

# Thanksgiving dinner does not have to break the bank

By Lauren Salkeld, Epicurious

Thanksgiving may be a holiday about plenty, but some years your wallet simply won't support that much abundance. With these 10 money-saving tips, your Turkey Day can still include an impressive feast.

Read on for ways to save on groceries, plus ideas for making even the most humble ingredients shine.

**1. Serve Soup:** It might seem extravagant to serve a first course, but a few inexpensive ingredients can make a spectacular soup that will help fill guests' bellies when the main course is a little skimpy. Plus: Many soups call for aromatics like onions, carrots, and celery, which you probably already purchased to make stuffing, or to stuff inside the turkey cavity. Potato-based soups, such as our Sweet Potato Soup with Buttered Pecans or Creamy Fennel and Potato Soup, might be your best bet; potatoes and sweet potatoes were not dramatically affected by the drought and so prices are not expected to rise this year. Other options include Butternut Squash Apple Soup, Cream of Cauliflower Soup, and Chestnut Soup with Sourdough Sage Croutons.

**2. Brine Your Bird:** Purchasing a supermarket turkey, instead of an organic, heritage, or farmers' market bird, is an easy, obvious way to save money. To get the best flavor and texture from your bargain bird, brine it. To dry brine, rub the turkey in a salt and herb mixture, and let it sit in the refrigerator (brining usually takes about an hour per pound). To wet brine, soak the turkey in a salt-water solution (herbs, spices, and aromatics can be added as well as other liquids like beer or molasses), in the refrigerator, for several hours or

overnight.

**3. Pick a Star Herb:** Fresh herbs might seem like a high-ticket item, but if you don't already own the dried alternative, fresh is the way to go. You can often buy a bunch for a few dollars and they'll deliver tons of flavor. Also consider that even though dried herbs seem like a better deal, they'll likely expire, and lose their flavor before you get a chance to use the whole container. To save money, pare down your herbs to one or two and use them in different ways throughout the meal. And if you have any extra, dry them for using later.

**4. Shop Seasonally:** In-season ingredients are likely to be less expensive so build your menu around those. Brussels sprouts are at their peak right now making them a much more economical option than green beans. Another tip: Rather than roasting whole Brussels sprouts, shave or shred them for a more bountiful presentation. The leaves can be sautéed or served raw. Try our recipes for Shaved Brussels Sprout Salad with Fresh Walnuts and Pecorino and Sauteed Shredded Brussels Sprouts with Smoked Ham and Toasted Pecans.

**5. Scratch and Save:** If your kitchen is well stocked with basics like flour, butter, sugar, and yeast, it often makes more financial sense to bake from scratch. So skip the frozen pie dough and the par-baked rolls, roll up your sleeves, and make pie dough and rolls from scratch.

**6. Buy Frozen or Canned:** We usually prefer fresh vegetables, but canned or frozen veggies are a great way to save money at Thanksgiving. If your family loves corn pudding or green peas on Turkey Day, check the price of frozen – many brands are flash frozen and will still have all the flavor and nutrition of fresh. Canned pumpkin is usually cheaper than fresh and most recipes are designed for it, so it's a smart way to save. Plus, unlike in 2011 when pumpkins suffered because of Hurricane Irene, the drought had little effect on these sturdy crops and prices are expected to remain flat this year.

**7. Make Dessert Multi-Task:** Dessert will leave a lasting impression so you don't want to scrimp too much. But if you're smart about it, you can hit several nostalgic holiday notes in one fantastic finale. Try our recipes for Pecan Pumpkin Pie or Caramelized Apple and Pecan Pie.

**8. Dress Up Dessert:** Add an extra flourish to dessert and your guests will likely forget that the overall meal wasn't as bountiful as usual. Heavy cream can be a little pricey (and prices are expected to be high this year) but a little goes a long way. Pick up a pint and whip it into light, lofty whipped cream that will make simple pies and cobblers seem more special. Vanilla ice cream will do the same.

**9. Improvise to Save:** Buying a large package of something when you only need a small amount is a big waste of money. If your pie recipe calls for shortening and you don't already have some on hand, use butter instead. If your cranberry relish includes orange zest but you only have lemons and limes, they can easily be substituted.

**10. Make It a Potluck:** If hosting Thanksgiving is threatening to break the bank, don't be afraid to ask for help. That can mean enlisting a few guests to pitch in with side dishes, dessert, or wine. It can also mean turning the feast into a potluck. Big communal meals are fun, and because everyone puts their own spin on dishes, they make for an interesting, diverse meal.