

March

Green Grocery Shopping

“Green” has taken on a whole new meaning in recent years. Whether you are Irish or not, March has traditionally meant St. Patrick’s Day celebrations but the wearing o’ the green takes on a new meaning as concerns increase about the economy, environment, and global warming.

Thinking green while grocery shopping can serve two purposes: saving money as well as resources. Here are some great tips adapted from ones developed by Alice Henneman, MS, RD, Extension Educator and author of *Food Reflections*, an online newsletter of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension (<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/save-some-green>):

Practice the 3 R’s: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Throwing away leftover food not only wastes money, it also wastes the energy, resources, and packaging materials associated with the tossed food.

- **Reduce** the amount of leftover food tossed by serving smaller portions of foods that frequently produce leftovers
- **Reuse** leftovers by serving them again in a day or two or freezing them for future use
- **Recycle** leftovers into a different type of meal; for example – add that extra rice to a soup the next night

Drink to this. Buy a reusable water bottle and fill it with water. Your investment quickly will pay for itself.

Got to have a plan! Plan meals ahead, make a list, and shop less often for groceries or shop when your errands take you near a grocery store. You’ll save time, use less fuel, and throw away less food.

Size matters. When choosing between a large container or several smaller containers that add up to the same volume, consider whether buying the larger one will serve the same purpose and save you money. For example, buying individual juice boxes (with more packaging) rather than a larger bottle may make sense if you are traveling but not if the juice is consumed at home where cups are available.

It's in the bag. Reusable shopping bags are great when shopping, but if you prefer plastic grocery bags, reuse them to line small wastebaskets. Put a few bags in the bottom of the waste basket BEFORE you line it, so there's another one ready to use after one is filled. Also, most grocery stores have bins outside where you can bring your used plastic grocery bags to recycle.

Don't be a "spoil"-sport. Reduce the amount of spoiled food or out of date foods in your house with these ideas:

- **Read** labels for "use by," "expiration," or "best if used by" dates.
- **Refrigerate and freeze** foods at recommended temperatures -- 0°F or lower for freezers and 40°F or lower for the refrigerator section. An appliance thermometer assures your refrigerator/freezer is maintaining these temperatures.
- **Follow** recommended storage times for foods. For example, some containers may specify a recommended time frame in which to eat a food after it is opened.
- **Avoid** buying food in bulk if it will spoil before you can use it.

Bulk up. Larger containers are often less expensive and can have a lower packaging to product ratio. They make sense IF you will use all of the food or product. If it needs to be frozen or packed for lunches, repackage smaller portions into reusable storage containers. Also, some products like as hand soap can be purchased in big bottles and used to refill smaller containers.

Think Seasonally. Eating produce that is "in season" and grown in your region requires less transportation and storage before reaching your table.

Shop with the End in Mind: Styrofoam containers are very convenient but take up a lot of landfill volume (25-30%) can take up to 500 years to break down, and aren't typically reused or recycled. Other packaging choices such as plastic, paper, glass or cans may be recyclable as well as reusable.