

Information From Vegetarian Times: http://www.vegetariantimes.com/article/bulk-buying-101/?utm_source=MyVegetarianTimes&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=MyVegetarianTimes

Guess what? You were right. Bulk is better—better for your food budget, better for your creativity in the kitchen, and better for the planet too. Read on for six essential dos and don'ts to help you make the most of your next bulk foods shopping trip.

DO BUY ONLY AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE AS YOU NEED

According to Nunnery, the No. 1 benefit of buying in bulk is that you can buy exactly how much of a given ingredient you want: “You are in control of the quantity you buy. Quantities aren't dictated to you by the packaging.” Sure, you can buy more, but you can also buy less. For example, you can buy the exact amount called for in a recipe.

TRY BUYING MORE Carolyn Scott-Hamilton, author of *The Healthy Voyager's Global Kitchen*, likes to stock up on healthful staples for everyday cooking. “I love using grains and legumes in my cooking,” says Scott-Hamilton. “Cook once and eat thrice is my motto. I cook up a big pot of beans and a big pot of rice and use them throughout the week in different ways.”

TRY BUYING LESS Buying less of an ingredient (think spices, dried mushrooms, nuts, etc.) can help stretch food dollars, cut down on waste, and keep the contents of your pantry fresher. “I don't want to buy an entire pound of [cocoa](#) powder if I just need 1 or 2 tablespoons for a recipe,” says organic chef Ani Phyo, author of *Ani's 15-Day Fat Blast*. For Phyo, the freedom to buy less also makes it easy to kitchen-test substitutions. “It's a great way to try something without committing,” she says.

DO BRING YOUR OWN CONTAINERS (IF ALLOWED)

“We encourage shoppers to bring their own containers,” says Ricardo Chavira, marketing director of Co-opportunity Natural Foods in Santa Monica, Calif. “No bags are used, and we can easily weigh containers prior to them being filled. It's a win-win!” At In.redients, shoppers even get the tare (empty weight) of their containers on a little sticker that can last for years. If your local store doesn't let shoppers use their own containers, consider suggesting a policy change. “Maybe other grocery stores will do the same thing if customers just ask,” says Nunnery. As for travel-friendly containers, Scott-Hamilton says, “Invest in your own reusable bulk bags so you're not using plastic bags over and over.”

[Editor's pick: Chico Bag Produce Stand Complete Starter Kit; chicobag.com.] Also found at Driftless Market.

DO STOCK UP ON AIRTIGHT CONTAINERS

So how should you store bulk buys at home? VT food editor Mary Margaret Chappell favors 1 and 1 1/2-quart canning jars: “I label them with masking tape and a Sharpie. There have been one too many times I've thought soy flour was chickpea flour or Arborio rice was sushi rice.” Not a fan of Mason jars? Any airtight containers will work. In the mood to purchase new containers? Scott-Hamilton highlights two useful features: easy to stack, and clear, so you can see ingredients.

DON'T CROSS-CONTAMINATE

When shopping in the bulk aisle, Nunnery stresses the importance of being sensitive to other people's allergies. “Always use the right scoop for the right bins,” he says. On this topic, Chavira goes so far as to say that shoppers with a serious gluten intolerance should avoid the bulk bins altogether: “Don't assume something is gluten-free if it is in the bulk bins. If it is stored in a bulk bin around gluten products, it can become contaminated.”

DON'T TOSS THE PLASTIC BAGS

Experiencing eco-guilt over using plastic bags for bulk ingredients? Rest assured that buying in bulk requires less packaging—and printing—than typical off-the-shelf products, even if you use plastic bags to transport your bulk buys home. Plus, the bags are recyclable and reusable. “You can always take them to the farmers' market,” recommends Phyo.

For five creative ways to reuse produce bags, visit vegetariantimes.com/producebags.