Cooking on a Budget

Recipes, tips and ideas for all kinds of budgets and tastes
Basic Lasagne

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- pepper
- pinch of oregano
- 500ml white sauce
- 10 pasta sheets
- 150g grated cheese
- 680g minced beef
- 1 onion, diced
- 8 mushrooms, diced
- 2 peppers, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, diced
- 1 tin of tomatoes

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 200 C / Gas 6.
2. Fry the onion and garlic in the olive oil until golden in colour. Add the mince and fry for 12 mins. Next add the peppers and mushrooms and fry for around 6 mins or until soft.
3. Add the tomatoes, oregano, salt and pepper and leave to simmer. In a large greased ovenproof dish, layer a third of the mix and cover with pasta sheets, then pour a third of the white sauce over. Repeat for 2 more layers. On the third layer sprinkle the grated cheese over the last layer of white sauce.
4. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes. Slice and serve with a salad or wedges.
Toad in the Hole

Ingredients:
- 6 sausages
- 1 tbsp. sunflower oil
For the batter
- 140g plain flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 eggs
- 175ml semi-skimmed milk

Method:
1. Heat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7. Put the sausages in a 20 x 30cm roasting tin with the oil, then bake for 15 mins until browned.
2. Meanwhile, make up the batter mix. Tip the flour into a bowl with the salt, make a well in the middle and crack both eggs into it. Use an electric whisk to mix it together, then slowly add the milk, whisking all the time. Leave to stand until the sausages are nice and brown.
3. Carefully remove the sausages from the oven – watch because the fat will be sizzling hot – but if it isn’t, put the tin on the hob for a few mins until it is. Pour in the batter mix, transfer to the top shelf of the oven, then cook for 25-30 mins, until risen and golden. Serve with gravy and Sam’s favourite veg – broccoli.
Chilli Con Carne

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp Oil
- 500 g Lean minced beef
- 1 Large onion, finely chopped
- 1 sachet Chilli Con Carne Seasoning Mix or paprika spice
- 1 can Chopped tomatoes
- 1 can of kidney beans or baked beans
- 200 ml Water

Method:

1. Fry the minced beef and onions in a pan until brown.
2. Sprinkle the Chilli Con Carne Seasoning Mix and stir well.
3. Add the chopped tomatoes and water, and bring to the boil.
4. Cover and simmer for 25 mins, or until the meat is cooked and liquid evaporated.
5. Add drained kidney beans and simmer for a further 5 mins.
6. Serve with warmed Corn and Wheat Tortillas, or Rice. To really spice it up, top with Red Jalapeños, or cool down with Soured Cream Topping and a fresh salad.

Other Recipe Ideas:

- To mix it up a bit, load a fluffy jacket potato with a generous serving of Chilli - why not add a sprinkling of cheese too.
- How about adding Chilli to your Nachos? Messy, but so much fun to eat.
- Cook your Chilli in a slow cooker - walking in after a long day at work to this smell - nothing beats it.

Tip Alert:
Make large portions, and freeze what you don't eat. Perfect for when you need a quick meal another night.
Easy Pizza Toast

Ingredients:
- 4 slices bread of your choice toasted
- Pizza sauce
- 1-2 cups grated mozzarella
- Salami/toppings of your choice
- 1 teaspoon oregano

Method:
1. Pre-heat the grill of your oven.
2. Place the toast on a baking sheet and add a generous spoonful of pizza sauce. Spread with the back of the spoon to the corners.
3. Top with a handful of grated mozzarella followed by the toppings of your choice.
4. Sprinkle over a little oregano.
5. Place in the oven and allow to cook until the cheese has melted.
6. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a few minutes before serving.
Shepherds Pie

80 min  Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 500g/1lb 2oz minced lamb
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 anchovy, finely chopped (optional)
- 1 x 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 450ml/16fl oz chicken, beef or lamb stock
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the mash

- 700g/1¼lb potatoes, peeled and cut into halves or quarters
- 55ml/2fl oz milk
- 75g/3oz butter
- 1 free-range egg yolk

Method:

1. In a large saucepan, heat the oil. Add the onion and cook for 5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a large frying pan, heat a little olive oil and fry the mince, stirring, until browned all over. While the meat is frying, break up any lumps with the back of the spoon.
3. Stir the onions and add the flour (this helps to thicken the juices) and stir. Mix well and add the bay leaves, thyme and the anchovy and stir. Add the chopped tomatoes, stock (keep a little aside, for putting into the mince pan to de-glaze the pan) and Worcestershire sauce.
4. Add the cooked mince and then pour the stock mixture into empty mince pan, scraping off any bits of mince left in the pan. Pour the remaining stock into the pan containing the sauce mixture. Bring the mixture to the boil, adding a pinch of salt and pepper and let it simmer for about 45 minutes, stirring regularly.
5. Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/Gas 6.
6. For the mash, boil the potatoes until tender (about 10 minutes). Drain, add the milk, butter and egg yolk, then mash until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.
7. Pour the meat into a 1.4 litre/2½ pint ovenproof dish and spread the mash on top, smooth over and mark with a spatula. Put the dish into the oven and cook until the surface is golden-brown.
Turkey Meatballs in Tomato Sauce

Ingredients:

For the sauce

- 1 onion, peeled
- 1 stick celery
- 2 tbsp garlic oil
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 2 x 400g/14oz cans chopped plum tomatoes, plus approximately 2 full cans of water
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp sea salt flakes or ½ tsp pouring salt
- black pepper, to taste

For the meatballs

- 500g/1lb 2oz turkey mince
- 1 free-range egg
- 3 tbsp breadcrumbs
- 3 tbsp grated parmesan
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tsp dried thyme

Method:

1. For the sauce, put the onion and celery into a food processor and blitz to a mush. Reserve 2 tablespoons of the mixture for the meatballs.
2. Warm the garlic oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan or casserole, add the onion and celery mixture, along with the thyme, and cook at a moderate to low heat, stirring every now and again, for about 10 minutes.
3. Add the cans of plum tomatoes, filling up each empty can with water to add to the pan. Season with the sugar, salt and pepper, stir well and let the mixture come to a bubble, then turn the heat down and simmer the sauce gently while you get on with the meatballs.
4. For the meatballs, put all the ingredients for the meatballs, including the reserved chopped onion and celery, and salt according to preference, into a large bowl and gently mix together with your hands.
5. When all the meatball ingredients are not too offensively amalgamated, start rolling them into balls. Put each meatball onto a baking tray lined with baking parchment or greaseproof paper.
6. Drop the meatballs gently into the simmering sauce; try to let these fall in concentric circles working round the pan from the outside edge inwards, in the vaguest of fashions.
7. Let the meatballs simmer in the sauce for 30 minutes, or until cooked through.
VEGETARIAN
3-veg mac ‘n’ cheese

Ingredients:
- 150g butternut squash, cut into chunks
- 300g penne (we used Napolina 50% white and 50% wholemeal)
- 40g butter
- 1 small leek finely sliced (about 50g)
- 25g flour
- 600ml milk
- 100g frozen peas
- 175g mature Cheddar cheese (we used a vegetarian version)
- 1 slice day-old brown bread, blitzed into crumbs

Method:
1. Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. Put the butternut squash in a steamer over boiling water. Steam for around 15-20 mins or until tender. Drain and then blitz in a food processor until smooth.
2. Cook the pasta according to the pack instructions.
3. Heat the butter in a medium saucepan, add the leek and cook for 2 mins. Stir in the flour and cook for 1-2 mins more. Take the pan off the heat and gradually whisk in the milk. Return to the heat and bring to the boil, stirring all the time. Simmer for 5 mins. Stir in the peas and bring back to a simmer. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the butternut squash, then 125g cheese.
4. Stir the pasta into the sauce and transfer to an ovenproof dish. Sprinkle over the remaining cheese and the breadcrumbs. Bake for 20 mins or until golden and bubbling.
Squash and Ricotta Pasta Bake

Ingredients:
- 1 butternut squash, peeled, deseeded and chopped into 2.5cm pieces
- olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely sliced
- 1 bunch of fresh basil, leaves picked, stalks finely chopped
- 1 x 400 g tins of chopped tomatoes
- sea salt
- 500 g dried penne
- freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons ricotta cheese
- 750 ml organic vegetable stock
- 150 g mozzarella ball
- 1 handful Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- 2 sprigs fresh sage, leaves picked

Method:
1. Preheat your oven to 200°C/400°F/gas 6. Place the squash on a baking tray, drizzle with olive oil and pop in the hot oven for around 15 minutes, or until tender.
2. Pour a couple of lugs of olive oil into a large frying pan, add the garlic and basil stalks and fry for a couple of minutes. Add your tomatoes to the pan, breaking them up with a wooden spoon and bring to the boil. Drop in the roasted squash, bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to the boil, add the penne and cook for a couple of minutes less than it says on the packet. Drain, then toss with the sauce.
4. Tear up the basil leaves and sprinkle into the pan with some salt and pepper. Stir in the ricotta and the stock, then bring back to the boil.
5. Rub a large baking tray, ovenproof pan or earthenware dish with olive oil and spoon in all the pasta and sauce. Tear over the ball of mozzarella and top with the Parmesan. Rub the sage leaves with a little olive oil and put on top.
6. Pop it into the preheated oven and bake for 15 minutes or until golden and bubbling. Serve with a crisp green salad.

Tip Alert:
If you’re a chilli freak like me, try adding a chopped fresh chilli to your tomato sauce.
Tomato Rice

**Ingredients:**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 1 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups vegetable stock

**Method:**
1. In a frying pan with a tight fitting lid, sauté onion and garlic 2 minutes in vegetable oil.
2. Add rice, tomato and spices, stir.
3. Add chicken stock. Cover and simmer on low heat for about 20 minutes or until liquid is gone and rice is tender.
FISH
Tuna Pasta Bake

45 min  Serves 4

**Ingredients:**
- 600g pasta
- 50g butter
- 50g plain flour
- 600ml milk
- 250g grated cheese
- 2 x 180g cans tuna drained
- 330g can sweetcorn drained
- large handful chopped parsley

**Method:**
1. Heat oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas 4. Boil the pasta for 2 mins less time than stated on the pack. To make the sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan and stir in the flour. Cook for 1 min, then gradually stir in the milk to make a thick white sauce. Remove from the heat and stir in all but a handful of cheese.
2. Drain the pasta, mix with the white sauce, tuna, sweetcorn and parsley, then season. Transfer to a baking dish and top with the rest of the grated cheese. Bake for 15-20 mins until the cheese on top is golden and starting to brown.
Fish Cakes

**Method:**

1. Cook the potatoes in boiling water until just tender. Drain well and return to the pan on a low heat. Heat for another minute or two to evaporate excess liquid. Mash the potato with a small knob of butter. Allow to cool.

2. Put the fish, spring onions and milk in a shallow dish, cover with cling film and cook in the microwave for 1 ½ - 2 mins until just cooked. If you don’t have a microwave, put everything in a saucepan and gently cook until just opaque and cooked through.

3. Drain the fish and spring onions through a fine sieve. Gently mix through the potatoes, avoiding breaking up the fish too much, along with the sweetcorn, cheddar and a generous grind of black pepper. Form into 6 - 8 patties. The cooler the mashed potato is when you do this, the easier it will be to form the patties as the mixture will be very soft when warm.

4. Pour the egg on one plate and scatter flour on the other. Dip the patties in egg and then flour and arrange on a sheet of baking paper on a tray. Put the patties in the fridge for at least half an hour to firm up if the patties feel very soft.

5. Heat a large frying pan with a generous glug of olive oil. When the oil is hot, carefully lower the fish cakes into the pan. Cook for 5 - 7 minutes or until golden brown underneath and then carefully flip them over. Fry for another 5 - 7 minutes or until golden on the bottom and heated all the way through.

**Ingredients:**

- 1 x pack fish pie mix (cod, salmon, smoked haddock etc, weight around 320g-400g depending on pack size)
- 3 spring onions finely chopped
- 100ml milk
- 450g potato peeled
- 75g frozen sweetcorn, defrosted
- handful of grated cheddar cheese
- 1 large egg, beaten
- flour for dusting
- olive oil for frying
White Fish with Chickpea Ragu

55 min  Serves 4

Ingredients:
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- salt and pepper, Kosher, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika (preferably smoked)
- 1 (15 ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 1 (14 1/2 ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 1/4 lbs halibut fillets (1 in. thick) or 1 1/4 lbs cod (1 in. thick)
- 1/2 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Method:
1. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and 1/4 tsp each salt and pepper and cook, stirring, until beginning to soften, 5 to 6 minutes. Stir in the paprika and cook for 1 minute.
2. Add the chickpeas and tomatoes and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 4 minutes.
3. Season the fish with 1/4 tsp each salt and pepper and nestle it among the chickpeas. Simmer, covered, until the fish is opaque throughout and the sauce has thickened, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the parsley before serving.
Cooking on a Budget: Tips and Ideas

Go shopping at the end of the day

Budget cooking is about buying what’s reduced or on offer, and if you go to the supermarket with your shopping list an hour before closing time, you’ll be able to snap up the best bargains.

Food that’s reached its use by date is heftily discounted at the end of the day, so it’s a great time to snap up meat and fish in particular, which you can shove in the freezer until you need it.

Cook in bulk

Batch cooking is not just a money saver - it’s a time saver, too.

Three litres of a tomato base sauce, with loads of veg grated in cost about £1 to make and is the equivalent to around 6 jars of pasta sauce.

Then freeze it in portions and it becomes lasagna sauce, pasta sauce, chili, pizza topping, and even a delicious tomato soup if you water it down.

Be adaptable

This could be a challenge if you’re a slave to the recipe books, but you can save money by adapting recipes to use ingredients that are reduced or on special offer.

A chicken chow mein can easily become a pork chow mein if you find a packet of pork chops for 50p in the reduced section for example.

Shop in less obvious places

We all love the convenience of supermarket shopping - especially when we do it online and get it delivered right into the kitchen.

But if you’re cooking on a budget, going shopping in person and checking out less obvious places, like your local Asian supermarket, will help make your money go further. Staples like spices and bulk packages of rice and noodles are much cheaper there than in the supermarket.

Buy super-size

This one needs a bit of forward planning - and some storage space – but buying in larger quantities is the best way to make sure you’re getting good value.

Local markets will sell large quantities of household veg such as carrots and potatoes at a fraction of the cost.

Use your leftovers

Before you scrape the dregs of tonight’s dinner into the bin, stop to think about whether it could have a second lease of life.

Using up leftovers will help your weekly shop stretch further, and it doesn’t haven’t to mean eating the same meal two days running.

Leftover chicken, veg and gravy can become mini chicken pies and eaten for lunch later in the week.

Stop buying treats

Don’t panic: we’re not about to suggest your child gives up cakes and biscuits in the interests of economy (can you imagine the horror?).

But it’s cheaper to make your own goodies using store cupboard basics, rather than buying half the contents of the confectionary aisle.

If you have the right ingredients in the cupboard - such as flour, sugar and honey - you can make treats like cakes, biscuits and cookies in minutes.

Don’t be scared to substitute

So you’re all ready to whip up a budget family meal, when you realise that you’re missing a particular ingredient. Do you a) dash to the shops to pick it up, or b) make do with what’s in the cupboards?

Savvy cooks aren’t afraid to substitute in the interests of saving money. If you understand what goes with what, you get to know what swaps can be made.

If the recipe calls for crushed garlic and you only have garlic powder, it will still work.

Stop throwing food out

Hands up if you’re guilty of throwing away an embarrassing amount of unused food at the end of each week.

Past-its-best food may not look very appetising, but often still has life left in it if you know what to do with it. By using the chicken carcass from your roast dinner and some suspect bendy carrots, you can make a lovely soup, for example.

So get out of the habit of binning food that’s looking a bit dodgy, and into the habit of thinking creatively about what could be done with it.

Just don’t eat anything blue and furry.
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