



10 low-budget steps to a plant-forward diet

Check out more tips here:



Increasing the proportion of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet improves your health and is environmentally friendly. You don't have to go full vegetarian to realize the effects of being plant-forward. Try some of these simple steps at one meal a day or even just 3 meals a week to start down a healthier path!

A few benefits of being plant-forward:

- **It saves you money:** Meat is usually the most expensive part of a meal in grocery stores and at restaurants, so cutting down on it can also cut your expenses.
- **It makes you healthier:** Plant-forward diets are low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals. Fruits and vegetables have amazing amounts of nutrients per calorie!
- **It makes you younger:** Nutrients common in plant-forward diets can strengthen the immune system and slow your body's aging process. You can also decrease your chance of developing diseases associated with meat-based diets, like heart disease and several cancers.
- **It is good for the earth:** Growing plants is better for the environment than raising livestock. Eating more plants in place of animals can make a significant difference in your carbon footprint.

A common recommendation is that meals should be 1/2 fruits and veggies, 1/4 grains, and 1/4 protein. But how do you do that without spending hours in the kitchen or doubling your food budget? Luckily, eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is easy, delicious, and budget friendly.

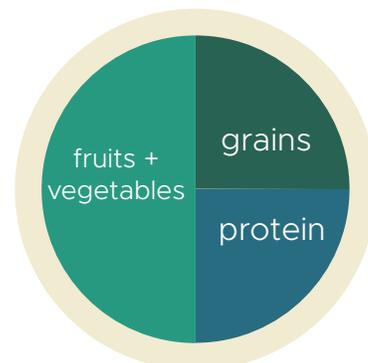
Eating more plants should not be frustrating or annoying. The good news is that a small increase in plant intake plus a small reduction in meat intake can make a big, positive difference in your health and that of the planet! Here we provide 10 tips to fill your plate in a healthy, low-cost, feeling-full, and *delicious* way.

1. A grain, a green, and a bean

When in doubt, this simple formula can lead to delicious, quick, and easy plant-based meals: A grain, a green, and a bean. A meal with at least these three components gives you **vitamins, minerals, whole grains, and protein**. Try combining one of each of these:

- **Whole grains:** quinoa, brown rice, barley, amaranth
- **Greens:** spinach, collards, kale, broccoli
- **Beans:** black eyed peas, black beans, kidney beans, lentils

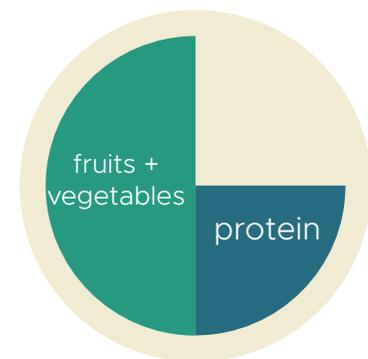
Combining these and seasoning them with your favorite spices or sauce can make a **delicious, nutritious meal in under 30 minutes for less than \$2 per serving**, and can have around 35 grams of protein. That's about 70% of your daily protein need! All these ingredients can be bought in bulk to **save you money and time** at the grocery store. Greens and beans are inexpensive when canned or frozen. They also keep well in the fridge or freezer, so you can make big batches to last a long time! This idea is a great replacement for less nutritious, to-go meal options and can be used to make meals like **casseroles, soups, and gumbos**.



2. Meat as a side

Eating plant-forward **doesn't mean giving up meat**, it just means eating less meat. It's the vegetables' time to shine! The portion of meat on your plate should be about the size of your closed fist.

- Instead of a whole chicken breast and a side of broccoli, **reverse the portions** to half a chicken breast and more broccoli, or broccoli and a whole grain bun.
- Serve your meat sliced on top of your veggies.
- Make a vegetable-based casserole or soup with a small amount of **meat added for flavor** (bacon works wonders here!).
- Halve the amount of meat on your sandwich and add an egg instead.
- Mix half meat and half beans** the next time you're making burgers or tacos. They'll be less expensive, less fatty, and just as delicious!

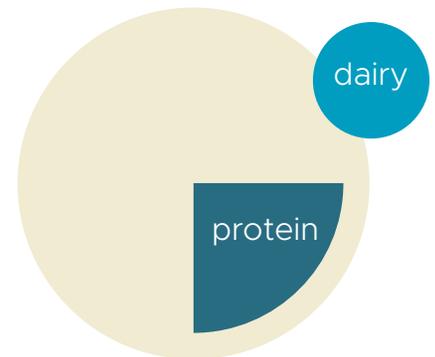


Swapping the starring role of meat to veggies provides more nutrients, added protein, and much less fat. As meat is usually a more expensive grocery item, this switch can also decrease meal costs.

3. Keep the protein

Eating less meat **doesn't mean eating less protein**. Non-meat protein sources are plentiful, diverse, and delicious! Find your favorite protein sources and incorporate them into your everyday diet. Here are some ideas:

- Try **Greek yogurt** for breakfast or a snack. It has a whopping 17 grams of protein per serving and is great with fruit or granola.
- **Cottage cheese** makes a great side or snack, packing 12 grams of protein in a 27-cent serving. Try it with fruit, jam, or nuts on top.
- A **glass of milk** is an easy way to get 8 grams of protein, especially for kids.
- Add an **egg** to sandwiches, salads, stir-fries, or even your grilled cheese. They have 6 grams of protein each.
- Read on for info on grains and beans- they deserve sections of their own!

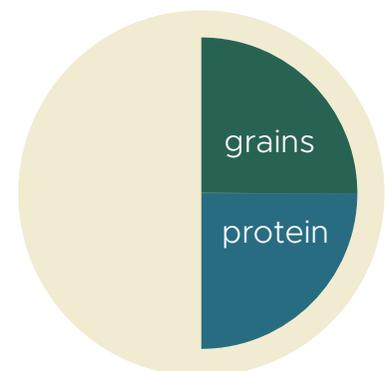


4. Great grains

Whole grains can be an excellent **base for a healthy, protein-packed meal**. Unlike white rice and bread, which have very little nutrients, whole grains are full of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants and have been associated with lowering blood sugar, helping control weight, and reducing the risk of heart disease. Dried grains can be cooked the same way you'd make rice, and whole wheat bread is great for sandwiches. Try out these grains **alongside veggies, in a soup, as a salad, or in a casserole**:

- **Quinoa** (8 g protein/cup)
- **Amaranth** (9 g protein/cup)
- **Brown rice** (5 g protein/cup)
- **Whole wheat bread** (3.6 g protein/slice)

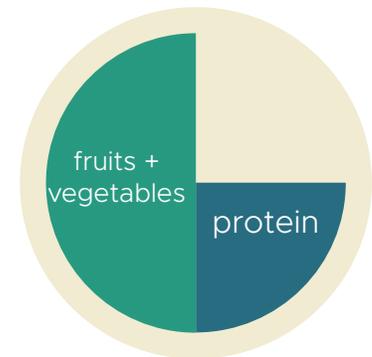
Each of these are usually 30 cents or less per serving! When eaten as part of your healthy plate alongside a hearty amount of vegetables or beans, reducing the amount of meat in your meal will not cause a reduction in protein. Grains last a long time, can be brought in bulk, and can be prepared in large portions or frozen for individual servings, all **saving you time and money**.



5. Lovely legumes, beautiful beans

Legumes (a type of pea) and beans can be a tasty, healthy alternative to meat in any dish. They're high in fiber and have been related to **reduced cholesterol, decreased blood sugar levels, and weight control**. Canned beans and legumes cost about 35 cents per serving, and dried varieties about 15 cents. A cup of these beans and legumes can count for about 30% of your daily protein and over 55% of daily fiber intake:

- Sauté **chickpeas** to make a crispy side dish or pasta topping.
- **Peas** are great in stir-fries and pastas.
- Try **lentils** in a soup, side, bowl, or casserole alongside vegetables and a bit of cheese.
- **Kidney, pinto, and black beans** can be added to brown rice for a protein-packed classic with flavors from around the world.
- Add **peanut butter** to apples, bananas, and oatmeal, or snack on peanuts.



6. It doesn't have to be more expensive

Eating more green **does not mean spending more green**. Check out our guide on 7 healthy low-budget food swaps for some grocery ideas! Be careful: foods labeled “natural,” “organic,” and “non-GMO” do not necessarily mean healthy or more nutritious. They *do* usually mean more expensive.

Many veggies and grains can be purchased in bulk, leading to much **lower costs per serving**. Frozen fruits and vegetables are as nutritious as fresh and usually less expensive. They can quickly be microwaved and added to pastas, casseroles, soups and more! Bonus tip – fruits in season are more likely to taste fresh and be on sale, so shopping the season can save you money.

These delicious, nutritious ingredients all qualify for **SNAP, WIC, and EBT benefits!**

7. It doesn't have to be gourmet

You don't have to go to high-end grocery stores to get delicious foods that provide you with the nutrients you need. Basic ingredients from your favorite local store or even your own backyard are perfect - **nothing fancy required!** Healthy meals also don't have to take hours or specialized methods to prepare.

- **Quinoa, brown rice, lentils**, and other high nutrient grains cook in about the same amount of time as pasta or rice. They can easily be simmered in water on your stove. While you're waiting on your grains to cook, you'll have time to chop and sauté some vegetables, beans, and even a little meat.
- **Make your spaghetti and meatballs healthier** with whole wheat pasta and by replacing a few of those meatballs with cooked veggies like squash or mushrooms in your tomato sauce.
- **On your next burger night**, try frozen bean burgers. They're inexpensive and delicious with your favorite burger toppers! Or, make your burger patty with half meat and half black beans. Have a slider instead of a full burger and add on more veggie sides like baked sweet potato fries.
- **On your next Taco Tuesday**, replace half of your ground beef with beans, or go for full bean tacos! Beans are cheaper, take less time to cook, and are healthier than ground beef, but can be cooked the same way and are delicious with taco seasoning.
- **Casseroles** are easy, quick meals that can serve many and last throughout the week. Nearly any veggie can become a casserole dish. Try baking three different vegetables into a dish together.

Voila! Meat savers with gourmet flavors.

8. Eat a rainbow

Food is much more fun when it's varied! One way to make sure you're getting a diverse range of nutrients is by **eating foods of many colors**. Try eating colorful meals to incorporate every food group and many flavors into your day. For example, you could start your day with brown whole-wheat toast and red apples, enjoy orange sweet potatoes and green spinach at lunch, and eat yellow squash and black quinoa with dinner. **A rainbow of colors means a rainbow of flavors!** Check out the frozen and canned vegetable aisles for low-cost, colorful produce that can be cooked quickly.

9. The sauce is the boss

Sometimes in meat-based meals, the best part isn't the meat- **it's the sauce**. The great news is, delicacies like barbecue sauce, hot sauce, soy sauce, curry, and honey mustard still taste amazing on plants. Although well-intentioned meals can quickly become unhealthy by drenching them with sauce, well-portioned amounts of sauce can bring **amazing flavor to a plant-based dish**. The same goes for cheese! Think of buffalo cauliflower, barbecue tofu, spicy grilled zucchini, or a cheesy veggie bake. You can **discover many new flavors** by applying typical meat sauces to veggies and even try making your own.

10. Try something new

Take eating more plants as a chance to **expand your horizons**. Eating a wider variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can introduce you to new flavors, textures, combinations, cooking styles, and cultures! Plants are used in traditional dishes all around the world- cooking them in styles from other countries is like **traveling from your kitchen**. When you're open to trying to try new foods, you're bound to discover some fresh favorites.

11. (Surprise!) Bring it full circle

When you eat more fruits and vegetables, you're left with more bits of plants that you may not want to eat, like peels, leaves, and stems. Instead of throwing these in your trash and sending them to the landfill, **consider composting!** Composting allows landfills to last longer by keeping unnecessary mass out of them and helps prevent air quality loss from the release of methane from food stuck in landfills. Compost can be made in your own backyard to be used in your garden and sometimes can be picked up on the curb just like your trash. Learn more about composting in Georgia here: www.georgiarecycles.org/composting-in-georgia/ and learn how to promote curbside composting on our website, scienceforgeorgia.org.