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**School Lunches the Frugal Way!**

**By Cyndi Roberts**

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It seems that school starts earlier every year. So it's time to start thinking about what to put in those school lunches every morning.

My children always wanted to bring their own lunches because they didn't really like what was offered in the school lunchroom. But it was sometimes a little difficult to make their lunches nutritious and tasty and also to put a little variety in their lunchboxes without spending a small fortune.

If we let ourselves, we can spend a "lot" on individual servings, lunchables, and treats for lunches. Here are a few ideas to help you meet the "Frugal Lunchbox Challenge".

Go to the Dollar Store and buy a few of those individual serving-size storage containers. These are very inexpensive and they are worth every penny.

You can use them for any number of things—like making your own fruit cups and pudding cups.

And they can also be used to hold dip for carrot or celery sticks or fill with peanut butter and pack a zipper bag of pretzels for dipping.

Also at the Dollar Store or discount store, you can pick up one or two of the small "blue ice" cold packs. They will help keep lunchbox items cold and safe. Sandwiches such as egg salad or tuna salad need to have a cold pack. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, on the other hand, can be packed without one.

Those zipper bags we all love come into their own when packing lunches! They can hold vegetable sticks, popcorn, crackers, homemade cookies, etc.

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Muffins hold up well in a zipper-top bag, as do slices of banana nut bread, or most any other quick bread.

When the weather turns cool, a small thermos will come in handy for homemade soup or chili. I see lots of these for sale at garage and yard sales, sometimes for as little as 25 cents.

A thermos is also handy to hold whatever drink your child likes to take.

Try to put some fun in the lunchbox: keep a stash of small, inexpensive toys, cut sandwich bread into cool shapes with cookie cutters, write little notes to your child, cut out funny cartoons. Children love surprises.

A good routine to get into is while you are cleaning up the kitchen after dinner, put leftovers in the storage containers, or make sandwiches and place in the fridge in a designated area for lunch items. Get your kids to help—the more they are involved, the better!

Put napkins, etc. in lunch boxes or bags and place them where all anyone has to do in the morning is fill with the prepared items. Now you can all be out the door in minutes!

Here are a few recipes that will help get you started this school year:

Apple Surprise 1 apple Raisins Peanut butter

Cut apple in half. Carefully, cut out the core of the apple. Spread peanut butter where the core used to be and over surface of apple. Sprinkle raisins over the peanut butter.

Trail Mix 2 cups granola cereal 1 cup peanuts 1 cup dried apple bits 1 1/2 cups yogurt-covered raisins 2/3 cup chopped dates 1 cup dried banana bits

Combine all ingredients and store in an airtight container.

A small serving of this goes a long way!

Peanut Butter Balls 1/2 c. peanut butter 2 1/2 tbsp. nonfat dry milk 2 tbsp. raisins 2 tbsp. honey 1/4 c. coconut Sesame seeds

Mix all ingredients and form into balls. Roll in sesame seeds.

This is a good recipe for the kids to help with— they love to roll the dough into balls.

NOTE: sesame seeds are cheaper in bulk at a health food store. You can get unsweetened coconut there, also.

Cyndi Roberts is the editor of the "1 Frugal Friend 2 Another" bi-weekly newsletter and founder of the website of the same name. Visit

to find creative tips, articles, and a free

e-cooking book. Subscribe to the newsletter and receive the free e-course "Taming the Monster Grocery Bill".

**Book Review: "Frugal Living for Dummies"**

**By Deborah Shelton**

**Book Review: "Frugal Living for Dummies" by Deborah Shelton**

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Book Review: "Frugal Living for Dummies"  
Reviewed by Deborah Shelton

"Frugal Living for Dummies"  
by Deborah Taylor-Hough  
Publisher: Wiley Publishing, Inc.  
ISBN: 0-7645-5403-4  
Price: \$16.99 US

Whatever your reason for wanting to save money (job loss, suddenly single-income, another child on the way, rising college tuition costs), arm yourself with Frugal Living for Dummies for super saving success.

This book details so much more than coupon-clipping. Some of the chapter topics include ideas for frugal family fun, thrifty cooking tips, ways to cut utility bills, setting a budget and lots of inexpensive gift ideas. And that's just the beginning! Frugal Living also provides icons in the margins that alert readers to important reminders, tips, super savers, special warnings, great ideas and handy checklists.

Each section is jam-packed with cost-cutting ideas for baby showers, back-to-school needs, dinner parties, gift giving, auto maintenance, home cleaning, dining out, laundry, family trips.... Basically, Deborah Taylor-Hough offers

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money-saving solutions for every aspect of your life.

Frugal Living for Dummies is an essential reference for your family collection. This book will make a practical and thoughtful gift for young couples just starting their lives together, college students on their own for the first time, single-income families, new parents, and anyone who needs

proven ways for cutting costs while keeping their sanity.

A must-have guidebook for the novice penny pincher as well as the seasoned dollar stretcher.

About the Reviewer: Deborah Shelton is a mother, freelance writer, and author of the brand new book, "The Five Minute Parent: Fun & Fast Activities for You and Your Little Ones." Visit Deborah's website for more family-friendly ideas: <http://www.fiveminuteparent.com>

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