

smart shopping

Food shopping is a chore for most people, and there is nothing more stressful than running around looking for last minute items before your guests arrive. A bit of forward planning and a few strategic shopping tips for your dinner party or home event will save you valuable time and money, as well as ensuring you and your guests are enjoying quality produce.

A shopping list is absolutely essential when entertaining. When making your shopping list, remember to adjust the recipe quantities for the required number of guests. Check your pantry and refrigerator to determine what you need to buy.

Divide your shopping list into the following categories:

- supermarket
- butcher
- greengrocer
- fishmonger
- liquor store
- deli/gourmet store
- specialty store (eg Asian grocer)

You'll find a useful shopping list template that you can download on our website <http://www.lifesafeast.com.au/tips.htm>.

Divide the above items into those that can be bought ahead of time, those that need to be ordered, and perishable last-minute purchases. I recommend shopping for non-perishable groceries a week before your occasion, leaving you ample time to attend to food preparation and other tasks that need to be done closer to the time. Always check the use-by dates, particularly on dairy and deli items.

Meat, fruit and vegetables can be bought the day before, whilst seafood and fresh bread should be purchased on the day. Order meat, seafood or special foods a week before, and confirm the order the day before collecting it. Some local suppliers will often be prepared to home-deliver if you are placing a large order.

Incorporating seasonal produce into your menu will save time and money. Seasonal produce is readily available, is at optimum quality and is easy on the pocket. Using fruit and vegetables that are out of season will cost you considerably more, and you may end up going on a wild goose chase trying to find what you are looking for. Our "What's in Season?" guide in our [free monthly newsletter](#) will give you an idea of what fruits and vegetables are currently in season.

When ordering liquor, ring your order through and request that it be ready for collection. There are many online liquor stores that will home deliver, often free with a one dozen bottle purchase. We recommend Vintage Cellars: <http://www.vintagecellars.com.au> and Cellarmasters: <http://www.cellarmasters.com.au>.

There are many time-saving products available these days which will make your life so much easier, especially if you are cooking for a crowd: shaved parmesan cheese, pre-washed salad greens, peeled and deveined prawns, chargrilled vegetables to name but a few! Another way to save significant time is when placing your meat order, ask your butcher to trim, bone, joint or dice it. Similarly, when ordering seafood, ask that it be filleted, boned or shucked.

Remember – it's okay to cheat a little! Your guests don't expect you to have made everything yourself. Take advantage of the wonderful assortment of quality products available these days - good quality dips are perfectly acceptable, as is a freshly baked dessert from a reputable patisserie.