



Make Do & Cook: Savvy Shopping
Patricia Mansfield-Devine

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Make Do Books

Make Do & Cook: SAVVY SHOPPING

Shop and plan the smart way to create delicious and nutritious meals
on the smallest budget

by

Patricia Mansfield-Devine

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Introduction

Many people do not know how to cook. Many don't care to cook. Many feel that they don't have time to cook. But if you are on a budget, learning to prepare tasty, nourishing, enjoyable meals for yourself and your family can save you a fortune, and it needn't take up much of your time.

Food is a success not because of what you spend on it but because of what you do with it, and a little knowledge can go a very long way.

I wrote *Make Do & Cook* – the book on which this e-book is based – for anyone who wants to cook, from the beginner who is unsure of how to start, to the experienced cook who feels nonplussed by trying to work – perhaps for the first time – within a budget. It shows you how to balance your budget, how to shop with savvy and how to plan two-week's worth of menus that are nutritious, cheap and – above all – delicious. It doesn't aim to show you how to heat up Pot Noodles or make the most of turkey twizzlers – it is dedicated to creating delicious dishes from good, basic ingredients that you can find in any supermarket.

This e-book is based on two sections from *Make Do & Cook* – Savvy Shopping and Menus & Budgeting. These are important subjects because saving money on your food starts at the very beginning of the process – in the shops.

I hope it will help you enjoy great food on the smallest possible budget. And if you want to know more about how to do this, including 100 simple recipes, check out *Make Do & Cook* at:

<http://www.webvivantpress.com/makedoandcook.html>

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Savvy shopping

Where to shop

Most Britons shop in the supermarket, but the situation is very different in many other parts of the world. It is particularly different from what I see here in France. Here, food is cheaper in the market, so if you have access to a market, farmer's market or farm shop, get down there and find out for yourself if you can make economies. It is also worth finding a butcher or fishmonger if you can, as their expertise on cuts and advice on cooking methods can save you a fortune over time. Don't be afraid to ask for advice.

As we all know, the different supermarkets are aimed at different kinds of shoppers. People with more disposable income tend to head for Waitrose and M&S, while those with less money tend to head for Aldi, Lidl and Morrisons. If you're short of cash, don't be a snob about the so-called low-end supermarkets – the food, particularly the fresh food, is often of excellent quality. Alternatively, if you have access to a good butcher or fishmonger, see if they have offcuts you can use to make soup or stock (many of these can be had free of charge or for mere pennies, particularly leg bones, which make excellent stock).

What to buy

Stick to staples when it comes to food – meat, fish, fruit, vegetables etc. Basics like this only require growing, cleaning and placing in the shops, so you're not paying for anything extra. *Make Do & Cook* shows you how to cook food for yourself from basic ingredients, which can save a small fortune.

As ever, there are exceptions to this rule among goods that are fragile or which go off quickly, as the majority of these are processed at the time of collection – examples include peas and sweetcorn, nearly all of which are processed at harvest time before their sugar content starts to reduce, and milk, much of which is processed immediately. This means powdered milk is very often cheaper than fresh milk.

Don't buy ready-cooked foodstuffs if you can help it – ie, foods in packets, tins, ready-made sauces etc. You the customer have to pay for

every element of this processing. This kind of food – often referred to as ‘processed’ – is also packed with flavour enhancers, preservatives and colouring agents to make it look more appetising. None of these have any food value and some of them may actually be harmful. You will also end up consuming more calories if you eat processed food, as the fat and sugar content is often far higher than in dishes you would make for yourself at home. Fat and sugar make excellent preservatives, which is why they’re so widely used by food manufacturers, but they do your health no favours.

How to buy

Always, always, always check the per-kilogram price of goods. This must become your mantra when you’re shopping. If you’re not used to doing it, you may be astonished at some of the price differences. Items that at first glance appear near-enough identical, or have roughly the same price per bar or pack, can work out radically different per kilogram.

There are occasional exceptions to this rule because some items that are lightweight go a long way – mushrooms and aubergines among them, while highly flavoured foods such as Cheddar cheese or Parmesan may be heavy but last a long time. In these cases, price the item by the number of servings you can get out of it.

General tips

Don’t shop when you’re hungry, tired or rushed – you’ll make mistakes. Shop when you’re period’s due and you may come home with a trolley full of chocolate and cakes. Shop when you’re angry and you’ll make equally bad decisions. Shop only when you really have the time to compare prices and weigh up purchases carefully – eat before you go, and shop in a quiet frame of mind.

You pay more for packaging. Plastic trays, paper liners, foil wrapping – the more packaging there is on goods, the more you’re going to have to pay for them. Do you really need fancy little chocolates each individually wrapped in foil and served on a paper tray? In my supermarket, Swiss chocolates in a box recently worked out at 33 times the price of block chocolate cheaply wrapped in cellophane – that’s a lot of money just to

feel a bit special as you pull off a wrapper. Whenever you're buying an item, consider whether you really want to make the packaging company richer.

Smaller pieces: As a rule, tinned or frozen vegetables or meat/fish costs less money when it's in smaller pieces. Tins of mushroom bits cost less than tins of perfect button mushrooms; bags of chopped-up frozen veg for soup cost less than perfectly sized haricot beans; teabags cost less than leaf tea. Decide for yourself whether you really need perfectly shaped or sized foodstuffs – for soups and stews it is usually unnecessary.

Don't skimp on animal food: It might seem wise to economise on your dog and cat food, but personally I've found that the animals eat more of the cheap food than the expensive food, and I also have a conviction that the good food keeps them out of the vet's surgery for longer. You will probably get better bargains on animal feed at a DIY store than you can in the supermarket.

If you buy in bulk, things are usually cheaper. Family-size tins of veg or baked beans, 20kg bags of animal feed, jumbo-size packs of toilet rolls etc. If in doubt, check the per-kilo price. In this book, you'll learn how to cost out your shopping per month rather than per week, in order to make the most of bulk buying.

Long-life milk is cheaper than fresh milk (and powdered milk is cheaper than either).

Budget brands: You can save money very painlessly by switching to budget brands for non-comestibles (ie, stuff you don't eat). There is no point in paying more money than you have to for things like tinfoil, plastic bags, toilet rolls, washing-up liquid etc. People often show a great deal of brand loyalty to things like cleaning products – this is nearly always a false economy.

Shop late: If you do your shopping just before closing time, the price of fresh food is often reduced.

Branding

Since I've mentioned branding, let's take a more detailed look at how that works. Shops price their goods by what they call 'price-points' – in other words, the levels that the shopper – poor sap – is willing to pay. There are four of them.

1 – Supermarket premium own-brand

Some of the major supermarkets have introduced high-end ranges of their own manufacture, which are different from their middle-price ranges (see below). Packaging is usually fancy and high-end, and may even disguise the fact that the goods are actually own-brand – for instance in my supermarket, SuperU, the high-end own-brand foods are labelled ‘Savoir des saveurs’, not ‘SuperU’.

2 – Manufacturers’ brand

These are the leading brands we’re all familiar with, such as Heinz, Coca-Cola and Hellman’s. Shoppers like brands because they make us feel all warm and fuzzy – we know what we’re getting and the product quality is usually both excellent and consistent. However, it costs a company a lot of money to maintain a brand image – special packaging, advertising etc – and that cost is passed onto the consumer. If you want to buy branded goods, you’re going to have to pay more for them. Included in the commercial brands are the high-end ‘by appointment’ companies – Lea and Perrin’s, Gordon’s etc – which are used by the Royal Family.

3 – Supermarket own-brand

Next on the list is the supermarket own-brand, which usually carries the supermarket’s own name. These are the brands that the major-league supermarkets create in order to compete with the leading commercial brands such as Heinz, and they very often copy the packaging and general ‘look’ of the leading brands very closely – using similar sizes and colours of bottles, for instance. Low-end supermarkets such as Lidl are only just getting round to producing their own brands but such ranges have been common in the major supermarkets for decades. Sainsbury’s own ketchup, Tesco’s own mayonnaise etc come under this heading.

4 – Budget ranges

At the bottom of the price range are the supermarket’s budget ranges of goods. These usually appear in cheaper-looking packaging in order to put you off buying them, have names like ‘Value’ or ‘Smartprice’ and cover the no-frills basics such as tinned vegetables, baked beans and so on. They are often excellent value for money. I now buy my supermarket’s budget-range shampoo at 60 cents a bottle, which compares nicely with Pantene at 3.70 euros – my hair doesn’t know the difference.

How to use price points

If you’re cutting back on spending, the advice is often to drop a price level and see how you get on. This approach can save the average

household up to £1,700 per year, but my advice is more radical – drop straight to the budget ranges and work your way back up to the level you find acceptable.

As a general tip, any item that you're going to use directly as it is, without cooking it or altering it in some way, such as mayonnaise, tomato sauce or jam, is where you'll notice differences in quality. Here is where you may find it pays to spend good money: Heinz tomato ketchup, Amora mayonnaise and mustard, Patak's Hot Lime Pickle, Frank Cooper's Original Oxford Marmalade, Lavazza coffee etc.

On a personal note, I must admit defeat with regard to beer. In this house we drink Kanterbrau beer at 3.05 euros per litre. We tried dropping to the budget range from our local supermarket (1.95 euros per litre) and the quality was dire. We came back up to the supermarket own-brand (2.50 euros per litre) and it wasn't much better. In the end, we went back to Kanterbrau, and allow for the extra euro per week that this adds to the budget. For occasional treats we buy Hoegaarden.

Wine

Drinkable wine costs good money, and cooking wine isn't drinkable (nor does it do much for your food) so when it comes to wine, I'd advise a compromise – get something that's cheap enough to use for cooking, but still good enough to drink.

In my experience it is generally far easier to get a good cheap red wine than a good cheap white wine. If you fancy champagne but can't stretch to it, you can disguise cheap white fizz with a dash of creme de cassis and call it a kir royale instead.

Points of sale

Supermarkets place goods where you're most likely to see them, and the bit of the shelf between your head and your knees is the premium sales area. This is where you can expect to find all the leading commercial brands, along with the supermarket's own brands – right in your eyeline.

Cheap goods are usually placed at the bottom of the shelf stack, so if you're economising, drop to your knees and see what's available on the bottom shelf. In my supermarket it includes biscuits at one euro per kilo

(as opposed to over 12 euros for a leading brand) and chocolate at 1.17 euros per kilo as opposed to 18 euros a kilo for a well-known Swiss make.

Goods on promotion are usually placed at the ends of the aisles, and here's where you'll find the 'bogoffs' (buy one, get one free). These are worth looking out for if they are genuinely items you need or would buy anyway, but keep a wary eye out – even a half-price reduction on a good bottle of olive oil, say, may keep the per kilo price higher than your normal purchase. Only you can decide whether it's worth it.

Seasonal shopping

You need to shop seasonally for the very good reason that seasonal foods are cheap.

Here, we are really talking about fruit and vegetables (most meat and fish being farmed), and since many people are now unfamiliar with the idea of seasonal shopping and are used to everything being available all year round, it's worth taking a brief look at what's in season when.

All seasons

Cabbages (of some kind or another), carrots, potatoes, onions. Because these items are always available, they form the basic ingredients of this book. Also always available are tropical fruits such as bananas and pineapples, and all the pulses, including lentils, dried beans and chickpeas.

Spring

Spring greens, asparagus, broccoli, new potatoes (ie, the small ones that you cook whole and eat with salad), radishes, watercress, spring onions, cauliflower, leeks.

In nature, spring is a thinner season than you might expect, though it improves as the year wears on – May is a better month than March.

Summer

Artichokes, asparagus, aubergines, broad beans, broccoli, carrots, courgettes, fennel, mangetout, new potatoes, peas, radishes, rocket, runner beans, tomatoes, strawberries, soft fruit (blackcurrants, raspberries etc), lettuce, apricots (late summer), plums, melons, peaches.

Summer is when the food glut begins, especially soft fruit. This is the time of year to eat foods raw and in salad form, and freeze or preserve any surplus if you can.

Autumn

Apples, pears, blackberries, damsons, figs, grapes, melons, nectarines, peaches, plums, tomatoes, walnuts, artichokes, aubergines, squash, carrots, celery, marrow, courgettes, leeks, peppers, maincrop potatoes (ie, the big ones that you can bake), sweetcorn, wild mushrooms.

Autumn is the best season all round, with fruits and vegetables of all kinds coming ripe after the heat of summer. Traditionally, many foods would be processed for winter consumption in the form of jams, jellies, cider etc, while root vegetables would be 'clamped' (buried in heaps of earth) to last over winter.

Winter

Cabbages, Brussels sprouts, carrots, onions, cauliflower, maincrop potatoes, leeks, root vegetables (turnips, swedes, parsnips, celeriac, beet-root etc), rhubarb, apples, oranges, clementines, pears, pineapple, walnuts.

This is the season of winter vegetables (usually roots of one kind or another) and plenty of stodge to get you through the colder days. Late-cropping apples that matured in about October are also usually cheap in winter, as they keep very well.

Do it yourself

Picking your own fruit (and vegetables if you can) from a farm is a great way to save money if you don't mind a few hours spent double

over the strawberry patch or picking up windfalls in the orchard. It can be a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

If you're able to grow your own fruit or veg, so much the better. Growing your own is beyond the scope of this book, but be assured that anyone with a garden, balcony or even a window box can produce at least some of their own fruit and veg, even if it's only chilli peppers, herbs and cherry tomatoes.

Growing your own enables you to choose varieties that might not otherwise be available, and to eat your food when it's truly fresh – in nature, food should be alive right up to the time that you kill it. If you haven't done this kind of thing before, start small and don't beat yourself up if you fail – even five cut-and-come-again lettuce plants can end up saving you a small fortune over the course of a summer.

Food for free

Don't despise the abundance still available in Britain's hedgerows, such as elderflowers, elderberries, blackberries etc. Try a handful of elderflowers when you're cooking gooseberries, or adding a handful or two of blackberries to a sweet apple dish.

However, be wary of gathering mushrooms unless you're very sure you know what you're doing. Every year in France, over-confident people end up in hospital.

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Menus & Budgeting

You can't shop for food successfully unless you menu-plan, because until you've planned your menus for the week, you don't really know what you need. Buying ingredients without any clear plan for using them is a high road to food waste, which is something you can't afford if you're on a budget.

How to plan

Every week, the evening before you shop, go through your fridge, freezer and store cupboards and make a note of what you've already got in. Then sit down with a pen and paper and work out what you're going to feed everyone for the week, making the most of your existing ingredients.

It can take a fair bit of fiddling to plan out a menu that has some variety and interest, and it's a good idea to build up enough standard recipes so that you don't have to repeat a dish for at least two weeks.

For a successful menu plan, try to alternate meat dishes with vegetarian or fish, and stodgy foods with lighter foods such as soup so there's plenty of variety. It doesn't matter if you have the same breakfast every day, or the same desserts – it's the lunchtime and evening main courses you need to focus on.

Start with lunches and work these out for the week, then list the evening meals according to what you've chosen for the lunch menu.

Be tough here – don't give your family a choice about what they have, otherwise they will *always* pick their favourite things and whinge about everything else. You should try at all costs to avoid cooking different meals for every member of the household unless there is a bona fide medical reason.

Budgeting

When budgeting, keep your till receipts by you, so that you're sure of the prices of everything.

After you've made your list of what you're going to buy for the week, tot up the cost. It may be a shock, and if your total exceeds your budget, look hard at where you might cut something. You can't consistently exceed your budget week after week without getting into trouble.

Look first at luxury goods, including toiletries. You can often make serious savings here by switching to budget brands, leaving you more money for essentials. You can also space out toiletries shopping so that you buy things in consecutive or alternate weeks. Look at budget ranges for sanitary products, nappies, kitchen and toilet rolls, plastic bags, washing up liquid, shampoos and soaps – often these are just as good quality as branded goods that cost several times the price.

Next on your budget, look at meat – meat is much more expensive than vegetables and most Britons eat too much of it. You should be aiming for 75g of meat protein per person per *week*, which is a very small amount – less than half an average chicken breast. The remainder of your weekly protein allowance (another 375g) should be taken up by pulses and dairy. This is a terrifying prospect for many Brits, who eat over 100g of meat a day per person, but the recipes in *Make Do & Cook* show you how to use less meat.

Cheese is also an expensive purchase per kilo, though as a flavouring, it is second to none. Imported cheeses are nearly always more expensive than domestically produced cheeses – that means, for me, that Cheddar and Lancashire are expensive, while Brie and Coulommiers are cheap. For most Britons, it's the other way around.

If you've actually run out of something, then you'll obviously need to replace it that week, but totting up your list is a good way of telling you which things you can eke out a little until the following week. Make sure to allow, periodically, for more-expensive items such as olive oil or a pack of disposable razors – putting away a certain amount each week can be a good idea for purchases such as this, which easily tip you over into negative territory.

If you prefer to budget by the month and this week's total exceeds one quarter of your total budget, you're going to have to shave costs in one of the other weeks. One item I budget for on a monthly basis is cat food, because I know that my animals consume three bags every four weeks. That gives me one week in which I have an extra 10 euros for other things.

I usually spend this on meat, which is cheaper if you buy it in bulk. The other three weeks of the month, I buy hardly any meat at all other than a 200g pack of lardons (bacon bits). I freeze all the meat as soon as I buy it, so it makes no odds exactly when in the month it's purchased.

Periodically – say once a quarter – try to do an 'eat the store cupboard' week, where you finish up all the contents of the fridge, freezer and larder without buying anything else. It may stretch your cooking skills a bit, but it saves hugely on food waste, which in turn saves you money.

When you shop, take your shopping list with you, including notes about the prices you expect to pay, and keep a running total as you go – prices vary from week to week and you can get caught out.

When to save and when to splurge

Cheap doesn't mean rubbish – buy good basic ingredients, or it will soon show in your cooking. Here's what to look for in basics:

Butter – should be unsalted or lightly-salted. Fresh-smelling. Avoid brand names.

Olive oil – should be cold-pressed extra-virgin, not oil that has been heat-treated.

Milk – fresh, it should be organic where possible. Dried, buy the make that you feel most comfortable with – supermarket's own ranges are usually acceptable. UHT, aim for one that tastes fresh rather than overcooked.

Eggs – should be organic or free-range where possible. Avoid eggs that taste fishy – it means the chickens have been fed on fish meal.

Vegetables – buy firm, plump, fresh-feeling veg. Mis-shapen is fine, but don't buy anything limp, stringy, mouldy or discoloured.

Fruit – as for vegetables. Fruit should feel plump, juicy and full of water.

Cheese – buy good quality cheese from a dairy or farm shop where possible. Avoid at all costs processed cheeses, especially anything in a tube or foil.

Fish – fresh fish should be plump and fresh-smelling, not fishy-smelling.

Meat – many cheap cuts are only cheap because they are tougher to cook but meat near the bone is in fact more flavoursome than the filleted meats many of us are used to. You're far more likely to find cheap cuts at a butcher's or farm shop than in the supermarket, where meat tends to be premium cuts that look attractive packaged up.

Look out for cuts such as pigs' ears, pigs' trotters, pork belly, lamb shanks, any cut of mutton, ox-tail, beef or pork shin and beef cheek. A quick glance at the per-kilogram price should tell you all you need to know.

Ready to save

With careful planning and budgeting, and by knowing how to find the best bargains the shops have to offer, you're ready to start making big savings in your food bill. And yet, as the 100 recipes in *Make Do & Cook* show, you can still enjoy gorgeous food.

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This e-book is based on:

Make Do & Cook

Learn the secrets of 10 important foods and how to cook healthy, delicious meals on the smallest budget

By Patricia Mansfield-Devine

WebVivant Press

ISBN: 978-0-9561514-1-4, Paperback, 150pgs, RRP: £9.99

Also available in Kindle and ePub e-book formats

Make Do & Cook embodies a new way of thinking about food.

Many people do not know how to cook. Some don't care to cook. And others feel they are too busy. But if you are on a budget, learning to prepare delicious and healthy meals can save you a fortune without taking up much of your time.

Make Do & Cook is aimed at anyone who wants to eat good food while saving money, including: Students looking for healthy and easy-to-prepare meals; Parents on tight budgets who want to provide their families with nutritious food; Beginners who want to learn how to cook good, simple meals without pretensions; Experienced cooks looking to cut costs without sacrificing quality.

You'll save the price of the book the first time you go shopping.

There are 100 recipes in the book, many based on timeless peasant cuisine from around the world.

But *Make Do & Cook* offers still more. It helps you to understand food, giving you the insight you need to plan and create your own menus. This book doesn't show you how to heat up Pot Noodles or make the most of turkey twizzlers – it is dedicated to creating delicious dishes from good, basic ingredients that you can find in any supermarket.

More ways of saving money and eating well

As well as longer versions of the Savvy Shopping and Menus & Budgeting chapters included in this e-book, *Make Do & Cook* has chapters on:

Your store cupboard – the basic ingredients you need for successful cooking, with explanations of oils and fats, herbs and spices and other essentials.

Equipment – the basic equipment you need: what's necessary and what's optional.

Economical cooking methods – how to cook using fuel-efficient methods.

Stocks & soups – the importance of stock, and soup as a main-course meal.

Basic foods – rethinking your eating habits.

Key foods

The main part of the book consists of 10 chapters covering basic foods in depth – carrots, cabbages, onions, potatoes, pulses, apples, eggs, bread, pasta and rice. Each has an introduction – covering varieties, preparation and basic cooking methods – followed by recipes featuring salads, soups, main courses, side dishes and desserts. The recipes include both meat-based and vegetarian dishes.

You don't need to spend money to make great meals.

Make Do & Cook is your guide to eating well on a budget.

For more information, visit:

www.webvivantpress.com/makedoandcook.html

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About the author

Patricia Mansfield-Devine is a writer and journalist living in northern France. For 10 years, she has been a downshifter, living an ecologically friendly lifestyle on a very modest budget. She has a life-long interest in food and its production, and grows much of her own fruit, vegetables and herbs. She blogs on issues affecting women over 40 at www.secondcherry.com and about downshifting issues at www.freeshift.com.

For more information, go to www.secondcherry.com

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