

Strategies Applied:

- I generally use my food processor on the vegetables: my kids have gone through stages where they're a bit picky, so I pulse them and mince them very finely in this recipe. It takes about two minutes to prepare them. Rough chop them first, especially the celery.
- You can also vary your ingredients by season, add more or less, or put in whatever you like. The original recipe called for jarred mushrooms, but we omitted them...put them back in, or saute your own and add if you like them.
- If you do not overcook your noodles and use a heartier one than the egg noodles, this dish can be doubled and frozen.
- Ground Beef:** I'll generally buy the 80/20; it cost so much less. I do drain carefully when I brown for things like casseroles, sloppy Joes or tacos. Every chef I've ever seen that isn't making their own mixes for hamburgers uses this more juicy option. In our area, it's often half of what you find the leaner versions at. Generally, I'll find larger quantities on sale: I'll bring it home and divide up up and freeze. Sometimes I'll cook it up and then divide it in Ziplocs so it's ready for a casserole and then freeze. My daughter cuts hers with Texturized Soy Protein for budget and health reasons. My cost for ground beef here is \$1.98.
- Onion:** Usually cheapest in the fall, I bought last at 33 cents a pound. I generally look for larger bags as they have larger onions; less time peeling. I'll also stock up because they keep for quite a long time. Do not keep them next to your potatoes, however.
- Whenever I peel my onions, I save the tops and bottoms and skin for my stock. If I only need a partial onion, I'll often just saute up the whole thing and put the excess in a zip bag in my freezer for a later use. This saves that odd 1/2 onion lurking around in the fridge, getting stronger and drying out. Cost for this recipe: 10 cents.
- Celery:** Running through December at my store for \$.98 a sleeve. Again, just like for carrots and onions, I'll save my tips and ends for stock. Make sure you use the leaves as they have a ton of flavor. Cost for this recipe is about 10 cents.
- Bell Peppers:** These can vary in pricing depending on the color, and of course, are always cheapest in the summer. There are two types of sales, per pound or per pepper. I usually look for the per pepper pricing; in my area it's generally cheaper - I'll then buy the biggest, most gorgeous ones I can find. The peppers are often bagged and sold by a unit price, too. A really good price in our area is about a dollar a pepper, so I usually try to stretch them when I can.

They really do add an important flavor ingredient to a lot of dishes.

- When I can get a really good price, I'll stock up and slice or dice and saute and put them in Ziploc bags in the freezer in quantities I generally use for my recipes, appropriately labeled, of course. They're generally a bit softer, so I go easy on the cooking process, and make sure to cook only till crisp/tender. Cost for this recipe: 40 cents.

- V-8 juice:** Always buy this on sale with a coupon. I usually save the tomato juice from the can when I use canned tomatoes, and keep this in the freezer - so today, I used that instead. Using the V-8 would add a more diverse type of vegetable in the dish. My cost: Free.

- Noodles:** I find pasta on sale all the time at my grocery store for \$.99 lb. I, personally, have not paid for any of my pasta for several years. I've found by buying the higher quality high protein/low carb or whole wheat varieties I can usually use a coupon, probably because there is such stiff competition between the different brands.

- Quite often you'll see these at the producer's websites, usually for 50 cents to a \$1.00 each; sometimes I'll find coupons on olive oil for pasta (and sometimes I'll find olive oil coupons on the pasta.) My cost for the pasta today: Free - you'll notice that I substituted a different style of noodle because that was what I had the most of in my cupboard.

From the kitchen of the FrugalHausfrau.com