



'Green' Money Tip of the Month: MAKE MEALS AHEAD AND FREEZE THEM

Convenience foods are popular because you simply have to pop a small container into the microwave or oven for a few minutes and dinner is ready. ***Unfortunately, you end up paying for convenience*** as these meals are rather costly for what you get, especially when feeding an entire family.

Not only are they costly, but they produce more waste that ends up in the landfills and use more resources in their manufacturing and delivery for all these little portions. If you're leaning towards going greener to help save the planet, buying individual microwave meals really does counteract your intentions.

However, you can still go green, enjoy the convenience of "heat and serve" meals, and save a lot of money by creating your own convenience meals with just a modicum of planning. All it takes is making meals in bulk sizes, then storing the remainder as individual portions in the freezer.

Making meals ahead of time is well worth considering whether you're single or heading up a big family. Cooking once, while getting multiple meals from your effort, also saves time.

Follow these tips to help you in your endeavor:

1. **Buy a cookbook.** There are plenty of cookbooks and websites that focus on this type of batch or freezer cooking. Find a few that meets your needs and start experimenting with recipes.
2. **Multiply your own recipes.** Experiment with your own favorite recipes, multiplying them into larger portions. Instead of making one lasagna dinner, make two, and then break the second into freezable portions that you can reheat later in the month.
3. **Separate leftovers into containers.** Cook larger-than-normal meals and separate the leftovers into single-serving containers. Soups freeze well in flat zipper bags and other meals can be stored in plastic containers.
4. **Freeze and store.** Label each container with a name and the date and store them away in your freezer. Many meals can store for months without freezer burn, but if you aim to store meals for only one month at a time, you won't need to worry about if they've been in the freezer too long.
5. **Reheat meals at your convenience.** Reheat the food at your convenience, but keep in mind that *you may need to add water to some meals to return them to their former consistency.*

This strategy can be advantageous for families large and small. You can freeze and store large meals or small portions. Many recipes lend themselves well to being prepared, separated and stored in this manner. Experiment with your favorite meals to see what works best for you.