoon oil
155g chicken, chopped - optional
200g assorted vegetables sliced (onion, peas, carrot, corn)
2 tablespoons chopped spring onion
2 eggs
1 tablespoon soy sauce

Method:

Beat eggs and set aside. Heat oil in a large pan or wok. Add meat and fry quickly, then add rice. Add all other ingredients except eggs and soy sauce. Stir continually to ensure even cooking without burning. Make a hole in the centre of the pan by scraping the rice to one side. Pour eggs into hole and cook. Stir eggs into mixture and keep stirring until eggs have been mixed in and are quite dry. Lastly add soy sauce. Be careful not to over cook. Vegetables should be still slightly crisp.

Mexican Meatballs

Ingredients:

500g mince
1 pkt taco seasoning
1 egg
2tsp cornflour
2 tbs tomato sauce
1 cup water
1 beef stock cube

Method:

Mix the egg into the mince with ½ pkt taco seasoning. I usually cheat and beat the taco seasoning into the egg before I add it to the mince – I think it distributes the seasoning more evenly through the meat mixture. Take a heaped teaspoonful of the mince and shape into balls. Place them in a single layer on the bottom of the crockpot.

Mix the water, stock cube, tomato sauce, cornflour and remaining taco seasoning together. Pour over meatballs. Cover and cook on low 4 – 6 hours (depends on your crockpot). Check after 4 hours to see if meat is cooked and sauce has thickened.

To Serve:

We often have these meatballs with rice but if we want something 'take away' I will wrap them in a tortilla, or mountain bread or a pita. I usually put some shredded lettuce on the tortilla, line up 3 or 4 meatballs, add a dollop of sour cream and then roll it all up. Delicious!

Surprise Casserole

When the fridge is looking empty at the end of the week instead of going shopping get out the crock pot or a casserole dish and start by putting in a chopped onion (if you have one) followed by any raw vegetables chopped or sliced and then any raw meat or chicken (cut into bite size pieces). Add a good slosh of tomato sauce and another of Worcestershire sauce. I then add any cooked left over vegetables and if needed a tin of tomatoes or a tin of sweet corn. Cook all day in a crockpot or for one and a half hours in a moderate oven in a casserole dish. Thicken when cooked and serve with rice, pasta or mashed potatoes. We call this surprise casserole as it has different flavours every time depending on what is in my fridge at the time.

- Contributed by Sue, Baldivis

Potato Cakes

Ingredients:

500g potatoes, cooked and mashed
60g plain flour
30g butter or marg
milk – enough to roll into a smooth dough

Method:

Mix potato, flour and marg with milk until a smooth, soft dough is formed. Roll out to approximately 10mm thick. Using a floured scone cutter or drinking glass cut into circles. Place onto a greased scone tray and bake in a hot oven for 15 minutes.

To serve split open, butter and eat while hot. Delicious with sour cream and salad for an easy meal.

Potato Pie

Ingredients:

200g mince
1 onion, diced
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp mixed herbs
4 large potatoes
½ cup sour cream
1 cup grated cheese

Method:

Peel and dice potatoes and boil until quite soft. While the potatoes are cooking brown mince. Remove from pan and using pan juices sauté onion and garlic. Mash potatoes until smooth. Add mince, onion and garlic, herbs and sour cream and mix well. Spread into an oiled lasagne dish, pressing flat. Sprinkle top with grated cheese. Bake in a hot oven until cheese is melted and golden brown. Cut into squares to serve.

Quick Rice Patties

Ingredients:

1 onion, chopped
1 cup rice
1 tsp marmite
2 tbsp peanut butter
1 egg
good pinch mixed herbs

Method:

Cook the rice in boiling, salted water. Drain well. While the rice is still hot, add the marmite, peanut butter, onion and herbs and mix well. Stir in the egg. Take tablespoonfuls of the mixture and shape into patties. Fry in shallow oil until lightly brown and golden on both sides. Drain on absorbent paper.

Alternatively, for a low fat version, spray a baking sheet with cooking spray and bake the patties in a moderate oven for about 30 minutes, turning halfway through.

These patties are really quick, easy and very cheap. They can be served hot, but are even better cold with salad or on a sandwich.

Scalloped Potatoes

Ingredients:

4 large potatoes
1 large onion
2 tbsp plain flour
2 tbsp butter
1 ¼ cups milk

Method:

Scrub and slice potatoes into thin slices. Slice onion thinly. Grease a casserole dish and place potato and onion in a layer. Sprinkle with flour and dot with butter. Continue in this manner until all the potato and onion is used. Heat milk and pour over potato. Cover and bake 45 minutes at 180 degrees. Uncover and continue cooking until potato is tender and lightly browned (about a further 15 minutes).

Vegetable Soup

Ingredients:

1 large onion, chopped
1 large carrot, chopped,
3 sticks celery, chopped
1 tsp oil
1 tin tomatoes, chopped
2 stock cubes (vegetable, chicken or beef flavours)
½ cup rice
2 litres water

Method:

Heat oil in the base of a large saucepan or stockpot. Brown onion, add celery and carrot and cook 1 minutes. Add tomatoes, stock cubes, rice and water. Bring slowly to the boil. Simmer 30 minutes until rice is cooked and vegetables are tender. Taste before serving, you may need to add salt.

Vegetable Pasta Bake

Ingredients:

250g pasta
1 tsp oil
1 onion, diced
½ cup peas
½ cup corn
1 carrot, diced
1 stick celery, thinly sliced
1 tin tomatoes, diced

¾ cup water
¼ cup milk powder (can substitute water and milk powder with 1 cup milk)
1 tbsp plain flour
1 cup grated cheese

Method:

Cook pasta in boiling water. Drain. Heat oil in large pan and sauté onion and celery. Add other vegetables and pasta. Mix well. Pour into greased casserole dish. Mix milk powder and plain flour into water, stirring to remove lumps. Heat to boiling point. Stir in half the grated cheese. Spread white sauce over the top of the pasta. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake in a moderate oven until top is lightly browned and cheese has melted.

You can use any vegetables in this recipe, ideal for cleaning out the crisper. Cut cauliflower, broccoli, zucchini, egg plant etc into small pieces.

Creamy Rice Pudding

Ingredients:

1 cup rice
6 cups milk
1/2 cup sugar (more or less to taste)
Vanilla essence to taste
½ cup sultanas

Method:

Put all ingredients together in the crockpot, give it a stir. Cook on low until rice is soft and the mixture is creamy – check after 4/12 hours. This is delicious with cream for dessert, or with a little extra milk for breakfast.

Note: I have made this using So Good instead of milk. I have even used the Chocolate So Good to make a chocolate pudding for the kids - they loved it!

Pancakes

Ingredients:

1 cup SR flour
¾ cup water
2 heaped tablespoons milk powder
2 eggs, separated

Method:

Beat the flour, water, milk powder and egg yolks together. In a separate bowl beat the egg whites until stiff. Using a metal spoon fold the egg whites into the batter.

Bare Bones Groceries

Heat fry pan or griddle until hot. Using a ½ cup measure pour batter onto lightly buttered pan or griddle. Cook until bubbles form and start to pop on the top of each pancake then turn. Cook for further minute. Place a clean tea towel on a cake rack and sit pancakes on tea towel until ready to eat.

This recipe makes about 8 medium pancakes.