

MODULE 2: SHOPPING & STORAGE | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 2

Shopping Strategy

Remember to dive into the Ingredient Index for in-depth shopping tips for particular ingredients.

Good food cooking means becoming a grocery store master shopper. Here are some tips for success every time you hit the aisles.

Make a list

Make a list. Check it twice. Stick to it. The key to smart, efficient shopping is planning. Whether you pick specific recipes for your week and only shop for those, or you shop to restock your kitchen with the ingredients that let you invent good food meals on the fly—always write down what you need before you go to the store. Sticking to a list ensures that you make smart choices, avoid potential food waste, and save money, and then gets you back to your kitchen quicker! Check your list a few times before you leave the house. You don't want to find yourself in the middle of preparing a meal only to discover that you're missing a key ingredient.

But if you do forget something, remember: no one's perfect! Use it as an opportunity to build some more creative confidence—check the Ingredient Index for a quick substitution.

Eat before you shop

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The perimeter

Where it's at! Packaged and processed junk foods are almost always in the center aisles of the store. Stick to the periphery for the majority, if not all of your shopping. That's where you'll find whole food ingredients like fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, and bulk items like nuts, seeds, and legumes.

Bulk

Save money and get the portions you need. Contrary to what we may have heard, eating more whole foods can be a real bargain. Most grocery stores have bulk sections which let you purchase certain ingredients (legumes, nuts, seeds, spices, flours, teas) in custom quantities (e.g., 1 tablespoon of chili powder versus a whole jar) and low prices (\$1.25/lb. for quinoa). Since bulk foods don't have all the pricey packaging, you can find good savings. Bulk is also great for keeping pantry containers stocked—buy the amounts needed versus a pre-measured box.

If your store doesn't have bulk bins but you know there are certain items like rice or flour that you'd purchase in larger quantities, you can usually find bulk options online or just ask a store manager to order in bulk for you. Gather some friends, co-workers, or family to go in on it with you and split it up. Everybody wins.

Deals are great, but be smart about them. Five onions for a buck is a great deal, but only if you eat all of them. Many stores honor their sale price even if you only buy 1 or 2, instead of all 5. When in doubt, ask.

Know who's growing your food

If you have the opportunity, get to know local farmers—save on organic produce by buying locally from a Farmers' Market or by joining a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). With a CSA, a farmer offers a certain number of “shares” to the public. Typically, the share consists of a box of vegetables (but other farm products may be included). Customers purchase a share (aka a “membership” or a “subscription”) and in return receive a selection of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season. It's a fantastic way to save money and infuse some spontaneity into your life. You support local farms while building confidence in the kitchen. And if you get a vegetable in your CSA box that you have no clue how to use, just refer to the Ingredient and Recipe Indexes or the course community. You'll find loads of options.

Use coupons

Once you start to find your favorite go-to products, visit the coupon/savings sections of the suppliers' websites and print out coupons. Also ask the grocery store for their coupon handouts and make sure to visit product websites to sign up for savings, too. Never underestimate the power of double coupon day or the amount of money that can be saved by joining a store's membership rewards program. Subscribe to newsletters for favorite products and connect with providers and the stores you frequent on social media — “like” and follow to learn about daily and weekly specials.

Skip the big cart

Unless of course you're shopping for many people, use the small cart or the hand-held basket when shopping so you don't overbuy. We're all guilty of straying from the list...produce can be so pretty!

Salad bar it

Sometimes, you just need a handful or two of diced tomatoes, or a cup of carrots for a meal. If you're short on time, hit the salad bar and buy your veggies already precut and prepped for you!

Love that imperfection

Blemished fruits and veggies deserve to be eaten too. Choose not-so-photogenic ingredients for cooked, roasted, and puréed dishes. Often, stores offer them at a discount anyway, and keep in mind: if no one buys them, they will likely end up in the trash—what a waste!

Lesson Actions

Next time you go shopping, implement at least three of these tips (preferably the ones that you have some resistance to—go out of your comfort zone)—write down your experience in your cooking journal. If you like, share with friends, family, or the course community what it was like to put some of these ideas into practice.