



Notes from Plymouth's RIVER COTTAGE

Joe Draper explains how eating well isn't just a rich man's game

A lot of people think that eating healthily and buying from sustainable sources is a rich man's game, but it really isn't the case and I believe that you can eat very well on any budget.

It's easy to buy ready meals and processed foods all in one trip to the supermarket, but do you ever look at what you actually end up with? How often do you come home, unpack the shopping after spending a small fortune on your big shop and realise that you have bought hardly any food and there seems to be a lot of items you don't really need?

We all know that supermarkets entice you with their special offers, encouraging you to buy more to get a better deal, but did you really need two bags of carrots or three packs of sponge fingers? If you find yourself throwing food away at the end of the week because it's gone out of date or you couldn't get through all those carrots, then there is another way: shop in local, independent stores that are run by real experts. There are so many benefits of using and supporting your local shops and you will get a much better deal, too.

So, next week, ditch the supermarket shop and visit your local greengrocer. Pick and choose exactly how many carrots and onions you need, and you'll soon discover when all your favourite fruits and vegetables are in season.

Next stop, nip in to see the butcher and you'll find a spectacular array of meat to choose from, which you know will all be local and fresh. Your butcher will even prepare it just how you like it and will be



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able to give you tips on how to cook cuts of meat you wouldn't normally choose. You can expand your repertoire and you'll be paying no more than if you were buying from the supermarket. You won't be paying for loads of packaging that will go straight into the bin – just think about what you actually get in a beef curry ready meal, once you take into account packaging and production costs! You get a small amount of poor-quality beef (or, if you're lucky, horsemeat!).

Pop into the fishmongers to pick up some sustainably caught fish that will have been landed that same day, to go with the seasonal spring greens that you just happened to buy from the greengrocers because they looked so good. Again, your fishmonger will be able to advise you on how to cook fish and will happily fillet it for you.

Last stop is the delicatessen, where I

know things can get expensive, but my top tip is never to go in too hungry! You can easily come out with a fantastic cheese at a good price, some local ham perfectly sliced into the exact amount that you need, and you know it tastes good because you've had samples of three types.

Now you can head home with shopping bags full of produce that's going to get you excited about trying new things and eating delicious wholesome meals.

These days, I find myself eating a lot more vegetarian food, so fish and meat become a special treat, and it keeps the food bills down, too. There is plenty you can make from kitchen staples. You could make chickpea and squash curry, served with mint yoghurt and homemade flatbread; cous cous salads are quick and easy; a tasty frittata is perfect for lunch; a warming soup is ideal on a weeknight; or my favourite, bits-from-the-fridge pizza! If you have the time, make your own bread; once you've done it a few times you'll find it is quite easy and tastes so much better than anything shop-bought. ■

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