It seems that almost everyone is feeling the pinch of the economy these days. Businesses are cutting prices and offering discounts to encourage consumer spending. Consumers are cutting back on unnecessary expenses, forgoing those little luxury items that have become part of our daily rituals, and putting off major purchases. We’re simply more mindful of how and where we spend our money, wanting to make the most of each and every penny.

In this world of do-it-yourself, cheap chic, and “stay-cations” it’s nice to know that you can still treat yourself to a special snack everyday, without breaking the bank. Popcorn is a wholesome whole grain that’s gentle on your wallet and your waistline. If you’re looking for the biggest bang for the buck, consider popping popcorn the old fashioned way—on the stovetop. A 3-cup serving of popcorn costs about 15 cents if you use this method. For convenience, you can’t beat microwave popcorn. But if you’re looking for ways to stretch your dollars, consider popping popcorn on the stovetop or in a popcorn maker, which allows you to control how much you want to make and lets you add toppings to suit your mood.

**How To: Stovetop Popping**

To pop popcorn on a stovetop, cover the bottom of a 3- to 4-quart pan with a thin layer of vegetable oil (don’t use butter, it will burn). Place 3 kernels of popcorn in the pan, cover with a loose lid that allows steam to escape, and heat. When the kernels pop, pour in enough popcorn to cover the bottom of the pan, one kernel deep, cover the pan and shake to evenly spread the oil. When the popping begins to slow to a few seconds apart, remove the pan from the stovetop. The heated oil will still pop the remaining kernels.

**Topping Options:**

- Popcorn salt & pepper
- Assorted herbs & spices
- Nuts (pine nuts, peanuts, slivered almonds, pumpkin seeds, etc.)
- Cheese crackers
- Pretzel sticks
- Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots, etc.)
- Grated cheese
- Chocolate chips
- Cinnamon, brown sugar, nutmeg

For more simple and tasty popcorn recipes, visit [www.popcorn.org](http://www.popcorn.org)