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Making Groceries Last

If you've been to the grocery store lately, you probably left the store wondering how so few items cost so much money! With the tough economy and costs of many raw materials and ingredients rising, the price of food has been rapidly on the rise. You can realize tremendous savings by preserving the food that you purchase for a longer period of time. Here are some tips on preserving food to help stretch that grocery budget.

To keep vegetables from rotting try lining the bottom of your veggie drawer with paper towels. The towels will absorb excess moisture to help keep the vegetables fresh.

Sometimes carrots, radishes, or celery can lose their crunch over time. If you take those veggies and put them in a bowl of ice water along with a slice of raw potato it will bring back their crispness very quickly.

Cottage cheese and sour cream are two items that can often go sour quickly causing a good portion to be thrown away. If you place the container upside down in your refrigerator it will create a vacuum inside the container. The presence of the vacuum will make it more difficult for the bacteria that spoil the food to grow, therefore making the food last longer.

There is only one non perishable food item. Any guesses? It's honey. If your honey crystallizes or becomes cloudy, you can microwave it on low heat for 45 second intervals until it becomes clear again.

By taking a few seconds to preserve some food items, you can make them last longer and save yourself a lot of money in a year's time.

Tips

April is Financial Literacy Awareness Month. Here are some ways to increase your financial literacy, which will help increase the money in your pocket!

- If you don't have one already, create a monthly budget and stick to it! Take into account your income and all of your expenses. If you're unsure of how to start a budget contact Advantage CCS and schedule a budget counseling session. A certified credit counselor will help you develop a monthly spending plan and provide tips to help you better manage your money.
- Are you spending too much money? Track your spending for one week and only use cash for your purchases. You'll find out where your money is going and you'll be able to figure out how to cut back.
- Increase your savings – A small daily amount can turn into big savings. If you can put aside a dollar a day, you'll have \$365 dollars in a year's time.



Q: I'm expecting a large tax refund. What should I do with the money?

A: Extra money is always a good thing. Often we would like to spend it as soon as possible, but there are a few things to consider before deciding where that money goes. If your secured debts are current, look at the rest of your expenses. While we are all anxious to get rid of debts, it's also very important to have some money set aside for unexpected items like car/home repairs or medical expenses. Avoid using all of the extra money to put toward debts and not leave any for yourself. It's in your best interest to put at least half of the money into savings for life's emergencies and put the other half toward your bills. Another option you can look at is using this money throughout the year as a monthly supplement. If you find you're borrowing money before the month is over, consider this as an alternative. If you get a \$1200 tax refund, instead of sending out all that money at once and potentially falling behind later in the year, put all the money into savings and withdrawal \$100 each month. This will help you stay on track and keep your budget more consistent. If you still are unsure what you should do, feel free to contact one of our certified credit counselors for some money management strategies.

Advantage CCS

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Saving on Storage

Do you rent a storage unit? If you do you're certainly not alone. In the never ending accumulating of life many of us are finding our stuff outgrowing the space in our homes.

Storage units are growing in popularity. Nearly 1 in 10 households in the US today currently rents a storage unit. However most of the time a storage unit begins with good intentions and ends with years of unexpected rent payments. If you have a storage unit or you are thinking about getting one, consider some alternate options for your stuff that can save you time and money.

Last year Americans paid \$22 billion for the use of storage space. Storage units do provide a valuable service for many Americans, but reasons for having the unit can often lead them astray. Often people intend to have a storage unit for a short period of time until they can clear some more space. But storage units have always been easy to fill up and very difficult to empty. Owners of storage unit facilities know this which is why they often offer the first month's rent for free.

Once you've committed your belongings to the unit, it's difficult to get them out for several reasons. First, it's a time commitment to go back to the unit and get your stuff out. Not to mention the hassle and cost of renting a moving van if necessary.

It's also difficult to make decisions about what to keep and what to give up. These decisions are much easier to put off for another day than to actually have to go and make them. It is often much easier to say, "I'll just pay the rent for one more month." Before too long you have hundreds of dollars in storage fees, which is often more than the value of the items in the unit.

We often become attached to items for sentimental value. Maybe your partner bought you that old TV many years ago and you spent many evenings watching it together. Or that old baby crib reminds you of when your children were younger. The fact is a lot of that stuff you don't really use or need anymore and it's just taking up space. By selling your old stuff online or at yard sales you can make some extra money and get rid of some unused items.

And thanks to online resources the need to hold onto unique items has also been greatly reduced. Sometimes we tend to hold onto things "just in case" that highly unlikely scenario happens. You may be saving those tiki torches for your Hawaiian barbeque next summer, but wasn't that barbeque supposed to happen this past summer? You could sell those torches online which makes you a few bucks. And if you decide to have that barbeque this year you can always look online and purchase some used torches for much less than it would cost to store them for an entire year. Used televisions, baby strollers, furniture, and books are just a few of many different items that are always available in abundance.

Although we have the best financial intentions when purchasing a storage unit it's easy to see how it can get to be too much. So if you're considering a storage unit make sure you take some alternatives into account first. With a little planning you can keep your stuff from becoming an extra financial burden.

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Resources

Check out these websites for financial education and money management tips and information.

www.advantageccs.org -Our website has a wide variety of financial education resources.

www.jumpstart.org -provides resources for teaching kids about money.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/> -includes money saving ideas for meal planning and helps you figure out how much you spend on food now and how much you should spend.

The Advantage Challenge

Advantage CCS challenges you to ...take a financial literacy education class this month. Advantage CCS offers Personal Financial Management 101 numerous times a month at the Agency's Pennsylvania office locations. The complimentary class is two hours and provides education on budgeting and credit management. Check out our website, www.advantageccs.org for times and locations.

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