



Plant-Based on a Budget: Strategies for Affordable Cooking and Eating

By
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The following is an excerpt from [A Plant-Based Life: Your Complete Guide to Great Food, Radiant Health, Boundless Energy, and a Better Body](#).

Health, Boundless Energy, and a Better Body by Micaela Cook Karlsen. © 2016 Micaela Cook Karlsen

Many people mistakenly believe that plant-based eating is more expensive, but it doesn't have to be. What can get expensive quickly is buying lots of "faux" meats and cheeses (real meat and cheese is already costly), packaged and prepared food, and takeout. A diet composed of simple, wholesome ingredients can actually cost less than one that includes meat. Here are some strategies you can use to keep costs low:

1. Join a **CSA** (community supported agriculture) program.
2. Buy foods from the **bulk section** of a store.
3. Place **wholesale orders** together with other people.
4. **Prioritize** whole, plant-based food over organic.
5. Shop at **big box stores** for staples (their inventory is expanding).
6. **Start a garden** or container garden; you can get free seeds from your local **Cooperative Extension**.

Given all the sources of affordable plant-based foods, it really is possible not to spend more. This table compares the cost of two plant-based dinners using groceries purchased at Walmart in Pennsylvania in 2015 to the epitome of cheap food—McDonald's—for a family of four. These meals assume you have a few spices and vinegars at home in the kitchen, but the cost of these is factored into the comparison.

Dinner for Four, Four Different Ways

Meal	BIG BURGER MEAL	CHICKEN McNUGGET MEAL	BEANS AND RICE MEAL	PORTOBELLO STEAKS, SWEET POTATOES WITH SPINACH, AND SALAD
Food Prices	2 Big Mac meals = \$12.98 2 Cheeseburger Happy Meals = 6.58 Tax = \$1.14	2 Chicken McNugget meals = \$12.78 2 Chicken McNugget Happy Meals = \$7.18 Tax = \$1.20	Spicy black beans = \$6.77 Savory brown rice = \$1.99 Steamed herb veggies = \$3.99 Salad + dressing = \$5.08 No Tax	4 portobello mushrooms = \$6.15 4 sweet potatoes = \$2.50 1 bag spinach = \$4.68 Salad + dressing = \$5.08 No Tax
Total Cost	\$20.10	\$21.16	\$17.89	\$18.41

*Additional research by [Kathy Pollard](#).

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