

Tips to help stretch your shopping dollar

Gerry is writing today.

What New Year's resolution you say? Well, maybe we all haven't said it out loud to anyone, but haven't we all decided to TRY and eat better, healthier and more economically, especially as we are recovering from the huge grocery bills of the holiday season and the over indulgences of December?

Let's help stretch your shopping dollar. How can you do this without huge sacrifices and effort in our busy lives? Here are some simple suggestions for you to consider and even, if you learn and change one thing, it is a positive step in the right direction.

Tip 1: Think about the layout of most grocery stores. All of the fresh stuff is around the perimeter of the store! Correct? Fresh bakery, produce, meats, dairy, seafood, flowers are all on the edges. Now this is where you should be focusing the majority of your shopping. All of the interior aisles, including the freezer aisle have pre-packaged, prepared, processed, over-packaged, high sugar, high fat foods. You should be avoiding the candy, cookie, pop, snack and junk food aisles.

Tip 2: When purchasing any product, check the date codes for the best before date and expiry date. Pick up the item with the date farthest from the day you're shopping. This way, you have a better chance of using up the product before it is not at its optimum freshness. You may throw out less this way and save yourself a bit of money.

Tip 3: When purchasing meats, particularly take advantage of bulk packaging. For example ground meats will cost appreciably less per pound when you buy the larger quantity packaging. Divide it up at home and freeze the extra for another meal or prepare two day's meals at once and refrigerate for an easy supper later.

Tip 4: Take advantage of in-store sales and

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promotions. Read your sales flyers and plan your meals around what's on special— especially meats and produce.

Tip 5: By purchasing whole meats, such as whole roasts, chickens, pieces of bacon, hams, turkeys, etc, you save money over buying the product cut and prepared by the butcher. You also may get leftovers with which you can make the next day meal or lunches. Leftover meats can be prepared for a different meal by adding vegetables, a sauce, rice or pasta to stretch them.

Tip 6: Convenience foods are costly, that's why they are convenient. Our time is worth money and you need to weight this when purchasing prepared ingredients and foods. Pre-shredded cheese is twice the cost of bulk cheese, but it is awfully handy to have on hand. So are salad fixings. Just think about what you are putting in your cart and why. Do you always need the most convenient item?

Tip 7: Try not to plan every meal with the meat choice being the first decision. Choose sides that are filling and nutritious. Serve more vegetables and salads. When you serve an expensive meat or meal, follow up with a couple of meatless meals or one-pot suppers.

Tip 8: Buy less expensive cuts of meat and use your crockpot more often. Cheaper, less tender cuts of meat are deliciously tenderized with the all-day cooking process.

Tip 9: Eat more fish. But it doesn't always

have to be expensive fresh fish— sometimes, yes, but not always. How about a tuna melt for dinner? Or canned salmon sandwiches with homemade tomato soup? Smoked oysters make a yummy treat for a simple lunch.

Tip 10: Buy the veggies at the back of the produce section. Cabbage, red, green and Napa, are at the back, and so are leeks, kale, rapini — all inexpensive and delicious!

Tip 11: Eat a rainbow of foods. I recently watched a program during which they showed a picture of what several severely obese people ate in one day— all of their food was brown and not brown rice! There were hamburgers,

French fries, fish and chips, cookies, donuts, chocolate and more. The more coloured food you eat, the better they are for you and your plate looks more appetizing too! We eat first with our eyes, then our nose, then our mouth.

Anyway, the idea is that there are lots of simple things anyone can do to help us work on our "non-resolution". Hope you've picked up some tips here and I sure hope I don't run into you in the chip and candy aisle!

Have fun and keep cooking.

(Lori and Gerry can be reached at whatscookin@independentfreepress.com)

Plum and Almond Tart

Pastry ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 6 oz chilled unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 to 2 tsp vinegar

Pastry method

1. Place flour and sugar in a food processor. Pulse to aerate.
2. Cut the butter into small pieces and distribute over the flour. Pulse until the mixture resembles fine meal.
3. With machine running, pour the vinegar through the feed tube and pulse five seconds. Dough should not come together into a ball.
4. Let the dough rest at room temperature for 30 minutes before using.
5. Press dough into bottom and up sides of an 8" round or oblong flan pan.

Tart ingredients

- 4 cups sliced purple plums
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup slivered blanched almonds
- zest of 1 lemon
- juice of half a lemon
- 2 tbsp flour



Streusel topping ingredients:

- 1/3 cup flour
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup oatmeal
- 1/2 cup butter

Tart assembly method

1. Gently mix plums with sugar, almonds, lemon zest, lemon juice and flour.
2. Arrange over pastry crust. Top with streusel topping.
3. Bake at 375 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

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