

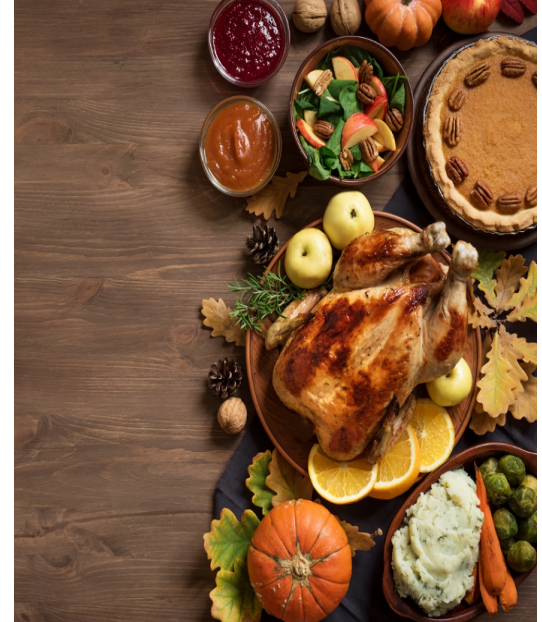


Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost Finding Your Recipes and Preparing Your Kitchen - Part 1

The holiday season is approaching! You may be planning an in-person or virtual celebration for friends and family in one big group or in smaller gathers. Regardless of the venue, it's never too early to start holiday meal preparation. If left to the last minute, meal planning can be a challenge no matter if you're having a dinner for one or ten. Planning your menu in advance allows you the opportunity to be sure all the favorite dishes are included and spend smarter. You will shop more efficiently, use less of your SNAP dollars, and decrease costs by avoiding unnecessary purchases. Sticking to your menu items and buying in advance over the course of several grocery trips will spread out the expense and lower the impact on your monthly food budget.

Getting Ahead of the Holidays Meal Cost, is a six-part series that will run from September to mid-November. About every two-weeks we will release a new topic in the six-part series. Each blog will include strategies and suggestions to save you money at the grocery store and make your holiday meal planning headache free. The series will Over the six-week series we will cover:

- 1- Finding Your Recipes and Preparing Your Kitchen
- 2- Canned Goods
- 3- Dry Goods
- 4- Spices
- 5- Frozen Items
- 6- Perishables



You will want to refer to your recipes often over the next few weeks. Begin by pulling out your favorite recipes and organizing them by breakfast, entrees, sides, and dessert.

Your Kitchen Staples

Let's get started by reviewing what we have on hand. We all have certain spices that are family favorites. Take an inventory of these items and make a note of those which are running low. Don't forget oils and non-sticks sprays. if you don't know what meal you'll be preparing, compiling a list of these staples will avoid purchasing the same item twice. Your list will save money and remind you to use items on hand first, utilizing them before they expire.

Cooking Utensils

Have you ever reached for a cookie sheet only to find it is warped? Now is the perfect time to purchase any needed replacement pots, pans, baking sheets, or muffin cup. Don't forget other baking, cooking, and serving supplies, such as parchment paper, aluminum foil, cutlery, and table linens (cloth or disposable). Keep in mind that non-food items such as these are not SNAP eligible so you cannot purchase them with an EBT card. For low-cost items, consider local dollar stores or borrowing from a friend or family member who will not be using their pots/pans.

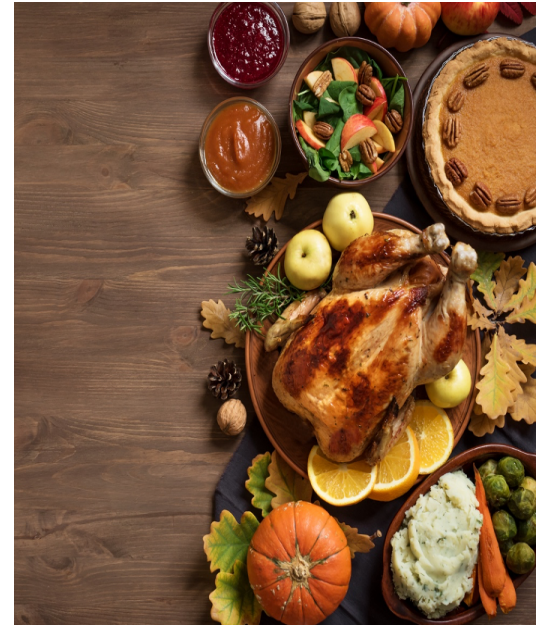


Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost Part 2- Canned Goods

As the holiday season approaches, canned foods are likely to be found in the menu. Canned items offer convenience over fresh or frozen since they can be stored in the pantry for extended periods of time (check the label), and in some instances the canned variety of some food items can be preferred. In [Part One](#) we focused on getting the kitchen ready and having favorite recipes on hand. In this blog, we will feature canned foods with the hope of assisting you in planning to fill your shelves with tasty foods. Canned goods offer a wide variety of foods. Canned fruits, vegetables, and meats are found at most local grocery stores and typically cost between \$1 - \$3 depending on the brand.

There are plenty of canned fruit fillings/toppings which may be used for pies or other pastries. Canned fruit fillings still maintain the shape and texture of fresh fruit. Some of the most popular include:

- Apple
- Apricot
- Blueberry
- Cherry
- Lemon
- Mixed Berry
- Peach
- Pumpkin
- Raspberry



Don't forget to add vegetables to your list. Canned vegetables can be purchased individually or in a six pack at some stores. Pick up some green beans for your casserole, mushrooms for the dressing, and so much more.

- Asparagus
- Beans (Black eyed peas & baked beans)
- Beets (sliced)
- Cabbage
- Carrots (Sliced and baby)
- Corn (Sweet & Southwest)
- Cranberries
- Green beans (cut & string)
- Mixed vegetables
- Mushrooms
- Peas
- Potatoes (Including sweet)
- Sauces: gravy, tomato paste, tomato sauce
- Spinach
- String Beans
- Tomatoes (whole, petite, mixed with okra or peppers)

Don't forget the great cakes and cookies you will bake. Be sure to check the aisle for Sweetened Condensed milk and coconut milk, both popular items during the holiday season. Plan your meal, make your shopping list, and start with shelf stable canned items! All the canned items mentioned in this blog are SNAP eligible. Visit morefood.org for the complete Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost six-part series or to contact the *More In My Basket* staff.

The Getting Ahead of Holiday Meal Cost series is sponsored by the *More In My Basket (MIMB)* Program. Visit morefood.org for the complete series or to contact the *More In My Basket* staff.

Shopping the Bargains and Sales

Where you purchase certain items can make a difference in how far your food dollars stretch. Consider which stores offer the best value for the items in your recipes. The best buy on spices and for canned goods might be two different stores. With each blog topic in the series, check grocery store advertisements and value store offerings selecting the store that offers the best combination of price and suitable product.

Watch for specials through grocery store loyalty card programs such as Food Lion's MVP or Harris Teeter's VIC; loyalty cards can lower the food bill at check-out. Paid membership warehouses such as Sam's Club, Costco, or BJ's are also great options if you are looking to purchase bulk items. Members of these warehouses are allowed to bring one guest when shopping. If you aren't a member, ask a friend or family member if you're able to join them when shopping. Let's kick off holiday meal planning right by finding the best deals. Happy Shopping!

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Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost- Dry Ingredients-Part 3

Now that canned items are taken care of, nonperishable dry ingredients are next. If you already created your menu, you'll know exactly what grocery items remain. If not, this list might spark some ideas and assist you in identifying additional items to add to your menu. To make menu planning and shopping easier, consider categorizing your list by breakfast, entrees, side dishes and desserts. For example, if you plan to have pancakes it will remind you to add flour and baking powder to your list. Below are some of the most common shelf stable dry ingredients used during the holiday season.



Powders	Sweets	Starches	Additional Items:
Baking Powder	Candies (toppings for desserts)	Breadcrumbs	Condiments: Ketchup, Mayonnaise, Mustard, Salad Dressing
Baking Soda	Chocolate Chips	Grits	Food Coloring
Cornbread Mix	Dried Fruits	Noodles (Elbow, Penne, Spaghetti)	French Fried Onions
Cornmeal	Sprinkles (toppings for baked items)	Pie Crusts: Chocolate, Graham, Oreo, Pecan	Nuts (almonds, peanuts, walnuts)
Cornstarch		Rice (brown, white, and yellow)	Mint Filling
Flour (All purpose, Almond, Self-Rising)			Oils & Cooking Sprays (Canola, Olive, Vegetable)
Powdered Sugar (used for frostings)			
Sugar (Brown & White)			

Recall from [Part 1](#) of the series (Finding Your Recipes & Preparing Your Kitchen), bulk item purchases can be especially smart for items that have a long shelf life, are easy to store, and cheaper to buy in bulk. Nuts are a great baking ingredient but can be expensive. To lower the cost, consider buying in bulk and splitting the cost with friends or family. A 24-ounce store brand of walnuts at Walmart is \$8.98 compared to a 48-ounce store brand bag at Costco for \$11.69. What a price difference!

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Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost Part 4- Spices

Now that [canned goods](#) and dry ingredients (Part 3; [hyperlink](#)) are taken care of, we are moving on to the ingredients known to add flavor and distinction to your dish, spices! With so many spices to choose from, remember this rule of thumb, take inventory so you don't overspend. Certain recipes will call for a small amount of a certain spice, which is not commonly used. To save money, utilize something similar that you already have on hand. Certain spices such as basil & thyme; and red pepper & paprika can be used to substitute each other. If using a substitution, be advised that the recipe may be slightly altered.



Depending on the amount of each spice you'll be using, purchase small or large bottles and split with family or friends. Not only will this make sure the item will be used at its freshest, but you'll also save money by splitting the cost!

Herbs and spices from your garden will flavor any meal perfectly. Don't have a herb garden yet? There's always next year! Learn more about container gardens [here](#).

Some of the most common/popular holiday spices include:

Baking Spices	Cooking Spices	Flavors, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cinnamon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Chili Powder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Almond Extract
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ginger	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cumin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lemon Extract
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nutmeg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Garlic Powder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vanilla Extract
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Peppermint	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kosher Salt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lipton Onion Soup
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pumpkin Spice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mint	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vanilla Bean Sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Onion Powder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Paprika	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rosemary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Tip: Organize your spices in the pantry by grouping them by purpose. A small basket from the dollar store can be helpful; place the baking spices together in one basket and cooking spices in another. If you are baking, you can quickly find the spices you need without sorting through savory spices.

Don't forget your pantry staples: pepper, salt, season salt, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, poultry seasoning and onion powder. All seasonings, herbs, and spices are SNAP eligible items. Be sure to write down staple seasonings in your home and include them on your list. If a recipe calls for a specific salt such as Kosher salt, sea salt or pink Himalayan salt, generally refined salt (table salt) will serve as an acceptable substitute.

Why plan ahead for your spice purchases? Think about pumpkin pie without the pumpkin spice or dressing without sage. As the holiday nears, more people will begin to stock up on their favorite spices – which guess what – they are *your* favorite spices too! Waiting until the last minute might mean that your dash to the grocery store for cinnamon leaves you empty handed and your batch of oatmeal cookies flat. Purchasing spices early will help spread out the cost of the holiday meal.

Stay tuned. In the coming weeks *More In My Basket (MIMB)* will continue our series on planned shopping to spread out the cost of the holiday meal.

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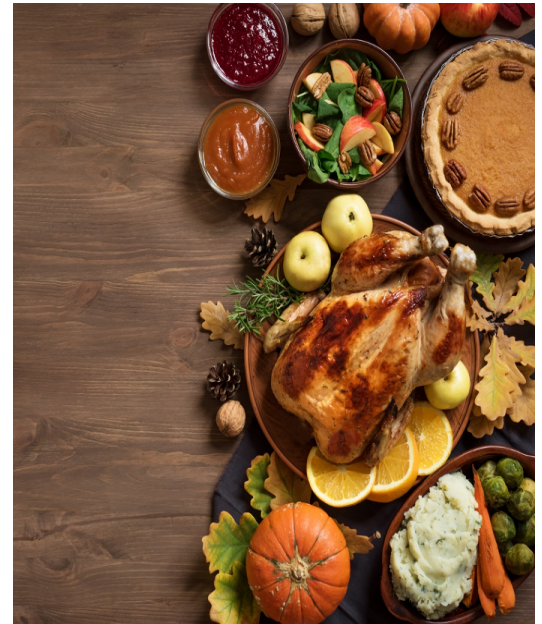
Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost- Frozen Items Part 5

Time is flying and the holidays are just around the corner. With just a few weeks left it's time to shift our focus to the frozen meal items. Freezer space can be at a premium, so we want to purchase these items nearer to our holiday meal. As you think about your holiday menu, the list below may be helpful in developing your shopping list.

Common Freezer Items:

- Cranberries
- Frozen Breads (rolls, garlic toast)
- Frozen Desserts
- Frozen Fruits
- Frozen Juices for homemade punch
- Frozen Vegetables
- Meats (including breakfast meats-bacon & sausage for overnight guests)
- Pie Crusts
- Sauces

When considering your meat purchases, remember to include meats used for seasonings in other dishes. Don't forget to label any freezer items you may purchase. If you aren't able to use them for the holiday meal, you'll be aware how long the item has been stored and can plan for future use. Be sure to check freezer space before grocery shopping. There may be some old items that need to be discarded. Spending money on items you may not have storage for is counterproductive to preparing in advance.



If your food item cannot be cooked from frozen, be sure to allow enough time for your frozen items to thaw following safe food practices. Previously prepared soups, stews, chili, pastas, sauces, and casseroles freeze well and can be prepared ahead of time and served as a part of the holiday meal. Previously prepared and frozen meals are great time savers and may allow more time to shop, prepare specialty items, clean, and rest before dinner time. If guests will arrive before the main courses for dinner are complete, frozen appetizers such as quiche may curb their hunger until the meal is complete.

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