



ten
dollar
DINNERS



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140 Recipes and Tips to Elevate Simple,
Fresh Meals Any Night of the Week

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with Raquel Pelzel

Photographs by Ben Fink



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Philippe, Valentine, Charlotte, Margaux, and Océane:
You made this happen, and you make this matter.



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introduction

I am so proud to bring my first cookbook to your kitchen, because it will help you save money (and lots of it) and encourage you to think about cooking in a different way.

I see my recipes as part of a bigger story that shows you how to eat well, be a responsible consumer, and spend with purpose. Saving money can be incredibly empowering—especially when you know that you’re putting healthy dinners on the table for your family every night of the week.

I believe that a budget meal can also be an enticing one: delicious, fresh, exciting, and made without compromise. At its heart, that is what my Food Network show, *Ten Dollar Dinners*, and my *Ten Dollar Dinners* cookbook are all about: the celebration of smart cooking and saving along the way. So if you think that budget food is only about meat loaf and rice and beans, think again. On these





pages, you'll find recipes that call for shrimp, wild mushrooms, and sirloin steak (as well as creative ways to dress up meat loaf and rice and beans!).

I learned how to be a smart cook and shopper because I grew up with a coupon-cutter mentality and on a shoestring budget. My mom raised me on her own *and* while she was putting herself through college and medical school. To say that money was tight would be an understatement. I remember one time when we had a jar of pickles in the refrigerator, and that was it. My mom, my sister, and I stayed up until the wee hours of the morning making candles to sell at the local dime store so we could buy groceries. Waste was never a temptation in our house. That said, my mom still wanted to teach me the joy of hosting others, something we rarely had the budget to do. When I was five Mom invited her girlfriends (and their daughters) and my friends (and their moms) over for a ladies' holiday cookie and hot cocoa party at our home in Tucson, Arizona. Even though we had no extra cash to be throwing a party, we still managed to put together a beautiful celebration on a tight budget. We decorated the Christmas tree, ate cookies, drank hot cocoa, and sang songs around the piano. It was simple and lovely. That single experience taught me how beautiful it is to cook for people and to bring joy to loved ones by creating something welcoming. My mom passed away when I was twenty years old, and to this day, I still hold our holiday cookie and cocoa memory close to heart—in fact, every December I now host a mother-daughter holiday tea with my four girls and their friends and their mothers.



My path to being the mom of four girls and hosting my own television show was circuitous, to say the least! After graduating from the University of Vermont, I went to Georgetown University and earned an MBA, which led to a career in finance and strategy. My job eventually landed me in France. I fell in love with the food markets in Paris: the cheese shops and boulangeries, the butchers and outdoor produce stalls. I was living there when I made the leap from relying on recipes to letting beautiful ingredients drive a meal.

I lived in France for four years and met my future husband and father of our gorgeous girls there. We married in the small village where he grew up in the south of France and eventually moved back to the United States. Before I knew it, we were parents to four little girls, and I found myself streamlining our expenses (just like my mom had to do) so we could survive on a single income. Shopping and cooking for four hungry toddlers and a husband with decidedly sophisticated tastes on a strict budget became a challenge, a game, and something I was hardwired to do.

I started teaching other women strategies for saving money while cooking delicious homemade meals. The most requested topic was how to make homemade yogurt—because we went through a *lot* of yogurt, and I quickly discovered that I could save hundreds of dollars a year just by making it myself. I decided to set up a handheld video camera in my kitchen and shoot a demo of me making yogurt that I would e-mail to my stay-at-home-mom group. That was the video that landed me a spot on *The Next Food Network Star*.

On the show, when we were down to three finalists, only one of whom would get their own program, the challenge was to make the “ultimate dinner party” for an incredibly esteemed group of judges (Bobby Flay, Rick Bayless, Masaharu Morimoto, and Marcus Samuelsson, to name a few). Our budget was sky’s-the-limit *huge*. You know what dish stole the show (and sealed my fate)? My humble Potato-Bacon Torte (page 348), a country-style savory pie that cost me about fifty cents a serving to make. These chefs were being treated to the best that money could buy and they chose my simple and downright cheap

potato pie over the other contestants' pricier dishes! It concreted my philosophy that a delicious meal doesn't have to be expensive to satisfy even the most esteemed taste buds. That is the power of *Ten Dollar Dinners*.

I want my recipes to be clever examples of a bigger story, a celebration of resource responsibility and spending with purpose. Saving money can be incredibly empowering, and it feels good to know we are spending wisely. I have hundreds of savings strategies to share, and if I could personally go shopping with each one of you—walking you through the grocery store and unveiling bargains and tips—then cook in your kitchens, I would. But instead, I offer this book, which I hope gets you as excited about cutting your grocery bill as I do about cutting mine.

I consider myself the luckiest cook in the world. I have my very own test kitchen “staffed” by my daughter-chefs and the world's most supportive husband. We don't overspend and we love food that nourishes our bodies and our souls. I believe in the power of the family meal and making them happen as often as possible. I hope that with this cookbook, you will find many fantastic recipes and mealtime strategies that help you get dinner on the table and guide you to living and eating better.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa d'Arban". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.





A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white bowl filled with pasta and vegetables. The background is blurred, showing a patterned fabric. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

making *ten dollar dinners* work for you

This book is about serving delicious food to your family and friends (and yourself) and how to do that while saving money. Some of that happens when you're out grocery shopping: looking for manager's specials, markdowns, and advertised weekly deals (boneless chicken breasts when they're on sale can be half their usual price). However, grocery-store cash-register success stories are only part of the big picture. The other part happens at home. A combination of smart recipes, ingredient-management strategies, and cost-saving tips adds up to less waste and more economy in the kitchen (for example, use cabbage to bulk up fennel, water adds volume to chicken broth, and stretch shrimp with inexpensive and filling beans or pasta).

Cooking on a budget should feel great—I feel empowered knowing that I spend my family's resources wisely and still cook fantastic meals. What I hope you will take away after reading this book is that you can serve exciting, fresh, and tasty food without sacrifice.

Recipe costs are calculated according to how much of each ingredient is used, not by the price of the entire package of the ingredient. The cost of a cup of sugar, for instance, counts toward the total cost of