



10 Ways to Save Money Buying Fresh Produce

You know you're supposed to strive for five servings of fruits and vegetables every day, but healthy choices aren't always cheap. If you cut corners to save money, you'll end up with less nutritious foods. Don't waste your money on watered-down, sugary alternatives to healthy foods, and don't get stuck with a kitchen stocked with expired produce either.

Follow these steps to stretch your food budget and keep a nutritious diet without spending too much on fresh food:

Where to Buy Produce

1. Start a Home Garden

Growing your own food is challenging and rewarding, but it is *not* easy. First, before you decide to grow your own produce, think about how "green" your thumb is. If you're new to gardening, start with simple seeds, like tomatoes and peas, which are resilient plants that grow in most environments. Radishes grow very quickly, and spinach is reliable too. As you expand your [home garden](#), you'll learn that the one characteristic you need above all is patience. You'll need to dedicate time and energy to get a high-quality, high-quantity crop.

2. Talk to Your Friends

If you don't have the time to maintain a healthy garden, talk to your friends. One of my good friends lives nearby and has a bountiful garden with plenty of cucumber, tomato, and peppers plants, among others. He is always more than happy to share, and in return I help him take care of his plants when he's traveling. Most of the people I know who keep a garden of their own have more food than their family can consume, so never hesitate to ask if you can partake.

3. Shop at Farmer's Markets

I'm ashamed to admit that until a few months ago, I had never been to a farmer's market in my adult life. If you haven't been to one either, visit one as soon as possible. You can even look into taking part in [community supported agriculture](#). Buying local produce from the people who maintain the land has many perks, like:

- Lower prices than at a supermarket
- Healthier, pesticide-free options, with no preservatives – great if you're looking to [eat organic on a budget](#)
- Support for smaller, local businesses that are more eco-friendly and keep overall prices down

4. Pick Your Own

If you don't have a farmer's market nearby, you're not necessarily out of local options. See if there are any farms in your area where you can pick your own fruits and vegetables. It takes less time than growing your own, of course, but you can still get better deals than at a [grocery store](#). Plus, a trip to the farm or orchard makes a great regular outing with family or friends.

When to Buy Produce

5. Know the Season

Have you ever noticed that your favorite fruits and vegetables are considerably more expensive during different seasons? That's because not all produce grows year-round. Getting fresh fruits and vegetables in their off-seasons requires expensive travel and shipping, and the stores pass the cost on to you as a customer. If you're looking to save, stick to what's in season, like apples and pears in the fall and strawberries and grapefruits in the spring.

6. Check the Date – and Time

If you know you'll cook or eat your produce within a day of shopping, take your store or local grower up on a great deal. That way, you'll get big discounts on fruits and vegetables that are on the brink of expiration. And at a farmer's market, you have major bargaining power near the end of the day. If you don't buy, growers have to transport the produce back, often to find it rotten or damaged. They'll be happier to sell to you at a cut rate rather than take a complete loss. But never get the fruit just because you get a good deal – have a plan for it.

7. Watch for Sales

Check your store for weekly deals on certain items, and don't stray from the sale items. Your grocer will change the fruits and vegetables on the sale list from week to week, so let their bargain buys set your fruit and vegetable menu for the week. Watch out for two traps of produce deals:

- Sale items disappear quickly, so shop in the morning if you can
- Deals are usually based on surplus, so chances are the items will expire soon – check the date and freshness before you buy

What Produce to Buy

8. Get It in Bulk

I don't have kids, so when I shop I'm buying for two, which makes buying in bulk difficult, although not impossible. First, I try to find foods I can freeze as soon as I get home. Second, if I can't freeze produce initially, I'll cook all the vegetables, store them in separate containers, and then freeze them. The general rule of thumb when freezing produce is: The higher the water content, the less likely it is that it will freeze well. If freezing isn't an option, find other ways to put your value pack to use. For example, you can [add fruit to smoothies](#) and desserts, or use vegetables in a soup, salad, or casserole.

9. Drink Your Juice

A glass of 100% fruit juice with your breakfast is an affordable and healthy way to kick-start the day, and it counts as one serving by itself. Don't get tricked into unhealthy options, though. Make sure the fruit juice you buy is all natural, and check the labels so you can avoid juices with excessive sugar content.

10. Check the Freezer

Contrary to popular opinion, frozen food isn't necessarily less nutritious than fresh produce. You can get the same benefits in a more convenient and more affordable form. Frozen vegetables tend to be cheaper than their fresh counterparts, and freezer bags make it easier for you to use only what you need when you need it. Try adding frozen vegetables to dishes like stews, casseroles, soups (e.g. [Crock-Pot slow cooker recipes](#) work great), and pasta-based recipes to make them less obvious. Canned produce is also cheaper than fresh fruit and vegetables and lasts much longer, so you don't need to eat it right away.

Article information provided by:

<http://www.moneycrashers.com/how-to-save-money-buying-fruits-and-vegetables/>

www.commonhealth.virginia.gov

The contents of the CommonHealth weekly emails may be reprinted from an outside resource in the area of health, safety, and wellness and is intended to provide one or more views on a topic. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Virginia, CommonHealth, or any particular agency and are offered for educational purposes. If you have questions or concerns about this article, please email us at wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov