

“Growing your own vegetables is easier than it looks and you’ll save money on your greengrocer bill each week.”



PART ONE:
Send us your ideas to
livewell@mindfood.com



SPEND SMART LIVE WELL

With the global economy firmly in the grip of a credit crisis, it's little wonder we're feeling clingy about our cash. The rising cost of living and the uncertainty of employment adds to pressure on household budgets.

“Spending smart” doesn't necessarily mean leading a deprived or dull life.

All it takes is a little forethought, self-discipline and imagination.

From holidaying on a budget to getting creative with your cooking, there are many opportunities to save without missing out.

Each month we will feature an ongoing series that offers smart ways to redefine your life. We invite you to help drive this initiative using your own experiences. Be part of the MiNDFOOD Community and send in your tips and ideas to livewell@mindfood.com.



Make a list before you go grocery shopping and stick to it. Avoid certain aisles in the store if you have to. Eat before shopping so you're less tempted to buy extra snacks.



While it can seem like a quick and easy option, takeaway nearly always works out to be more expensive than making a meal yourself.



If you can't live without luxury items such as gourmet bread and condiments, invest in equipment that allows you to make them at home.

"If you would be wealthy, think of saving as well as getting."

Benjamin Franklin
US Founding Father
1706–90

FOOD

With supermarket prices skyrocketing, food spending often claims the biggest part of your budget. However, you can save at the supermarket without compromising on quality or sacrificing your favourite foods by buying in bulk, comparing prices, watching the checkout scanner for errors, buying online and being flexible.

If you shop for food every few days you're more likely to grab expensive ingredients, ready-to-eat meals or a few "extras". However, doing one large shop every week (or even month) saves on money, hassle and petrol.

While the supermarket is convenient for buying everyday items, stores that offer food packaged in bulk are good places to save. For example, lentils, chickpeas and dried beans are cheaper to buy in bulk than individual packets or cans.

Shopping online for groceries can be a clever way to stick to a budget. It is quick and convenient and allows you to delete non-essential items from your virtual trolley if you've exceeded your budget. As with all online purchases, remember to factor in the delivery fee.

Saving money on food isn't just about what you buy. It's also about what you throw out. Australians and New Zealanders throw away a third of their food – and with it thousands of dollars – each year.

Avoid the lure of takeaway by buying recipe ingredients you can assemble quickly and easily at home. As for eating out, fish and chips on the beach or a picnic in the park with a bottle of wine can be just as enjoyable as a five-star restaurant experience. If you do eat out often, buy a discount voucher entertainment book.

For budget-friendly markets in your area go to mindfood.com (Community).

TOP TIPS

- The best markdowns at the supermarket are offered during off-peak hours (usually between 9pm and midnight).
- Compare the prices of items on particular shelves. The cheaper options are often below or above eye level.
- Use a discount card where available and don't discard receipts as they often offer deals and discounts.
- Spending \$10 a day on lunch and a coffee quickly adds up over a year, leaving little change from \$2500. Rethink your daily spending: do you order a coffee just because it has become a habit? Enjoy your takeaway coffee as a weekly treat.
- To avoid buying extra treats for your children at the supermarket, give them tasks to keep them entertained. Ask them to count the potatoes as they put them in the bag or collect certain items from the shelves.
- Decide on a pre-shopping weekly menu plan so you know exactly what ingredients to buy and you avoid waste and buying extras. See our Weekly Menu Plan on page 153 or sign up to receive it in your inbox at mindfood.com.





HOME GROWN

Author of *The Growers Cookbook* and *Easy on Your Pocket Vegetable Gardening*, Dennis Greville says lettuce is one of the quickest and easiest vegetables to grow at home, closely followed by broccoli and spinach, while the most cost-effective vegetables include beans and zucchinis (courgettes).

I GREW IT MYSELF

Growing your own vegetables at home is not only a way to save money, it's also a rewarding experience.



FITNESS FOR FREE

If you can't live without your weights program or sweating up a storm during an aerobics class, a gym membership is worth the money. However, if you don't need the confines of a gym for your exercise program, hit your local park, oval or beach. From lunges and push-ups to dips and sit-ups, there's no limit to the exercises you can do outside. Park chairs make a good place to do a series of dips, while running up stairs and hills is one of the best ways to increase your fitness. You may also find that a park nearby has its own outdoor fitness equipment. If you live near the beach, ocean pools are also an enjoyable way to swim laps for free. For exercises you can do outdoors go to mindfood.com/Health.

GROW IT

Growing your own vegetables is easier than it looks and you'll save money on your greengrocer bill each week.

TV presenter and mother of three Lana Coc-Kroft planted a vegetable garden for the first time last year, which now includes lettuce, salad greens, strawberries, carrots and tomatoes.

"With fresh produce being so expensive I think growing your own is the way to go," she says. "Gardening is made so easy these days as nurseries and other stores have many [DIY] brochures available."

If you don't have a large amount of room, even the smallest spaces, including balconies, can yield vegetables. For step-by-step guides to growing your own fruits and vegetables at home go to mindfood.com/Environment.



TOP TIPS

- If you find it hard to motivate yourself to make time to exercise, set aside time in your diary each day and treat it as any other appointment.
- Visit your council's website for information on local walking or running groups as these are often free, plus you'll be more motivated to keep up regular workouts.



COMMUTE FREELY
Leave your car behind
and save your wallet
and the environment
by cycling to work.

GETTING AROUND

After the hefty fuel hikes of last year it's a relief to see prices at the pump falling. However, the average-sized family car can still easily guzzle up to \$100 worth of petrol each week. The good news is there are ways to

minimise fuel consumption while reducing your carbon footprint: maintain a consistent speed on your journey (rapid acceleration burns more fuel); avoid sudden starts and stops; have your car serviced regularly; and park your car in the shade or buy a sun shield to keep the interior temperature down (using airconditioning can increase fuel consumption by up to 11 per cent).

TOP TIPS

- Think before you drive: do you really need to take your car to the local shops? Walking or cycling is not only better for the environment, it also contributes to your daily exercise quota.
- Organise a car pool. Increasing the number of people in a car reduces your fuel consumption, plus you're helping the environment. Go online for websites dedicated to assisting people to find car pool buddies.

If your family has two cars, use the smallest vehicle for getting around during the week and save the larger car for longer trips.

Don't let your petrol gauge get low. If you're running on empty you will be forced to the nearest petrol station and could miss out on the cheaper off-peak prices.

If you're buying a car, a small fuel-efficient vehicle or a hybrid will save you hundreds, maybe thousands, of dollars a year.

For a list of fuel-efficient and hybrid cars on the market go to mindfood.com (Technology).



REDUCE YOUR BILLS

Don't assume your monthly bills are a fixed cost.

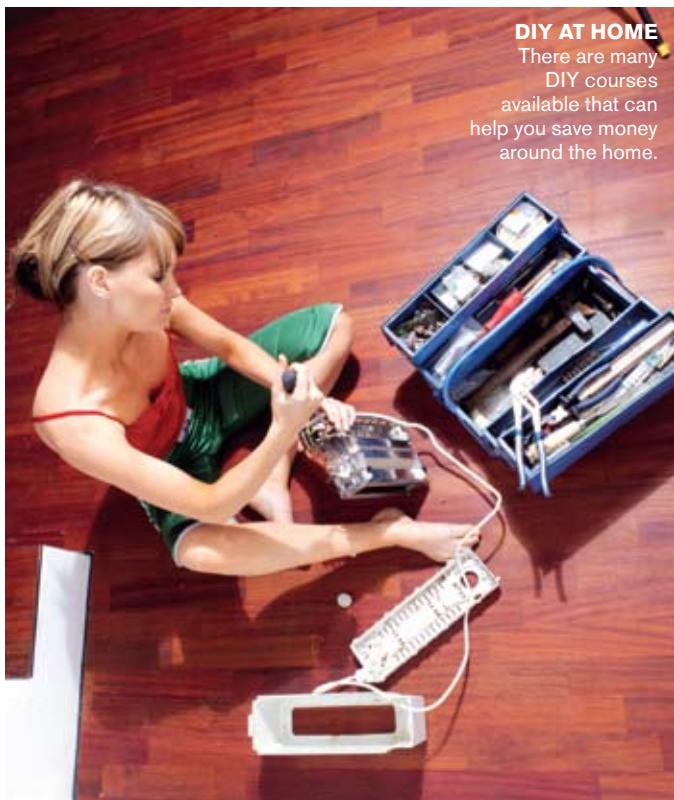
Combining two bills with the same provider, such as internet and phone, can result in a smaller bill. If you rarely use your landline, why pay up to \$50 a month for it? Scrap your home phone connection and speak with your mobile provider about a plan tailored to suit your needs.

If you make overseas calls, buy a phonecard with international rates or set up Skype on your computer so you can make free phone and video calls over the internet.

Look at getting an ecoMeter. These handy devices offer real-time information about your home's energy and water consumption. For tips by leading financial advisors on how to reduce your bills go mindfood.com (Community).

TOP TIPS

- Turn off appliances (that are warm to the touch) at the wall, including stereos, TVs and PlayStations. You could save more than \$100 a year.
- Wash your clothes in cold water and, if you don't have a clothesline, buy drying racks. Try to avoid buying a clothes dryer as they gobble up hundreds of dollars worth of power each year.
- Get everyone in your household into the habit of switching off lights when they leave a room.
- Install a solar hot water system. You could save up to 75 per cent each year on the hot water component of your electricity bill.



DIY AT HOME
There are many DIY courses available that can help you save money around the home.



GET HANDY

Ever wished you could fix your car, hemline or leaky bathroom tap yourself? Instead of paying for a mechanic, tailor or plumber, it's often more simple than you'd think to fix things yourself. Start researching your local area for courses, such as the free adult DIY workshops held at Bunnings.

If you'd prefer to take an online course, websites such as instructables.com, wisegeek.com and acmehowto.com offer step-by-step instructions on a range of DIY topics. For a step-by-step guide to backing up your computer and changing a tyre and other useful tips go to mindfood.com (Community).



TOP TIPS

- If you'd like to hone your skills in a certain area, from sewing to motor mechanics, community colleges are an affordable option and offer a wide range of courses.
- If you can't fix something yourself, take it to a repair store and ask for a quote rather than replace it.
- Hobbies such as knitting, baking, jewellery making or painting can be good ways to save money. You can give your crafts away as gifts or even set up a stall at your local markets.
- Even if you don't consider yourself the creative type you can try your hand at making greeting cards for friends and loved ones.

You may be surprised by what you can find at council clean-ups. The unspoken rule is “if it's out there it's free.”

SHOP SMART

You wouldn't be afraid to name your price on auction websites such as eBay or TradeMe, so why hesitate to haggle in stores? The age-old tradition of haggling is best received in markets, vintage stores and op-shops. Also, always try your luck on big-ticket items such as beds and electrical goods. In this unstable market most things are negotiable.

You can also make a beeline for discount stores, factory outlets and local markets when looking for a shopping bargain. For tips on haggling go to mindfood.com (Community).

TOP TIPS

- You're more likely to be successful in haggling if you ask for a deal, such as a two-for-one offer, rather than a radical drop in the price.
- Look on the internet for discounted goods – there are plenty of bargains to be had. For a list of bargain shopping sites go to mindfood.com.



FREE FOR ALL

Check your local council's website for upcoming community events.



FRUGAL FUN

Who says you need to open your wallet to enjoy yourself? There are all sorts of free events, such as festivals, gallery openings, lectures and concerts, on offer. For a range of free events check with your local council.

If you're a regular cinema goer, take advantage of ticket deals or snap up a multi-ticket book. If you'd prefer to have a night at home, ask your local video store which nights it offers cheaper deals.

If your friends want to save money, form a DVD club and swap DVDs from your personal collections each month.

Look to the great outdoors for inspiration. The beach is the perfect spot for a picnic while national parks are great for cycling and bushwalking.

Many art galleries and museums host free exhibitions while some performing arts centres provide cheap tickets to upcoming shows.

For a range of free events, such as gallery openings, in Australia and New Zealand go to mindfood.com (Community).



PRICELESS IDEAS

- Get up early, pack a picnic and head to the beach or one of your favourite spots to watch the sun rise.
- Light some candles, dim the lights and soak in a bubble bath.
- Take some time out to catch up with an old friend.
- Make use of your local library and bring home a good novel or audio book.
- If you have children, plan a trip to the museum.



CHEAP DRINKS

If you want to enjoy a few drinks without blowing your budget, buy in bulk and split the cost between friends.

"There are all sorts of free events, such as festivals, gallery openings, lectures and concerts, on offer."

WORK YOUR MONEY

If you own your home, resist the urge to build up your savings account and direct your savings to pay off your mortgage faster. "If you ever need that money for a rainy day, just ask the bank to top up your mortgage," says mother of one Dale Hartley-Brown. "If you have been consistently paying slightly more than necessary, banks will usually happily do this."



TOP TIPS

- Get a low- or no-fee bank account if you're not sold on the idea of reward schemes.
- Organise a low- or no-fee credit card.
- Try not to use other banks' ATMs, as you will usually incur a fee.
- Set up internet banking direct debit to pay your bills on the last day they are due.



INSIDER TRADING

Trading goods and services with friends and neighbours is a good way to save on items you'd normally pay for. Babysitting swaps, for example, have taken off in the US and the UK, which has led to co-ops (parents drop their children at a friend's house for the day and vice versa).

Rather than spend \$30, \$40 or \$50 for a book, hold a book swap with your friends. There's no need to bid farewell to your own books; simply lend and borrow them among your friends. You could even swap books through a book club.

Auckland advertising account co-ordinator Elizabeth Slater and her flatmate swap and discuss books at fortnightly book

clubs at their Parnell home. "It's a great way to read really good books for free," she says.

Meanwhile, Queenstown charity executive Kaye Parker swaps household items with a friend: "The other weekend I borrowed throws, jugs, books, ornaments and cushions from my friend for a guest room. I lent my friend a big coffee table last year and now that she's bought a new one I have it back, plus I've lent her a rug that matches it so well. We also know several tradespeople who own utes and, for a dozen beers, they'll happily transport the larger items. Now we can refresh our homes and decor for free."

Apply the swapping principle to going on holidays. Organise to swap homes with a friend. It's a much cheaper way to have a holiday, minus the cost of accommodation.

For tips on setting up your own book club go to mindfood.com (Culture).

TOP TIPS

- Save money by trading services. For example, swap airport pick-ups and drop-offs. It's expensive to hire a shuttle bus or taxi but not much trouble to drop off a friend or neighbour who'll return the favour.
- Visit swapping websites such as wapace.com and ourswaps.com.
- For house swap holidays in Australia and New Zealand visit aussiehouseswap.com.au.



FASHION FIX

If you have an urge for new clothes but want to skip the credit card bill, try swapping clothes. My friends and I have clothes swaps every three months, often at the start of a new season. We simply meet at one of our homes and throw unwanted items into a pile. Next, we dive in, pull out items we like and start trying them on. From dresses and jeans to trackpants and shoes, we pick up garments that no longer fit or appeal to their original owner. No money changes hands. Sometimes there's a separate "high-value" swap. At the end there's a "hard sell" where one of us amusingly extols the best qualities of the unclaimed clothes. The unwanted items go to charity, plus it's a fun way to catch up with friends.

TOP TIPS

- Don't overlook factory outlet stores, particularly for basics such as T-shirts and underwear.
- Sign up for clothing store emails so you are notified of upcoming sales and receive discounts.
- Revamp your own wardrobe. Take all items that need mending or altering to a tailor. It's much more cost-effective to have a zipper fixed on a dress or a hemline altered on a pair of trousers than to buy something new. You can also have pieces that look tired or outdated professionally dyed, or you can do it at home.
- A good tailor can also replicate your favourite suit, shirt or dress in a different fabric for sometimes much less than what you originally paid.
- Get to know your local op-shop or vintage clothes stores. If you drop in regularly you are bound to find some great pieces.
- Try to buy good-quality clothes, particularly basics such as jeans and shoes. They may set you back more at the cashier but they will look better and last longer than cheaper items.



MORE AT MINDFOOD.COM

Be part of the MiNDFOOD Community and send in your tips and ideas for spending smart to livewell@mindfood.com.