

Cheap Healthy Eating

By: Karen Stephenson

Eating healthy is easier than you think when you have creativity and resourcefulness working with you. Food costs can add up fast, and if you read the labels of what you are purchasing, it isn't food; it is "food-like" substances. Taking the "back to basics theme" into the creative realm will not only save you money, but you'll be eating much healthier.

First of all, it is important to understand that itemizing priorities is essential. Far too many of us have been duped into believing we are too busy to spend time in the kitchen and cook a meal. As a result of creative advertising and marketing strategies, processed foods have become a massive market in the food industry.

I research ingredients in the products that the food industry is selling us and there is no wonder we have an epidemic of poor health, diseases and obesity out there. We have heard "you are what you eat" over and over again, and these words are powerful. Make no mistake, if you frequently cook processed "food-like" substances (including many frozen foods) you better figure out a way to bank "the time you are saving in the kitchen" because you will need to withdraw that time in the future when you are sitting in the doctor's waiting room to find out why you are ill. Bad eating habits may take years to catch up, but they do (unless corrected) and they wreak havoc on health.

Foraging

Vitamins, minerals, flavonoids, phytonutrients, enzymes and so on are all vital to great health and a great source of all of these are in "weeds" and in other wild plants. Foraging throughout the growing season provides us with a fresh supply of goodness.

There are ways to preserve some wild edibles so that you can use them throughout winter months. Dehydrating, drying and freezing are all great options to use to help benefit from the goodness of foraging year-round.

- 1) Dehydrating wild edibles is just as effective as dehydrating cultivated vegetables. Be sure to monitor the dehydrator because drying times will vary depending on the water content of each plant. For best results, dehydrate one type of plant at a time. If dehydrating (let's say) dandelion leaves, try to keep them the same size because larger ones will require more time than the smaller ones.
- 2) Drying wild edibles either by hanging them or in the oven at a VERY low temperature is another way to store plants over the winter. (Personally I prefer hanging them in a dry location.) I don't know for sure, but some sources indicate that hanging is better than using the oven. Be sure that all plant matter is totally dry before storing otherwise moisture can ruin a jar full of herb. (Mason jars are great for this or sterilized recycled store-bought jars.) For more information on drying please check out EdibleWildFood.com.
- 3) Freezing works for some wild edibles. It is best to research whether a plant is recommended to be blanched or not before freezing. I blanch lamb's quarters then toss them into a freezer bag (remove all air by sucking the air out with a straw) and be sure to date and label the freezer bag. Purslane can be washed, dried and placed in a freezer bag.

Freezing Tips

Freezing is one of the easiest methods to preserving your harvest. Rinse the plants quickly in cold water, shake off excess water, and then chop coarsely. Place the chopped plant into ice cube trays and freeze. Once frozen, transfer the plant-cubes into freezer bags or air tight plastic containers.

Another method for freezing is to spread the wild edible loosely onto a baking sheet to freeze. Once frozen transfer the wild edibles into a freezer bag and seal.

When they thaw, the wild edibles cannot be used in a salad, but they can be used in cooking. Do not re-freeze after thawing.

Grapevine leaves are very healthy for us and contain resveratrol. I recommend collecting lots of these! When you get home, rinse them, blanch and allow to drip dry. Carefully place the leaves on top of one another. Place in a freezer bag, remove the air and freeze. When ready to use, thaw. Grapevine leaves can be used as a wrap – make a mixture of whatever you like (such as cooked rice mixed with finely chopped onion and garlic), wrap in the leaves and secure with a toothpick. Place in a baking dish, cover with a sauce or cheese and bake – you have a cheap and healthy meal.

Buy Bulk & Dehydrate

Purchasing large bags of (healthy) rice, dried beans, lentils, chickpeas and so on goes a long way! Store them in air tight containers or glass jars. Buying bulk is inexpensive and these items go a long way! Yes, they require more time to prepare but not only is this healthier it is cheaper.

Making homemade hummus (chickpeas) is cheap and is a healthy snack.

This will take time but it is a way to save money in the long term - buy fresh vegetables as they are in season. Dehydrate and store them. A food dehydrator is not that costly (where I live they cost about \$30-\$40) and it is a great investment than lasts a long time. Sadly, these are not common items found in second hand stores but it is worth checking out, be sure to check out Freecycle.org, Craigslist and Kijiji as well.

Beets, carrots, onions, apples and so on all dehydrate well and their goodness will be there for you when you use them throughout the winter. Tossing dehydrated vegetables into your home cooked soups or stews over the winter helps to power pack your soup or stew with goodness. Food dehydrators come with a manual that provides a listing of fruits and vegetables you can use and how long they take.

Vegetables

Squash keeps very well in a cool location in your home! When they are available at a cheap price, buy lots!

Cabbage – never underestimate the power of the cabbage! It is a superfood and it is generally always inexpensive. When buying fresh veggies becomes a financial challenge, reach for cabbage! For more reliable and amazing information on just how beneficial cabbage is to our health please visit [The World's Healthiest Food](#).

Sprouting

In the winter months there is no better way to supplement fresh vegetables than to sprout. Sprouts contain plenty of vitamins, minerals, proteins, and enzymes. In addition to providing the greatest amount of these nutrients, sprouts deliver them in a form that is easily digested and assimilated. In fact, they improve the efficiency of digestion.

When the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables decline and the prices increase in the winter months, sprouts are amazing (they are amazing anytime). Sprout seeds are very inexpensive (even organic),

always fresh (they grow until you chew them) and have the potential to help solve hunger and malnutrition problems in our communities.

Sprouts (when done at home) are inexpensive and they give us incredible health benefits. For example, alfalfa and red clover seed sprouts are high in phytoestrogens that help prevent heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis and menopausal symptoms.

If on a tight budget then the best way to start sprouting is to use a glass jar (wide-mouthed is best) and some window screening or panty hose. Instead of itemizing the steps here, I will refer to [Mumm's](#). I have purchased my seeds from them for years and they are very inexpensive when purchased in bulk (and they last a very long time) and, in some cases, postage is free!

Other sources of seeds can be found at local farm suppliers – but be sure the seeds are organic. Many “bulk” legumes sold in stores may work as well but knowing that you are getting them from a reliable source is best. I will always recommend Mumm's for bulk purchasing, and their service is impeccable.

Homemade Juices

Store bought juices are usually loaded with white sugar and/or fructose. Not healthy! Making your own juice is easy, inexpensive and much healthier for you. For example, wild grapevine grapes (depending where you are wild concord grapes also) are easily frozen and they make an incredible juice. Take a couple of handfuls of grapevine grapes and place them in a pot with about a litre of water. Bring to a boil and turn stove off. Let sit for an hour or two then squeeze the grapes as best as you can. Strain into a juice container and add another litre of water. Add sugar to taste (I use organic cane sugar because white sugar is toxic to human health). You can take fresh picked grapes and place them in a freezer bag – remove air – write the date on the bag and freeze until you need them!

Red sumac and Highbush cranberries also freezes well and makes a powerful vitamin C drink. You can follow the same procedure as the grapes for making juice and freezing.

If these berries are not found in your area, research what edible berries grow where you live and use these.

Other Ideas

Experiment with your harvested dried edibles to make incredible herbal teas. Many taste great chilled such as (what I call) “Balmy Nettleade”. In a large thermos I toss in about three pinches of stinging nettle, two pinches of bee balm then add boiling water. I love my herbal teas strong so I let this infuse at least an hour. When you have your desired taste, strain the plant matter and allow the liquid to cool to room temperature. Add in some fresh lemon juice to taste and chill!

If you dehydrate beets, taking two or three dehydrated slices and placing them in a juice container full of water (let sit for a few hours) and add a bit of lemon (or 2 slices of dehydrated lemons) makes an incredibly tasty and healthy juice.

Watermelons are cheap right now so if you want a real tasty treat in January, buy as many watermelons as you are able to now. If you haven't a juicer no worries! Take the tasty part and toss it in a blender. Add a couple of other fresh berries if you are able. Measure out about 2/3rd of your juice container and freeze this quantity of the juice in a freezer bag. Over the winter months take a bag, thaw and top your container with water. Add a safe choice of sweetener if desired.

Edible

Vitamin C the Canadian Way

There is no arguing that fresh citrus fruit contains lots of vitamin C. Purchasing fresh or frozen orange juice is not cheap and really, if you read what is in some of them they truly are not helping our health much. I have always asked: why is it that fresh store-bought orange juice always has a different look, texture and taste from actually squeezing fresh oranges?

Ok, it sure won't taste the same, but for a drink that will boost your vitamin C levels better than store-bought orange juice, then pine, spruce or cedar trees are a fabulous (and free) source. Make an herbal tea with them and drink it as is or make a large quantity, let cool and place in the fridge. You can even add a dash of lemon juice for that added "C" and taste.

Cereals

Get out of the cereal aisle of your grocery store! Just about everything in there is not only very expensive but those cereals claiming to be healthy have some not-so-healthy ingredients. My local health food store and a chain store called Bulk Barn sell a brand of organic cereals that are cheap! Yes - cheap!

Nature's Path brand of kamut, puffed millet and other grains are very healthy. Each 170g bag costs about \$2.60 (and there is no air in the bag). I blend together millet, kamut, a handful or two of hemp granola and raisins and eating a half bowl of this is filling! It is also by far more nutritious than boxed cereals.

Puffed millet on its own (I find) is 'airy' but the kamut has a crunch and a pleasant taste.

Snacks

Purchasing pitas or tortillas when they are sale is the first step in making an alternative snack to potato chips. These freeze well so stock up!

Blend together your favourite blend of spices and include some sea salt. Get creative and mix things up until you have a taste you like. (A basic example: garlic powder, dill, onion powder and sea salt.) Make a large batch up and blend some of this with your favourite choice of oil. Brush onto the pita or tortilla and bake until crisp. These make a great healthy alternative to potato chips and crackers (crackers contain a lot of not-so-good ingredients).

Spices & Herbs

This is a brief mention to use LOTS of spices when you cook, bake, etc. Spices contain a lot of vitamins and minerals! Turmeric, cayenne, chili, cinnamon, black pepper and mustard seed are super spices as far as nutrients! Turmeric is linked to countless health benefits including the relief of arthritic pain and cancer prevention. Make tea with cinnamon – add some honey and this is so tasty!

Add more herbs in your salads – and drink them! For example, rosemary makes a great tea!

Get creative in the kitchen – your health will reward you!

Last Word

If you want to learn more about what the food industry then I recommend you read “In Defence of Food” by Michael Pollan.

An amazing online resource is Foodmatters.tv.

Two incredible videos:

Food Security: http://shivchopra.com/?page_id=252

Food Inc.: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1286537/>