



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article

March 29, 2016

Dollars in Your Pocket

By Robert Erickson, Henderson County Master Gardener

The one thing that most people participate in these days is talking about the high cost of food. That includes those who eat out frequently as well as those who prepare most of their food at home. For those who eat out, the simplest solution is to prepare more of your meals at home. You provide the cook, the server, and the clean up service rather than paying for those services.

For those who prepare most of their family meals, take heart. There are still ways to save money on spiraling food costs. If you want to save money in the kitchen, what is the most expensive thing you purchase on a per pound basis? Meat? Maybe. Bread? Not really. So what do you pay the most for on a per pound basis?

Would you believe that that little square bottle of basil costs you over \$30 per pound? Oh yes, I love the little square glass bottles too. I save all of them and fill them with home grown basil, thyme, rosemary, and other herbs. The nice bottle typically contains two ounces of the desired herb and costs between \$5-10 in the store. One eighth of a pound costs five dollars; that means that one pound costs...I won't tell you; you can do the math.

In this area, we can easily grow almost every herb that is available in the store. The plants usually cost less than \$2 or \$3 dollars and will give you fresh, not dried, flavor from spring through fall. And the nice thing is that you can grow most of them anywhere either in the ground or in a container. A little potting soil and a plant and you have all of the fresh herbs you need until winter hits. Even then, you can take the remaining leaves, dry them, crush them, and put them in the little square bottles you have been saving and they will get you through the winter.

For those who like to use some of the "exotic" herb mixes, you can make your own probably from the herbs you already have on your shelf. Look on the Internet; there are recipes for mixes for everything from "Herbs de Provence" to "Garam Masala."

A few potted plants on your patio, a couple in the ground in your garden, and you too will savor the taste of fresh herbs over dried ones of unknown origin and date.

Want to save more? For around \$2-\$3, you can buy a bunch of onion sets and plant them wherever you want in the garden. A bunch of sets usually contain about sixty future onions that will each weigh around half to one pound. The stores sell these at about \$1 per pound. That's saving some serious money. Don't worry about which onion set to buy; in Texas we have one of the best there is. The Texas 1015Y is a variety of sweet yellow onion that was developed by Texas A&M. It is easy to grow here and tastes marvelous.



Try a bell pepper plant or a jalapeno or a cayenne pepper. How about a tomato? You can try potatoes too. My favorite is the Yukon Gold and in spite of its name, it grows well in East Texas.

Give these a try. Start with one and you will never go back.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.