



MONEYWISE

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: HOSTING HOLIDAY MEALS ON A BUDGET

If you've ever hosted a holiday gathering, you know there is a lot to consider: Who will be invited? When will they arrive? What will be cooked? and How much will it cost? With inflation driving up the costs of goods and services, the rising prices of groceries might be on the minds of many Kentuckians who plan to host an event this holiday season. Holiday meals can get pricey, especially when serving a large crowd. As you prepare for this year's festivities, there are several strategies you can use to lower costs while maintaining holiday cheer.

Plan ahead. First, gather your recipes and make a list of the ingredients you will need. Then shop your pantry and freezer, noting what you already have. Identify only the items you need to buy. When you shop, buy store-brand items when possible. These usually come with a lower price tag. Planning early also allows you to take advantage of sales and comparison shop.

Shop intentionally. Store mailers, websites, mobile apps, and social media pages can help you shop wisely. Use these tools to compare deals and prices between brands and stores. If the stores you choose provide online ordering, consider buying groceries through pickup. Ordering online can help you avoid impulse buys. It also helps you easily compare prices



and nutritional information and keep an eye on your overall total. Whether you shop online or in-store, use coupons and customer loyalty programs to maximize deals. If you're shopping in the store, keep a running tally of your total as you add items to the cart. Prioritizing purchases helps us stick to a budget.

Delegate dishes. If you're hosting a holiday gathering, suggest an organized "potluck" instead of trying to do everything yourself. Ask everyone to sign up to bring something. Assigning side dishes, desserts, and drinks, for example, is one way to split the costs and stress of hosting a holiday meal. It gives others a chance to purchase or share special recipes while distributing the responsibility.



THINK ABOUT CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES THAT COULD BECOME NEW TRADITIONS



Simplify sides. Vegetable-based dishes, such as sweet potato or green bean casseroles, are common around the holidays. While these dishes are tasty, they require several ingredients that can increase meal prices. Consider simplifying side dishes by serving vegetables “on their own” rather than in a fancy recipe. This cuts both costs and calories.

Traditional twists. There is no rule that you must serve turkey on Thanksgiving, for example. Instead, think about creative alternatives that could become new traditions. Choose meals that best fit your budget and the needs of your guests. For instance, pasta dishes can feed a crowd. You can prepare them ahead of time, they require few side dishes (just a big healthy salad), and you can change them to fit dietary needs. Ask your guests for creative suggestions (such as baked potato bars, themed dinners, etc.) and recruit their help when it’s time to cook.

Gather early. Suggest hosting your holiday meal earlier in the day. Breakfast, brunch, and lunch options often come with fewer expectations for side dishes, drinks, and desserts. In addition to lowering costs, an earlier meal may free up time later in the day to attend multiple gatherings or add in a fun, low-cost activity like a friendly game of football, a board game, movie, or craft.

As you consider budgeting for your holiday festivities, remember that changes don’t have to be permanent. Budgets, needs, and wants change from year to year — your holiday plans can too. To explore healthy, budget-friendly recipe ideas, visit the University of Kentucky Family and Consumer Sciences Extension **Plate it up! Kentucky Proud** series at <https://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/piukp-recipes>

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