

Written for Woman's World

Slash \$3302 off your annual grocery bill

By Linda Kallman

Looking for an easy way to slash your grocery bill? “The key is to make dinner from what you have on hand and use your imagination,” says Tawra Kellam, author of *Not Just Beans* and creator of the website www.notjustbeans.com. There are all sorts of creative dinners that take very little time and your family will love! Her simple tips, that she says really come from her mom and co-author, will save you \$3302:

Start a soup or potato night. “Soup and bread, or stuffed baked potatoes make filling, nutritious meals,” says Tawra. Soup can be made from leftover vegetables and meat you save during the week. Leftovers like cheese, broccoli and bacon can also be used to stuff your potatoes. Keep a container in the freezer for veggies and meats that you don't finish. You can just fill a potato with them one night for a quick, inexpensive dinner, or add them to leftover rice or noodles another night to make a delicious soup. Serve a meal like this just once a week instead of chicken breasts and you'll save \$280 this year!

Serve breakfast for dinner! Kids love to have pancakes or French toast for dinner. “They think it's a special treat,” Tawra tells us. Make it even more fun by adding small amounts of chocolate chips, raisins, or berries to make faces. Serve breakfast items like that or an omelet instead of pork chops for dinner just twice a month all year and you'll save \$150!

Dish up meatless favorites. Meatless meals don't have to involve just lentils, tofu, broccoli and spinach. Make some meatless favorites -- like spaghetti with tomato sauce, hearty baked macaroni and cheese or homemade cheese pizza -- instead of fast food or take-out once a week. And most meatless dishes are easy to store so you can keep your pantry stocked with the ingredients you'll need. Keep a list of your family's 5-10 meatless favorites. If you have a busy day you can just check the list for some low-cost dinner options. Tawra's Mom Jill says you'll save \$1040 a year.

Cut out juice and soda. Water's better for you! If you start them at a young age, even your kids will be happy drinking water with dinner. Too much juice just fills them up so they don't eat. Too much soda only leads to tooth decay and weight problems. If you cut out one cup of juice per person in a family of four per day you will save \$547 each year. Cut out one six-pack of soda a day and save \$728.

Eat fewer chips. Instead of the family going through a bag of potato chips once a week, serve skillet potatoes with dinner one day and save \$104 for the year. “There's no nutritional value in the chips anyway,” says Tawra. Using fresh potatoes is healthier and saves money. You could also substitute mashed potatoes, or even Spanish rice for the same savings.

Stop wasting food. “This may seem obvious,” adds Tawra, “but people just pile their kids’ plates full and expect them to eat an adult portion! Then they wonder why their food bill is so high!” Pay attention to how much food your family wastes in a week. Try giving kids smaller servings to start. If they want more let them have it after they finish what’s on their plate. “If someone gave you \$1,000 you wouldn’t throw it in the trash,” says Tawra, “but every year parents throw away \$1000 of wasted food!”

Skip the bakery. Instead of buying bakery bread, make homemade oatmeal or apple muffins, banana bread, or corn bread. It’s not as hard as you think! “It only takes about five minutes to put the ingredients in a bowl and stir it!” Tawra says. The trick is keeping all of your baking supplies and ingredients in one, easy to reach place. If you do this twice a week you’ll save \$156. Even if you cheat and use a pre-packaged corn bread mix you’ll save that much!