

Defeat Debt

Credit Advisors Foundation

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Your Holiday Budget Strategy

This holiday season may be very different for you if you are trying to avoid using credit this year. With the costs of heating fuel and groceries on the rise and uncertainty in the housing, credit and job markets many folks are reassessing their holiday gift giving strategies.

Even if you've already created a holiday spending plan and budget, memories of holidays past and the emotional romanticism we



tend to attach to the season can quickly derail the best of intentions. All the more reason to plan and use a budget so that the holidays don't wear you out and turn into a willy-nilly spending spree requiring the next twelve months to get you back on sound financial footing.

Know your limits—both financial and emotional. The number one reason most financial experts recommend creating a holiday plan and budget is precisely because of the emotional triggers that abound during the season. (Including the fact that money, in and of itself, is usually an emotional issue.) By taking the time

to prepare and plan you will be less likely to be sideswiped by hidden emotional influences or destructive impulse purchasing.

Don't negotiate on your decisions. Once you have determined what is suitable and affordable for you, don't allow others to sway or "guilt" you into more. You'll end up spending far beyond your means and feeling resentful—a sure fire way to dampen the holiday spirit.

Avoid the trap of reciprocation and the pressure of expectations. If you find yourself in the

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Trimming the Fat from Your Holiday Food Budget

When creating a holiday gift budget use the same techniques to plan your holiday food budget as well. Decide on menus for meals, parties, and gatherings only after you have determined your budget. Put the focus on simple foods and seasonings for

your menus to reign in costs without losing flavor. And just like when shopping for gifts, prepare a list before you go to the grocery store to minimize the number of trips you need to make and reduce impulse purchasing. If you're not in the store, you're not

spending money there and it saves you time, as well as helps you avoid the stress related to the hustle and bustle of the season.

Substitute—in most cases when preparing holiday

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Budget Strategy

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middle of a gift exchange that is focused on how much was spent or who got the better gift, don't just rethink the gift and gift-giving, rethink the relationship. It's time to recognize that the holiday season is about relationships not loot.

You might encourage your family to reconsider gifts for everyone and/or spending limits. Sometimes everyone is just waiting for one person to make the suggestion. Why not explore the possibility? (You will want to have this family conversation before early bird shoppers get rolling.)

Be honest at the office. Sometimes the office can become a financial vacuum, sucking up more money from your holiday budget than you may realize. Between gift exchanges, pot lucks, school fund raisers and so on, you may need to establish a fair and equitable plan here as well. Good will and

positive intentions can be difficult to translate into cash amounts.

Start early. Really savvy holiday shoppers have an eye out all year long for gift ideas and price comparisons. If you didn't do that this year, consider starting now for next year. Pick up decorations and wrapping paper at after holiday sale prices to get a head start on next season or find basic or generic paper and decorations for the holidays coming in the next few months.



Buy on line or by catalog—the perfect way to save money and time as well as avoid headaches from the shopping frenzy at the mall.

Homemade gifts are often recommended as a way to save money around the holidays. Unfortunately, homemade *can* mean aggravation. Generally speaking, if you have never completed an arts and crafts project or baked cookies, breads or cakes before, you may be wise to avoid the 'homemade gift' solution. Crafts and baking can be time consuming for the novice this time of year, costing twice as much when reality and frustration sinks in and disaster is averted by the mall purchased gift.

Finally, of course you knew we'd mention it: avoid credit, particularly payday lenders. Nothing contributes to the post-holiday blues like a mountain of bills on January 2nd.

After all, in the blink of an eye, the tax man will be calling. *****

Wrapping up Energy Savings

Everywhere you turn recently Americans are being warned about the potential sky-rocketing of home heating and fuel bills this winter. Naturally, you should keep this in mind when preparing your budget and plans for the holidays, as such increases could easily derail the best intentions if you are hoping to pay off credit card bills after the first of the year.

Of course, there are a variety of things you can do to minimize your energy bill sticker shock. Keep in mind those classic 'Mom' comments like, "don't stand with the refrigerator door open", or "all the lights in the house are on", and this writer's personal favorite "you do know we don't own the electric company, don't you?"

Here are a few more practical ideas:

Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent bulbs and save 66

percent on average. Keep all your light bulbs and light fixtures clean—as much as 25 percent of light output can be diminished by dust.

When cooking, use your microwave rather than the regular oven and save. For even more economical cooking, make sure to keep the inside of your microwave clean. Fill up and use the smallest pans possible, given that the larger the pan the more energy necessary to heat it and whatever you are cooking. Use lids. Food cooks faster when you keep the steam inside (you also lose fewer nutrients).

Use full loads when you make use of the dish washer, washing machine or dryer. Use cold water, unless absolutely necessary, when washing laundry. Clean out the dryer's lint filter after each load and watch the temperature control. (Remember, you're drying the

clothes, not baking them!)

Unplug appliances if not frequently used.

If you make use of decorative holiday lighting get an inexpensive timer to turn the lights on and off automatically.

Allow hot foods to cool down prior to refrigerating and keep in mind that your freezer is actually more energy efficient when full.

Finally, consider showers. Generally, it takes less hot water for a shower than a bath. (We recognize what a HUGE sacrifice it can be to regard those hot mid-winter bubble baths as a special treat rather than a regular occurrence. We really do!)

There are both little and big things you can do to cut down on energy use and as a result keep your energy costs under control this winter.*****

*Word Search * Word Search * Word Search * Word Search * Word Search*

The Word Search Challenge—the words listed below, pulled from the articles in this edition of Defeat Debt, are hidden in our puzzle. Test your skill and find all sixteen words.

- BILLS
- BUDGET
- COST
- ELECTRIC
- EMOTIONAL
- ENERGY
- FOOD
- FUEL
- HOLIDAY
- NEED
- PLAN
- SEASON
- SHOPPING
- SPEND
- WANT
- WRAPPING

H	E	M	O	T	I	O	N	A	L
Z	L	S	E	A	S	O	N	D	B
T	E	S	D	N	E	P	S	O	U
N	C	O	R	E	E	P	M	O	D
A	T	C	G	Q	E	R	M	F	G
W	R	A	P	P	I	N	G	Y	E
B	I	L	L	S	V	A	J	Y	T
K	C	O	S	T	R	L	E	U	F
W	I	S	H	O	P	P	I	N	G
H	O	L	I	D	A	Y	A	N	G

Trimming Food Budget

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meals or treats, check out generic or store brand prices. Always scan the upper and lower shelves at the market, as brand name products are usually shelved at eye level. Avoiding costly name brand ingredients won't change the taste of your recipe but may produce significant savings. Remember to compare the costs between fresh and frozen vegetables for savings this time of year as well.

Make your side dishes the stars of the show. Side dishes like rice, stuffing or mashed potatoes fill you up without breaking the bank. Garnishes up the ante—for mashed potatoes sprinkle lightly with paprika and parsley flakes for color, or put chopped sweet red bell peppers in among the peas, Brussels sprouts or broccoli; chopped green bell pepper in with the tomatoes. Try cutting stars out of cheese to place atop casseroles or garnish with edible flowers and herbs. *****



Our success is made possible by your success. Thank YOU. May you and yours enjoy a bountiful Thanksgiving.

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Get Out of Debt with No Regret !!



The Kitchen on a Dime

Potato and Leek Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 (about 3 large) pounds leeks
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon margarine or butter
- 12 ounces all-purpose potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 (14- to 14 1/2-ounce) cans reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 (plus 1 tablespoon chopped) sprigs fresh dill
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Directions:

1. Cut off roots and trim dark green tops from leeks. Discard any tough outer leaves. Cut each leek lengthwise in half, then crosswise into 1/4-inch-wide slices. Rinse leeks thoroughly in large bowl of cold water, swishing to remove sand. With hands, transfer leeks to colander to drain, leaving sand in bottom of bowl. Repeat process, changing water several times, until all sand is removed.
2. In 4-quart saucepan, heat oil and margarine on medium until margarine melts. Add leeks and cook 8 to 10 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Stir in potatoes, broth, dill sprig, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper. Cover and heat to boiling on high. Reduce heat to low; simmer 15 minutes or until potatoes are very tender.

3. Ladle potato mixture into blender in 3 batches; cover, with center part of lid



removed to allow steam to escape. Lay a paper towel over top and blend until pureed. Pour each batch of puree into bowl. Return all puree to same saucepan. Stir in milk; heat through. Stir in chopped dill and lemon juice.

Recipe makes 6 servings at \$1 each.