

# Denice's Homeowner News

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## 7 Ideas for Slashing Your Grocery Bill

Saving money on groceries used to not be on my priority list. Who has the time to clip coupons and keep track of when and where the sales are just to be able to save a few cents? Then one day, purely by accident, I discovered an amazing fact—if I spent less money on groceries, I would have more money to spend on other stuff! This revelation motivated me to search for strategies that would help me spend as little as possible on each trip to the grocery store. Here are seven of the most helpful strategies I discovered:

**Grocery Stores are for Groceries**  
Funny thing—it turns out that grocery stores make the least amount of profit on groceries. The most profitable items for these stores are things like shampoo, toothpaste, paper towels, over-the-counter drugs, and other non-food items. Yes, it's very convenient to buy these things while you are already at the store, but this convenience will cost you 20%-30% more than buying the same thing at a discount store such as Target or Wal-Mart. Why not make the extra trip and save some money? It adds up over time...

### Bend and Stretch

Clever people those storeowners are... They know that bending to get something from the bottom shelf or stretching to reach something from the top one is too much exercise for most of us. That's why they conveniently place the most expensive stuff right at eye-level so that we can easily reach for it. The best deals

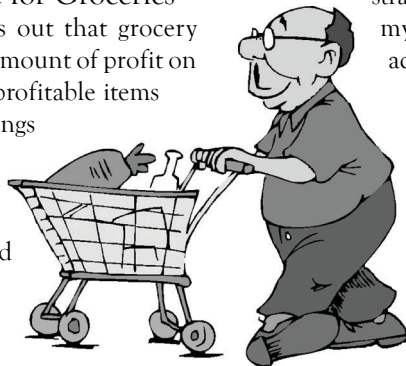
for us (and worst deals for them) are usually in the harder-to-reach places, like the top and bottom shelves. So bend and stretch and reach and save—this type of exercise is good for your wallet.

### Eat More Fruit

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Apples, and other fruit, also happen to be less expensive than candy and snack foods. So instead of filling up on high-sugar, high-fat, high-price junk food, I concluded that going with healthful and relatively inexpensive fruit is a better strategy. I am sure that both my doctor and my accountant would concur.

### Pretty Things Cost More

Packaging adds considerably to the total cost of a product. The fancier the package, the more expensive the content. Also, boxed items are more expensive than bagged products, which in turn are more expensive than loose stuff. Being that it's not the packaging that we eat, forgoing a colorful box can save us some pennies. For example, store brands and local brands are often of comparable quality to nationally advertised products, but have more modest-looking packaging, and are cheaper. Another example is meat and cheese. Buy the pre-packaged kind from the center-aisles and you will pay many pennies more than if you buy the same thing from the deli corner or the meat block section. *(continued, Page 2)*



Ghosts, goblins and other scary experiences may be fine for Halloween, but they have no place in your next real estate transaction. Are you thinking of buying or selling soon? Having an experienced real estate professional on your side who knows your area well can be the difference between getting tricked or getting treated. So give me a call or send me an e-mail today, and let's work together. I offer friendly service, solid advice and utmost professionalism. Oh, and there is never any sales pressure.

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# Pre-Approval Process Demystified

You've heard the term before, but if you are a first-time homebuyer you might still wonder what exactly is this pre-approval thing. What's involved? Do you really need it? So let's demystify this process and see how it really works.

## Step 1

You will meet with a lender's representative (who's called a *loan officer*) for about 20 minutes at his or her office. You will fill out a loan application that will, ask for information about your income, assets, employment, loans, etc. Upon completing the application the lender will ask to see copies of your W-2 forms (usually two year's worth), pay stubs (usually one month's worth), bank statements (for the last three months) and perhaps tax returns (usually the last two). You will then give the lender an authorization to check your credit, finish the coffee the loan officer's assistant brought you, and go home to wait for the answer.

## Step 2

The lender will obtain your full credit report, look to see what's in it, and check your credit score. Your employment will also be verified (your employer might need to write a letter stating how long you have worked for the company), and your income and available cash will be checked. If everything looks OK, the lender will continue onto the next step.

## Step 3

The loan officer will submit all the paperwork (called the *loan package*) to a person that will give the final "aye" or "nay" to your application. This person is called the *underwriter*. And how long does it take to get the decision? Generally, you can expect a quick answer if you've worked at the same company for a number of years, have strong income, little debt, have great credit and money for the down payment

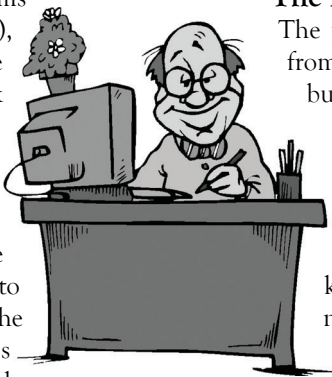
ready. A more complicated application (you are self-employed, or need a co-signer, or have credit dings) is the one that will take more time.

## Step 4

Once the underwriter approves (or *pre*-approves, I should say) your application, you will receive a pre-approval letter. It will state the maximum loan amount you qualify for, how much money you will need for the down payment and what your interest rate and monthly payments are likely to be.

## The Benefits

The person who benefits most from a pre-approval is—you, the buyer. You will know exactly how much you can qualify for so you and your Realtor can look at homes in the right price range. Because you will know how much you will need for the down payment and what your monthly payments are going to be, you can plan your budget accordingly. When you and your Realtor find the right home, your offer will be considered more seriously by the seller than any offer from someone who does not have the pre-approval. And once your offer is accepted, the loan approval will be one less thing to worry about.



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### Buy in Bulk, Cook in Bulk

*This dual strategy can save you money in two ways. First, buying in bulk is often less expensive than buying in small quantities. Secondly, prepare a double meal, and freeze half for later. When that later comes, you'll have a fast heat-and-serve meal available, rather than being tempted to head to a restaurant (and spend money) if you don't feel like cooking. Oh, and one more quick note—buying in bulk is not always cheaper. When deciding between one big package and a few smaller packages of the same product, consider the cost-per-unit (or cost-per-ounce). This is sometimes indicated on the package, and sometimes you will have to calculate it yourself (don't feel embarrassed to bring a calculator with you to the store).*

### Sunday Paper

*Those two pounds of recyclable paper you receive every Sunday have two money-saving features. First, there are the ads that tell you where the sales are and what's on sale. Secondly, there are numerous coupons that can probably save you \$5-\$10 on your next trip to the store. Now, I know there are people who don't want to bother with clipping coupons, but spending a couple of minutes glancing through the paper and clipping only coupons for stuff you'll buy anyway is not a big time-commitment. Ten cents here and twenty cents there can really add up.*

### When a Great Deal is Not

*Finally, saving money is not about always buying what's cheapest. Quality matters. Someone once told me: "I am not rich enough to buy cheap stuff." It*

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## Free Special Report Available

**The Seven Expensive Mistakes Buyers Frequently Make** is a three-page special report that no buyer should be without. If you are thinking of buying a home soon, arm yourself with the knowledge that can help you avoid expensive mistakes too many people have made. Request this report today – there is no cost or obligation.

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# Keeping Your Favorite Princess, Goblin or Super-Hero Safe

Halloween is a fun and exciting time for kids, but not without danger. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children are four times more likely to suffer an injury during Halloween than during any other day of the year. To help ensure that your family has a happy and safe holiday this year, I obtained the following safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- ✓ Trick-or-treating happens at night, so plan costumes that are bright and reflective.
- ✓ Most Halloween injuries occur due to tripping and falling. Make sure that your trick-or-treater's costume is not too long, that the shoes fit well, and that the mask does not obscure eyesight. Actually, instead of the mask consider using non-toxic makeup or decorative hats as safer alternatives.
- ✓ When shopping for costumes, wigs and accessories look for those that are clearly labeled as fire-resistant (there will be a lot of burning Jack-o-Lanterns out there).
- ✓ To keep homes safe for visiting trick-or-treaters, parents should remove from the porch and front yard anything a child could trip over such as garden hoses, toys, bikes and lawn decorations.
- ✓ Pets can get frightened by the strange sights and sounds of Halloween. Make sure that your furry friends are safe, and that they are restrained so that they don't jump on or bite a visiting trick-or-treater.
- ✓ Consider purchasing non-food treats for those who visit your home, such as coloring books, pencils and crayons, stickers, rub-on tattoos and coins.

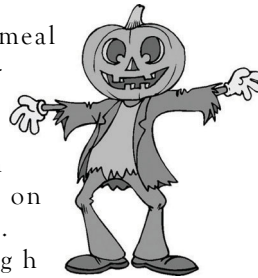
- ✓ A good meal prior to trick-or-treating will discourage youngsters from filling up on Halloween treats.

- ✓ Although tampering is rare, a responsible adult should closely examine all treats and throw away any spoiled, unwrapped or suspicious items.
- ✓ An adult should accompany young children on their neighborhood rounds.

- ✓ For older children going alone, plan and review the route that is acceptable to you. Agree on a specific time when they should be home.

Remind trick-or-treaters of the basic safety rules:

- ✓ Stay in a group, especially when crossing the street.
- ✓ Only cross the street on an established crosswalk. Don't assume the right of way. Motorists may have trouble seeing trick-or-treaters, and just because one car stops it doesn't mean others will.
- ✓ Only go to homes where the porch light is on, and never enter anyone's home to get treats.
- ✓ Carry a flashlight with fresh batteries.
- ✓ Children going alone should also know how to call 911 in case of an emergency or getting lost, and carry quarters (or a cell phone) to call home if needed.



**Q: What's a no-doc loan?**

**A:** No-doc(ument) loan is a type of mortgage where the borrower is not required to provide proof of income. It is often used by the self-employed and people who have difficulty proving how much money they make (get paid in cash, do freelance work, new to the country, etc.). The approval process works in a way similar to a regular loan: credit report is checked, money for the down payment is verified, employment is checked (if possible), and the only thing that is skipped is the income part—the borrower simply states how much money he or she makes. These types of loans normally require very good credit, and higher down payment. The interest rate is also higher than with regular mortgages as the lenders view the no-doc loans as being more risky.

**Have a tough real estate question? Your calls and e-mails are always welcome:**

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*makes sense. You buy a cheap, lower-quality product instead of the one you like; you try it, hate it, throw it away, then go back to the store and buy the one you wanted in the first place. Paying double is wasteful even for the rich, so sticking to quality stuff is a good idea for them and for the rest of us.*



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SPECIAL OCTOBER FEATURE

## HALLOWEEN: THEN AND NOW

The origins of Halloween can be traced back 2000 years to Celts who lived in Scotland, Ireland and northern France. In their calendar, October 31<sup>st</sup> was the end of summer, and November 1<sup>st</sup> was the beginning of winter and the New Year. This occasion was celebrated by a festival Samhain (pronounced *sow-in*), which means "end of summer." Celts believed that in the night when the old year ends the new begins the spirits of the dead would return to earth causing mischief. During the festivities of Samhain the villagers would dress in scary costumes and march loudly through the streets in order to scare away the evil spirits. They would light bonfires and try to tell each other's fortune (they believed that bonfires revealed future). And they also believed in faeries. Now, faeries were neither evil nor good, they just liked being treated well and got upset if they were mistreated. Faeries, Celts believed, would dress as beggars on October 31<sup>st</sup>, and would go door to door asking for food. People who gave them food were left alone, but those who slammed the door experienced some unpleasantness.

Over the years, Celts were conquered by Romans, and the influence of Christianity started to grow in Celtic lands. In the seventh century Pope Boniface IV wanted to do away with the pagan holiday, but felt he couldn't ban it out of fear of causing civil unrest. So he sanctioned a new holiday—the All Saints Day, to be celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Called All-hallows in old English, this new holiday would honor the martyrs and saints. A couple of centuries later another holiday was added, the All Souls Day (November 2<sup>nd</sup>) honoring the dead. It was celebrated in similar fashion as Samhain, with bonfires, costumes and parades. All three holidays became known as Hallowmas. The night before All-hallows was called All-hallows Eve, and in slang came to be known as Halloween. It's still celebrated each October 31<sup>st</sup> and enjoyed by people of many different faiths.

