

Strategies Applied:

The toppings are often what makes or breaks the dish in terms of pricing. I often use just the bottom portion of Romaine lettuce since it is crunchy and cool and use the rest for salad later in the week, and use half an onion in the recipe, the rest for topping and the same with the tomato. 1/2 a large tomato is usually sufficient for my family. I start with about 4 ounces of cheese - of course, the fam will eat any amount of cheese that's out, so I start with a smaller amount on a dish, and they moderate a bit better! Lime is wonderful with this dish, too, as is avocado, both a bit pricier than some of the toppings, and not included in the amounts!

Premade hard shells may often be bought at just a fraction of the cost of tortillas, by the way, with coupons and sales. These home-made shells are just so good, though!

The Picadillo can be doubled (or increased by any proportion you'd like) and be frozen in meal sized portions in a ziploc bag. It's moist enough to withstand some time in the freezer, very well wrapped. If using a container, make sure to press plastic wrap on top of the mixture before add in the lid.

- **Ground Beef:** I always buy on sale and freeze - I don't think there is ever a reason to pay full price. If I have a bit left over because the sale price doesn't allow me to always choose the quantity, I put the remainder in a Ziploc and freeze, noting the weight on the package. I'll add to it until I get enough to make something. Cost \$1.99 a pound, two pounds \$3.96.
- **Tortillas:** Always look for great deals around Cinco de Mayo, or bargain sales priced packages. I picked up a package of 36 for \$1.19, divided in to portions and froze the remainder, well wrapped in plastic and foil. They'll keep for a month or two with no discernible difference, but after that, they'll lose quality. I always look for the local brands. If I can't find a rock bottom deal like above, look for packages of 12 - 18 for a buck. Cost for this recipe 52 cents.
- **Onions:** They keep well, so try to buy on sale. Aldi's is a good place to find reasonably priced onions. Always less expensive in the fall/winter months, the pricing in my area runs from 33 to 66 cents a pound. Store them in a dark, cool place but not near potatoes. If you've bought too many onions, don't let them go bad. 1 at 33 cents a pound, about 10 cents.
- **Tomatoes, fresh:** These vary in price (and quality) according to season, and a good price here in Minnesota is between 69 and 99 cents a pound. In the winter, I often look for plum tomatoes because they seem to taste better. Don't be swayed by the outside of the tomato - some of the best have imperfections, especially if they're vine ripened. Never refrigerate your tomatoes if you can help it. An old farm wife's trick? Add a sprinkle of salt and sugar if your tomatoes are tasteless. 1 large tomato, about 40 cents.
- **Russet Potatoes:** Potatoes are dirt cheap - look for a great sales price of \$1.99 for 10 pounds in the fall and winter; regular sales price is \$1.99 for five pounds in my area. Store in a cool dry area, not near your onions - I like to store in a loosely closed paper bag. Don't know what to do with a large bag? Make what recipes you'd like to, then make [Freezer Twice Baked Potatoes](#) with the rest. I often pick out the smaller, misshapen potatoes for mashing and save the more regular sized ones for baking or other recipes. Whenever possible, I scrub and keep the skins on, even though they may not be shown that way in a recipe...

- A medium" sized potato (in my mind) runs about 5 ounces, smaller a few ounces less and a large around 8. Large "baking" potatoes look gorgeous but are always pricier and way above normal serving sizes. Cost for a medium at \$1.99 for 10 pounds, is 4 cents.
- **Olives:** For this recipe, any green olive will do – I often find them on special around Holidays and during the summer, sometimes with coupons. Just like with Tuna, your pharmacy shops often have great sales on olives. (They're often 99 cents at Walgreens, and often there are 50 cent coupons available.) I'll find them, also, sitting in grocery carts with other items reduced for quick sale as their reach their "best by" date – a seemingly arbitrary date stamped on the jar by the manufacturer, it seems to have little meaning for many items, including olives. They keep forever in the jar, and literally for months in the fridge after being opened. This small amount was 20 cents.
- **Romaine lettuce:** Look for 99 cents a head, [buying by the head](#) is much less expensive than the prebagged varieties. I used about 1/2 a head, cost 50 cents.
- **Cheese:** Cheese is an item that I almost always buy on sale. Often with store specials, coupons and special offers from the producers I can get cheese very cheaply, and sometimes at no cost. I'll stock up then – if it's not open, it keeps forever. If I have to freeze, I will sometimes do this – it's ok when used in a casserole, but not very good for eating. I look for a price of a dollar (or less) for an eight ounce block of store cheese. I used about 4 ounces of colby, and paid about 40 cents.