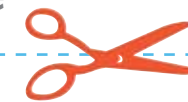




Where to find the **BEST** **COUPONS** now

16 ways to uncover discounts
on groceries, designer clothing,
electronics, and more



Shoppers across the country are going coupon crazy. Ninety-four percent of us now use coupons for food, household products, and health and beauty items, up from 86 percent in 2006, according to the Promotion Marketing Association. More people are also whipping out coupons beyond the supermarket. Restaurants, department stores, women's clothing stores, oil-change shops, and all kinds of other specialty retailers now offer them.

And there are more ways than ever to get coupons. The number of Internet coupon downloads has jumped 80 percent in the past two years. New services even let you get coupons right on your cell phone. So it's easy to cut the cost of practically anything. Here's how to uncover great coupon deals whether you're shopping for groceries or a new pair of shoes.

9 supermarket coupon tactics

■ **Download discounts.** Not using online coupons? Then get clicking! Check sites such as SmartSource.com, Coupons.com, and CoolSavings.com on the first day of each month, when new coupons are usually loaded. The software you must download to print the coupons will usually allow you to print two of each.

■ **Sign up for e-mail alerts.** Go to the Web sites of your favorite products (Iams, Aveeno, or Dannon, for example) and sign up for e-mail lists; you'll receive coupons and other special offers. Earlier this year, Procter & Gamble, which makes Ivory soap, Dawn dishwashing liquid, and other household products, ran a promotion offering coupons worth \$120 if you bought \$50 worth of P&G products. **TIP** Consider using an alternative e-mail address so your main account

isn't overwhelmed with ads and special offers.

■ **Take along your printout.** When you go to redeem an Internet coupon, print the whole page and take it with you to the store. The printout will have the URL it came from and will show the store manager that the coupon isn't fraudulent in case there's a question about its authenticity, according to Stephanie Nelson, who runs CouponMom.com. As we've reported before, some stores don't accept Internet coupons, so ask at your local supermarkets. (See "Don't Download a Fake!" on the next page.)

■ **Search online circulars.** Before you plan menus and decide where to shop that week, scan store circulars at sites like Mygrocerydeals.com and Sundaysaver.com, or browse the sites of your local supermarkets (Safeway.com

or StopandShop.com, for example). These sites will help you figure out what's on sale and where to get the best deals. One study from the University at Buffalo found that if you spend \$90 a week on groceries, you could lop as much as \$34 off the bill by shopping at several stores to take advantage of the best deals.

■ **Check out new coupon programs.** On Kroger's Web site, for example, you can enter your shopper card number and check off the coupons you want. When you buy the products and scan your card, the discount is automatically taken off your bill. No clipping necessary! Stop & Shop and Giant Food stores in the Northeast are giving shoppers hand-held scanners that tally discounts after they scan the items they want. The scanners are relatively easy to use

and keep a running total as you shop. Also check out Shortcuts.com, which lets customers load various supermarket loyalty cards with electronic coupons.

■ **Be alert in supermarket aisles.** Don't ignore coupons offered right in the store. (Many people do: Only 6 to 14 percent of on-package coupons are ever redeemed, according to CMS, a coupon-processing company.) Some coupons are attached to the item itself; others are in coupon dispensers perched on store shelves.

TIP If there's a coupon on the package, don't rely on the cashier to notice it. Tear it off and hand it over.

■ **Uncover hidden coupons.** Peel labels off cans and look on the back—you'll sometimes find a money-off coupon. Look on the backs of supermarket receipts too. On the

back of the register tape from one grocery store we found discounts for local restaurants and a music school.

■ **Buy multiple copies of local newspapers.** Couponmom.com's Nelson suggests buying several copies of the Sunday paper. "If it contains \$5 in coupons you can use

and costs only \$2, that's a guaranteed return on your investment," she says.

■ **Buy or create a carryall.** To make sure you'll use the coupons you take to the store, organize them. Pick up [a little pouch with dividers in the grocer's stationery aisle or at a discount store. Or use a small envelope or a zip-top bag. Drop in dividers and label them with the categories you buy frequently, such as canned goods, pasta, and pet food. As you add coupons, put new ones in the back so you'll reach for about-to-expire ones first, suggests Barry Izsak, a professional organizer and owner of Arranging It All in Austin, Texas. Keep the pouch in your purse or in the glove compartment of your car so you'll have it when you need it.

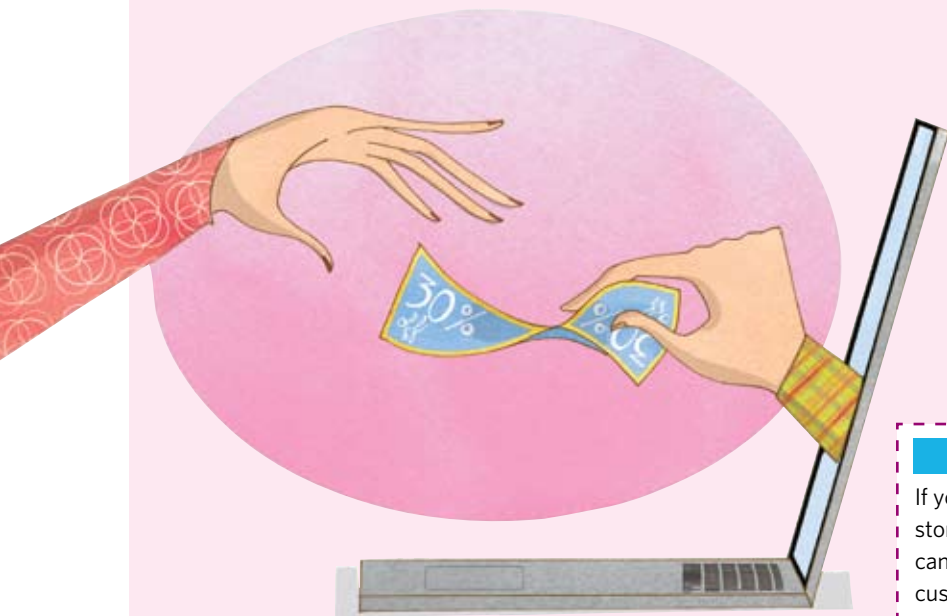


Don't download a fake!

According to the National Grocers Association, coupon fraud is on the rise. Here are four ways to avoid a bogus offer.

- 1 Look at the expiration date to see if it might have been altered. Most real coupons expire within three months.
- 2 Check for legal phrases like "not to be altered, copied, transferred, purchased, or sold."
- 3 Scan discount values. Good coupons usually have them in several places.
- 4 Stick with well-known sources such as Coupons.com and manufacturer Web sites.

7 coupon strategies for clothes, meals, and more



SIGN UP FOR FREQUENT-SHOPPER PROGRAMS AT YOUR FAVORITE STORES

Of course, supermarkets aren't the only stores with frequent-buyer programs that give you coupons and other discounts. All kinds of retailers—bookstores, pet stores, drugstores, movie theaters, and office-supply stores—have discount programs now too. For example, Office Depot's WorkLife program offers a 10 percent rebate on printer ink and paper; Petco's "PALS" plan gives a free bag of natural or premium pet food with every 10 bags you buy. You can sign up in the store or go to the retailer's Web site.

ASK AT THE STORE

If you see someone using a coupon at a department store, ask the cashier if he or she has an extra or can scan the coupon for your purchase too. The customer-service desk might also be able to provide you with the coupon.

SEARCH ONLINE CIRCULARS

Many specialty and discount stores like Walmart, Kohls, and Joann Fabrics post their weekly flyers online. Go to the store's Web site and look for a link that says something like "local ad" or "sale flyer." You might be asked to type in your ZIP code. Check out store circulars at ShopLocal.com too. We found coupons for potting soil at Walgreens, makeup at Kmart, oil changes at a tire shop, and lunch at a local pub.

CLICK ON STORE AND MALL SITES

If you're heading to a specific store, a mall, or an outlet center, check its site for coupons or deals before you go. At H&M's Web site, www.hm.com/us, for example, we found a juicy coupon for 50 percent off. (You had to buy three items and the discount was on the least expensive one.) We also found some nice coupons for several retail stores at a local mall by doing a simple Google search of the mall's name. Heading to an outlet mall? Don't leave home without clicking over to the outlet's site for coupons to print out. Also sign up for e-mail sale alerts.

SIGN UP FOR STORE E-MAIL LISTS

Many offer incentives: Sears gives two coupons, each good for \$5 off a \$50 purchase, just for signing up. The Limited gives you \$15 off a \$50 purchase, and Bed Bath & Beyond offers a 20 percent-off coupon. Many sites have a place to sign up for e-mail alerts right on the home page.

USE YOUR CELL PHONE TO DIAL UP SAVINGS

If you have an Internet-enabled cell phone, punch up Cellfire.com, a service that lets you download coupons right onto your phone. When we looked, we found offers for \$7 off an oil change at Jiffy Lube and one free movie rental with a regular-price rental at Hollywood Video.

SCAN THE BIG SITES

Couponcraze.com, CouponMom.com, and GoGoShopper.com are gold mines for in-store and online purchases. We found 20 percent off children's books at Scholastic Bookstore, a coupon for free popcorn at any AMC movie theater, and a buy-one-get-one-free offer from American Greeting cards. Other sites to try: CouponCabin.com, RetailMeNot.com, and Dealio.com. MommySavesBig.com is a portal for dozens of coupon sites.