

Vegetarian on a Budget

In many family budgets, one of the biggest food expenses is often meat. So in theory at least becoming a vegetarian should be an outstanding financial maneuver. In theory, if all you ate was rice and vegetables, you should be able to live for very little.

But theory and reality are often far apart from each other. Because the culture of vegetarian living has developed so many high quality foods to fill the gap left behind by a good steak or a plate of barbeque ribs, you can spend as much or more on your vegetarian lifestyle as you did when you were a meat eater. The high cost of living as a vegetarian is not entire attributable to gourmet foods however.

The truth is if you are going to live in day in day out and month in month out on a vegetarian diet, not only do you need some high quality foods to substitute for taking a whole food group out of your diet, you need variety. The quality is needed because its your health on the line if you don't get the proper nutrients. The diversity is needed because if you get bored with the vegetarian lifestyle, you may quit and give up. And nobody wants that.

Another reason that the cost of vegetarian eating is often higher than a "normal" diet comes from the fact that vegetarians are still in the minority. So prepared vegetarian foods and vegetarian only restaurants are rare. And to be able to make a profit, these specialty stores must charge a lot because they are specialty stores. Unfortunately, even though we see the vegetarian community as a supportive one, if you are going to be able to afford the vegetarian lifestyle, you are going to have to learn to cut costs.

Cutting costs means eliminating shopping at "boutique" vegetarian markets and no more eating out. Or at least it means cutting down on the eating out significantly. You can buy fresh vegetables and fruits at farmers markets or grocery stores that are just as valid as vegetarian options as any you get as a specialty store. Using a good food processor and other means, you can chop, dice, boil and puree just about any kind of vegetarian meal that you might be able to imagine getting in a restaurant. And at a much lower cost. Not only that but the leftovers can go into a compost pile to make fertilizer for your garden when you can grow your own vegetables next spring.

That "grower to consumer" market that often surfaces as a farmer's market is a great way to save lots of money also because you are buying your produce directly from the farmer and you cut the grocery store out of the loop entirely. One way to make sure you capitalize on every opportunity to buy inexpensive

produce is to work as a community. Get about a dozen vegetarian families working together to always be on the lookout for a great buy. One might find a small farmer's market or roadside stand that is selling produce far below grocery store prices. Another might find a farmer who will basically give his food away just to clear the field. With some coordination, you could field an army of vegetarians to grab those bargains while they are fresh and stock everybody's kitchen with low cost fresh produce.

These are just a few of many ways you can find to save money on your vegetarian groceries and still have just as much quality but without as much cost. By shopping smart and shopping for bargains, you can live the vegetarian life and feel good about it because you are not only healthy, you are smart.

PPPPP

Word Count 630