



Eco-Tips for Going Greener

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Some of you may know, one of my other passions is my involvement in the Sierra Club. Although my real Sierra Club interest is outings, and helping people get outdoors, I also have an interest in sustainability and “going greener.” There’s so much information available in the media and on the internet, it is often difficult to sort out what’s important. So, I’m beginning a simple series of “Tips for Going Greener” to give you my opinions on how to make greener choices based on my research and knowledge. Going greener is not only good for your business but for you, personally. Saving money, and saving the planet go hand in hand.

Your Kitchen...The Top Five Tips for Going Greener

Are you the chef in the household, or do you prefer to have someone else do the cooking? Do you realize some cooking choices are “greener” than others –e.g. more eco-friendly, sustainable, and easier on the planet?

1. **Choose your Food Supply Locally.** Think globally, buy locally. Once you decide your budget and the foods you need to eat in order to stay healthy, you have other choices on where to buy them. Typically, the best foods are those grown in our local area. The University of Idaho has good information on small farms and sustainability on their website <http://www.cals.uidaho.edu/sustag/SmallFarms/index.htm>

In Southwest Idaho, local foods means eating foods which are typically grown in this area such as greens, berries, root vegetables, fish from lakes and rivers and a certain amount of wild game. Consider the Farmer’s Markets and Community Supported Agricultural Farms (CSAs) as local sources for the freshest and most nutritious foods. Many CSAs in our area deliver, and this is the time of year they are beginning to produce some of the best spring crops. A good listing of local farms and CSAs which provide organic meats, dairy, fruits and vegetables appears in this Idaho Statesman article earlier in the year:

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2010/02/26/1096067/buy-a-share-and-enjoy-locally.html>

There are also a number of organic food home delivery services. Simply type in “organic food delivery and your city” in your search engine, and multiple entries will appear. In Boise, some of the choices are

<http://www.brownboxorganics.com/> and <http://www.organicfoodhomedelivery.net/organic-food/delivery/idaho/>

The best foods to buy organic. The Environmental Working Group www.foodnews.org recently updated the “Dirty Dozen” fruits and vegetables which contain the most pesticide residues. *After meat and dairy, the best fruits and vegetables to buy organic are: CELERY, PEACHES, STRAWBERRIES, APPLES, BLUEBERRIES, NECTARINES, BELL PEPPERS, SPINACH, KALE, CHERRIES, POTATOES and IMPORTED GRAPES.* Many of these foods can successfully be grown in home and community gardens, and some are readily available locally. Don’t be fooled by foods labeled as “natural”, these are not organic.

2. **Get rid of purchased bottled water.** Those plastic water bottles contribute to the planetary trash heap and leach nasty chemical compounds into your drinking water. Consider buying a water filter for your home and using drinking containers like Affirm Water (a small company in New Hampshire), Klean Kanteen, Sigg, Nathansports or Earthlust to transport your water. The best containers are glass, but it's tough to transport a pickle bottle in your car without being concerned about breakage! If you have doubts about the water quality in your home, you can get water quality results from the city and/or have your well water tested. In this area, some well water tends to be contaminated with agricultural wastes and heavy metals. Local test kits are available at minimal cost through the internet and many home gardening and hardware stores.
3. **Buy recyclable grocery bags and green bags for refrigerated vegetables.** These are such easy and simple ways to save money and resources. Just choose to buy recyclable grocery bags (\$.98 -\$12.00) for your shopping. Use them not only for groceries, but also for the hardware store, and other purchases. I, personally, like the big cloth ones that can be washed, but it's a matter of personal preference. Green bags are another bargain. They are available at most grocery stores, in various sizes, and cost under \$10.00 for 5-8 bags. They last a long time, and prolong the life of most refrigerated vegetables by at least 40-50% because they allow vegetables to breathe.
4. **Compost.** Yuck, do you want leftover food and vegetables rotting in your yard? Answer, yes! The very best book written on composting is Let it Rot by Stu Campbell. This book has the basics such as what is good to compost, and what is not. For example, avoid citrus, onions, meats, etc., and use vegetable scraps for your compost. You don't need a fancy compost container in your kitchen to collect your leftovers—unless you want one. For the outside compost pile, the simplest way is to use (free) pallets and create a fenced pile. However, I've learned my dogs love to roll in the stinky stuff, so I now use something called a "Tumbleweed" that is self-contained and can be turned easily. After 3-6 months you can take your compost and add it to your landscaping, garden or flower beds. It saves you from buying bags of fertilizer, and you will attract lots of beneficial worms. If you are really a die-hard composter, you can buy some earthworms and keep them in a relatively warm place, and let them work with your leftovers year-round. For lots more ideas you can contact the Master Gardeners at the extension office <http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/ada/>
5. **Kitchen Clean Up.** Household cleaning products will be discussed in a separate Eco-Tip. For now, consider using sponges, cloth towels and sustainable cleaning fibers instead of paper towels. One sponge can last the equivalent of 17 rolls of paper towels. Just zap it in the microwave for two minutes each week or put it in the dishwasher every other cycle to get rid of those germs. Your local dollar store is a great place to find these items.

If you have questions, suggestions for future topics or want to receive future email Eco-Tips, send me an e-mail at drbenton@comcast.net. If you are a green business, search for "green business" listings in your local city, and consider listing your business. We all need to support a more sustainable lifestyle and "good for the planet" choices.

