

How much do you pay for your average week's groceries?

How does your food bill compare with that of other similar American families? The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued an update of weekly cost of food eaten at home.

The USDA computes the cost of food for four food plans -- thrifty, low-cost, moderate and liberal, say extension food and nutrition specialists at North Carolina State University.

The average family of two (both between the ages of 20 and 50) spent \$37.40 on thrifty food plan, \$46.90 on low-cost plan; \$57.60 on a moderate plan; and \$71.30 on a liberal plan.

The figures for a family of two, both 51 or over, are: \$35.60, thrifty; \$44.90, low-cost; \$55, moderate; and \$65.60, liberal.

A family of four with preschool children spends \$54.20 on the thrifty plan; \$81.80 for a moderate eating plan; and \$99.80 for a liberal plan.

Once those two children reach elementary school and are eating more, the figures rise to \$62 for thrifty; \$78.60 for low-cost; \$98.20 for moderate and \$117.90 for a liberal food plan.

If your household contains a teenaged girl, add \$15.90 a week on a thrifty plan; \$19 on low-cost; \$23 for moderate; and \$27.70 for liberal.

A teenaged boy, not unexpectedly, eats even more. If he is between the ages of 12 and 14, allow \$16.10 for a thrifty eating plan; \$21.80 for low-cost; \$27.10 for moderate; and \$31.80 for liberal. Between 15 and 19, add

another dollar to each of the above categories.

Each plan covers the cost of foods that provide well-balanced meals and snacks for a week. The

totals do not include alcoholic beverages, pet food, soap, cigarettes, paper goods and other non-food items bought at the grocery store.

The USDA uses the thrifty plan figures to set coupon allotments in the food stamp program.

To accurately compare your

food bill, use the figures above if all meals are eaten at home or carried from home. If members are eating some meals out, deduct five percent from the amount

shown for each meal not eaten at home. So, if everyone eats lunch out five days a week, subtract percent, or one-fourth of the cost shown.



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Althea plant popular in N.C.

One of the most popular summer-flowering shrubs in North Carolina is althea. Althea is also commonly called rose of Sharon, although it is not the plant by that name mentioned in the Bible.

Althea is a deciduous shrub grown for its large flowers of pink, white, lavender, violet, or combinations of these colors. The flowers are bell shaped and there are cultivars with single or double blossoms.

Althea grows rapidly and is tolerant of air pollution and urban conditions. It can be grown in full sun to light shade in almost any soil that is not excessively wet. Althea usually grows to a height of five to eight feet and a diameter of four to six feet. When pruned, althea is dense enough to be used as a hedge.

But althea has bad points as well as its good points, say extension horticultural specialists at North Carolina State University. One drawback is that, while althea blooms prolifically at the beginning of summer, it then sets seed and blooms sporadically the rest of the season. Another drawback is that althea produces an abundant supply of seeds which often germinate around the plant.

These drawbacks have been overcome with the release of two hybrids by the U.S. Arboretum in Washington, D.C. The hybrids are triploid (they have three sets of chromosomes) and therefore the flowers are rarely fertile and produce no seed. Since no seed is produced, the plants continue to bloom from June through October.

The U.S. Arboretum hybrids are named Helene and Diana. Diana has white flowers and Helene had white flowers that have a red throat.

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