

Happy shopper

JOANNA CONWAY
EPOCH TIMES UK STAFF

Food prices have risen dramatically in the last year. I was buying a loaf of bread recently and was surprised to see the price had gone up to £1.64.

According to Mysupermarket.co.uk the cost of a basket of staple items (based on a weekly shop for a family of four) has risen by 21% in the last year. Based on this increase this would mean a price hike of £1092 per year. Wheat-based and dairy products continue to rise in price whilst savings can be found on essential fruit and vegetables such as bananas, broccoli and grapes. Asda remains the cheapest supermarket whilst Sainsbury's has seen the biggest percentage raise.

So how to combat the credit crunch? Start being a canny

shopper. Supermarkets have various ploys to make us empty our pockets sooner than we need to. Higher price products are often at easy-to-reach eye level whilst the better value, supermarket-own brands will be on the lower shelves. Some supermarket may seem to do good deals on two for one, 50 per cent free offers but then increase their price on fruit and vegetables.

Shopping tips

Cook from scratch – plan about three or four meals that you'll eat in the week and shop for the ingredients at the weekend. Keep it simple even if it's just sausage and mash or a pasta dish it's better for you, and less expensive than reaching for convenience foods.

Make a list – this will help you stay focused on what you need to buy rather than get distracted by the pile 'em high cheap supermarket offers. Make your list logical: start

with fruit and veg, meat-based products, dairy, dried goods and then bread. This will stop you weaving erratically from section to section.

Try ethnic supermarkets – which often sell fruit and vegetables at lower prices than the supermarkets. I buy all my fruit and veg from the local Afghan shop, I get big bunches of herbs at a fraction of the cost. They often sell unusual products that the big chain supermarkets don't stock – in the case of my local Afghan store the Kashmiri mangoes are delicious.

Mix and match supermarket value ranges – try different products in the low-cost range to see which ones you find acceptable. Value tea is as flavourful as wood-chippings but I can quite happily buy value honey, peanut butter and cornflakes. I prefer the Sainsbury's basic range for overall quality.

Hidden gems – there are



BEACON OF VALUE: An Aldi discount supermarket in Northwich. Whilst most of the UK's leading supermarkets and grocery stores are battling hard for their market share, discount supermarkets Aldi and Lidl are seeing an increase in profits as middle class consumers fighting the credit crunch search out bargains

some foods that are naturally very good but have fallen out of favour these days. Mackerel is a delicious fish that is very reasonably priced. If you're a blue cheese fan then the English produced cheeses are much better value than the continental ones. In Sainsbury's, Stilton sells for £7.69 per kg and Shropshire blue for £7.29 per kg, whilst French Roquefort is over triple the price at £23.30 per kg.

Aldi and Lidl – fewer staff, buy your own carrier bags and no baskets keep over-heads down and therefore cheaper products for the customer. More and more people are getting wise to the quality products stocked at these two continental discount stores. Friends rave about the quality of their chocolate and salami. Aldi have recently been awarded the Grocer Gold Awards for several of their products, which include beef wellington, chocolate chip brioche and their fishmonger range, to name a few.

Salads make great frugal food – and are perfect at this time of year. Even if you use a ready prepared bag of salad



The cost of a basket of staple items has risen by 21 per cent in the last year

leaves it's not going to be much more than £1.50. Hard-boiled eggs, mixed pulses and grated cheese are good additions to your salad. Make up a batch of vinaigrette and keep in a screw top jar in the fridge – eight tablespoons of oil, four tablespoons wine vinegar, two teaspoons of French mustard, half a level teaspoon each of salt, black pepper, half a teaspoon of caster sugar. Just shake and serve. Or do like the Iranians do and strew your salad with a handful of fresh

herbs: coriander, flat-leaf parsley and basil are good.

Fridge sweep soup – discounting the unappealing name this is a good way to use up vegetables left in the bottom of your fridge and clear the way for next week's shop. Celery, carrots, potatoes, courgettes and leeks – cut them into even sized pieces and sweat slowly, on a low heat in a covered pan. The vegetables should smell very fragrant and become vivid in colour – sprinkle on some vegetable stock granules to enhance the taste. Parsnips or sweet potatoes are a good addition as the natural sugars become almost honeyish with the slow cooking.

Do like a Womble – and "make good use of bad rubbish". Join your local Freecycle group and pick up useful household appliances. I recently found a working bread machine outside the bin store of my block of flats.

Living a life more frugal can be a very satisfying pursuit. It's not about being cheap and miserly but more about making the best of what you've got, appreciating and savouring things.

LOOSE LEAF

ALEX FRASER



The spiritual element?

When we have warmer days, it is refreshing to drink cold tea, even chilled. Iced tea as popular in the USA is generally black tea sweetened with sugar and with the addition of citrus juice and/or mint etc. Liquid tea can be pre-packed but this requires preservatives. In Japan one can also buy hot tea from vending machines: I have strong memories of a stomach-churning brew from a can. It was an unrepeatable experience.

Heavily roasted barley tea is popular in Japan (Mugicha) and Korea (Boricha). It is a simple drink, hot or cold, containing none of the delicious and healthy ingredients of real tea, though it may benefit the blood. On the other hand, the FDA's Centre for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition identifies acrylamide (a suspected carcinogen) in high temperature cooked carbohydrates including potato crisps, barbequed meat and coffee. We are all exposed to this chemical: my intuition is not to be too paranoid.

In China there is a long tradition of "sun brewing" in which tea and cold water are left in the sun to brew slowly. Today, I find it more convenient, and probably more hygienic, to perform cold brewing in the fridge overnight. One of my favourite unorthodoxies is to make green jasmine tea in this way but with sparkling spring water. It's a real surprise. As it is with vodka.

Self-styled tea-geek, John Kennedy at Teasmith (www.teasmith.com), a good friend and trade customer of ours, is making an art, or perhaps a science, of cold-brewing and is doing wonders with Wazuka Sencha (an excellent Japanese green tea) and Snow Jewel (a silver needle white tea). Try 1-3 teaspoons per 1.5l for 6-8 hours. For his parties he has perfected superb concoctions with spirits, but you'll have to ask him about that.

You can find Alex Fraser at East Teas, Borough Market on Fridays and Saturdays. www.eastteas.com

FRUGAL RESOURCES

Freecycle

www.freecycle.org

Matches people with things they want to get rid of with people that need them. Find your local group and swap and exchange needful things.

Fruwiki

www.fruwiki.com

As the name suggests this is Wikipedia for the frugal community. It takes you through the "frugal fundamentals" from "bartering" and

"being picky" to "self reliance" and "survival skills". Hardcore frugalists need only apply.

Frugal life

www.frugal-life.spaces.live.com

For a year Piper Terret has been working from home, and trying to live as frugally as possible. Find out the best method to save money on your food bill as she undertakes the 'Supermarket Challenge': a week of eating a world war two

diet, foraging for wild food, going vegetarian or a weekly shop at Aldi.

The Frugal Cook

www.thefrugalcok.blogspot.com

Award-winning journalist Fiona Becket adds a gourmet slant to the frugal arena. Her blog is well written, thought-provoking and with elegant, frugal recipe ideas. Her book *Frugal Food* comes out this Autumn.

Perfume houses covet Bulgaria's fragrant rose

EKATERINA POPOVA
EPOCH TIMES
BULGARIA STAFF

World famous brands such as Nina Ricci, Chanel, Christian Dior, Kenzo, Givenchy, and Gucci all refine rose oil as an essential ingredient for their fragrances, and now they are turning their eyes to the Bulgarian rose.

Among the major producers of this precious substance are Bulgaria, Turkey, Morocco, Iran, France, and Italy. Currently, around 60 to 70 per cent of the global rose oil production is imported by France. However, the specific climate characteristics in Bulgaria make the Bulgarian rose oil more fragrant, and with a long-lasting aroma, which makes it more desired by rival fragrance producers, according to experts.

Internationally, the price of rose oil has been constantly rising due to the amount of work necessary to produce this valuable raw material. At present it costs 4,000 euros (approx. £3,000) to produce about 2.2 pounds of the ingredient. However, experts from the Institute of Roses and Essential and Medical Cultures located in Bulgaria's famous Rose Valley predict that due to increased demand rose oil prices may skyrocket again.

The production of the valuable perfumery substance is extremely labour-intensive. To



A Bulgarian man gathers rose petals in the Valley of Roses in central Bulgaria. Bulgaria has a 330-year-old tradition in essential rose oil distillation

produce two pounds of rose oil extract, 5,500 to 6,600 pounds of roses petals are consumed. For this reason, the price of rose oil is often compared to the price of gold.

The petals picking time lasts for only 20 days every

year. In order to produce the best quality, highest yield, rose pickers are out in the fields from 5 a.m. each morning. The rose flowers are then harvested before the morning dew evaporates. According to experts, the roses harvested

on two different mornings will yield rose oil with different characteristics.

Rose oil is not only used in perfumery and cosmetics. Brandy and preserves are also made from roses. Rose oil extracts are used as medi-

cine for some diseases.

Americans have discovered yet another application for rose oil – it is used to treat space-shuttle equipment since rose oil is resistant to any temperatures.

Rose oil is contained in the

most expensive perfume in the world "Her Majesty's First" by Clive Christian. A 500ml bottle of the costly scent retails at £154,000, takes a year to produce and one droplet of it contains the essential oil of at least 170 roses.

INGREDIENTS

SERVES 6

TIME: 1 1/4 - 1 1/2 HOURS

COST: £1.50-£1.75 A HEAD

8-10 FREE-RANGE CHICKEN THIGHS, IDEALLY STILL ON THE BONE

1 LARGE ONION, PEELED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED

3 LARGE CLOVES OF GARLIC, PEELED AND ROUGHLY CHOPPED

4 DRIED LIMES, WASHED AND PIERCED IN SEVERAL PLACES WITH A SKEWER OR SHARP KNIFE

ABOUT 1 LITRE COLD CHICKEN STOCK, EITHER HOME-MADE OR MADE

WITH AN ORGANIC STOCK CUBE

1 - 1 1/2 TSP GROUND TURMERIC

8 WAXY SMALL TO MEDIUM-SIZED POTATOES (ABOUT 500-600G IN TOTAL) QUARTERED OR CUT INTO EIGHT

2 TBSP OIL

A LARGE BUNCH OF CHIVES OR SPRING ONION TOPS (THE GREEN BITS), FINELY SLICED

A BUNCH OF SPINACH

A GOOD-SIZED BUNCH EACH OF PARSLEY AND CORIANDER

YOGHURT, FINELY SLICED ONION AND HOT PEPPER SAUCE TO SERVE

Cut and pull away the skin from the chicken thighs and put them in a large casserole or sauté pan. Add the onion, garlic and dried limes, cover with stock and sprinkle over a good teaspoon of turmeric. Bring slowly to the boil then turn the heat down and simmer for 20 minutes. Push down the limes into the liquid from time to time so they don't just bob on the top of the stew. Add the potatoes and continue to cook until tender (about another 20-25 minutes). Meanwhile wash the herbs and spinach thoroughly, removing the tougher stalks and chop finely. Heat the oil in a frying pan or wok, add the onion

and herbs and fry them for a couple of minutes until they wilt. Tip them into the stew, stir, put the lid back on and cook for another 10-15 minutes for the flavours to infuse. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Traditionally this type of dish would be served with boiled basmati rice but you could serve it with couscous. (In bowls as there's quite a lot of liquid) Good sides are plain yoghurt, very finely sliced onion and hot pepper sauce.

Fiona's book *The Frugal Cook* will be published in hardback by Absolute Press this autumn at the amazingly frugal price of £14.99. (ISBN 981904573852)

Italy's fizz sets its sights on champagne's top spot

PROSECCO, Italy (Reuters) – Gianluca Bisol has great expectations for the white sparkling wine his family has been making since 1542 in the Valdobbiadene and Conegliano regions north of Venice.

A 22nd-generation prosecco producer, he is hoping prosecco's growing international renown will help his fizz gain ground over pricier champagne. Prosecco production has grown to 150 million bottles from five million a year in 40 years, mainly driven by demand for exports to Germa-

ny and the United States. Now its makers aim to increase production to 250 million bottles, moving it closer to the world's leading bubbly. France last year produced a record 339 million bottles of champagne.

"Prosecco is softer, easier to drink than champagne," Bisol said. "Add the good price/quality ratio, and prosecco could become the leading world bubbly over the next 30 years."

Taking on champagne will require boosting exports, which amounted to about

16 million bottles last year, a fraction of the 150 million bottles of champagne France exported.

One battleground will be emerging wine markets like China: exports of champagne to China soared 30 per cent to 650,000 bottles last year, a nine-fold increase in five years, according to the association of champagne producers. Prosecco sales totalled less than 100,000 bottles.

In prosecco's favour may be the fact that its taste is sweeter than the traditional brut favoured by champagne-buy-



Italian sparkling winemakers are gaining ground over their pricier competitor Champagne

ers: some Chinese consumers still like to mix their white wine with lemonade to make it palatable.

With economies slowing down across the globe, prosecco's affordability may prove to its advantage. A factor here is that most is made in large industrial containers, while champagne producers induce fermentation in each bottle, a process that takes longer and is far more costly.

So prosecco retails from as little as 1.5 euros (£1.19) a litre if you fill your own bottles from a jug at a hole-in-

the-wall shop in Venice, to 25 euros (£20) for Cartizze, the highest quality of hand-picked prosecco grown only on one hill.

In contrast, a popular champagne like Moët & Chandon sells for 30 euros a bottle in Milan and top champagne names can fetch hundreds of euros.

In 1969 the prosecco producers of 15 villages in Valdobbiadene obtained the DOC designation – Denominazione di origine controllata, the Italian equivalent of the French AOC or Appellation

d'origine contrôlée – which certifies the content, production method and regional origin of the wine.

Today the DOC area cultivates 4,700 hectares, producing 56 million bottles a year from the steep hills of the valley.

But in the plains from nearby Treviso all the way to the border of Slovenia 100 miles away, a further 5,000 hectares are planted with prosecco grapes, making 100 million bottles a year as they have no limit on production per hectare.