

Suggestions for going green while saving greenbacks

DEAR MS. GREEN,

Any tips on combining care for the earth, concern about family health, and just generally doing the right, sustainable thing with a serious household budget? It seems like so many green products, organic, local foods, and “alternatives” to conventional, mass-produced goods are expensive. Don't get me wrong, I want to pay people for their work and I understand that the farmers at the local farmer's market cannot possibly match prices at the big boxes, but our family's financial situation has changed and we need to watch every penny.

Cheapskating it in Chapel Hill.

DEAR CHEAPSKATING,

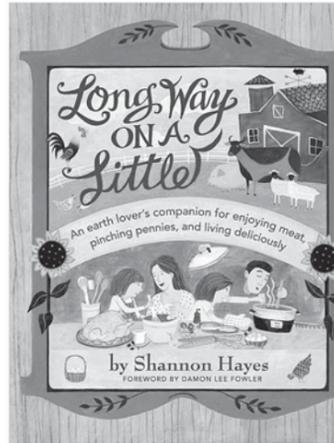
Ms. Green hears you. Boy, does she hear you! And while yes, she agrees that many of the products marketed as more sustainable and “green” do carry a high price tag, as do locally grown organic veggies and hand-made cloth diapers made by the loving hands of a cool vegan mom from Durham who grew the cotton in her own backyard, harvested it during the full moon, then spun and loomed it into soft, downy fleece and hand-sewed to the exact specifications of your baby's bottom, it is actually possible to live a more sustainable life and stick to a budget IF one prioritizes and uses some basic



Ask
Ms. Green

common sense.

First, let's talk food. As the person in the house responsible for food preparation, this is probably Ms. Green's personal Achilles heel. And while occasionally Ms. Green is tempted to become one of those couponers that you see on TV when she sees a story of someone who bought \$348 worth of groceries for \$11.36, the reality is that most coupons are for highly processed foods that come in a box: food that would thrill Ms. Green's children but does not do very much for her knowledge of what's healthy, not to mention sustainably produced. With that in mind, here are Ms. Green's best budget food tips: buy in bulk when possible (including seasonal fruits and vegetables from local farmers – or your own garden — so you can freeze or can them, invest in a freezer (yes, it's worth it if you have the space), cook from scratch, and if you are a meat-eater, consider less expensive cuts of meat, like grass-fed stew beef or pork shoulder when planning dinner. Ms. Green just bought



Ms. Green has found this book to be very helpful.

herself a marvelous book: *Long Way on a Little* by Shannon Hayes, that details the secrets of cooking different kinds of grass-fed meats. Hint: the secret is to cook them a long time on very low heat.

Next: Clothes. The answer here is thrift. The thrift shop, to be exact. Ms. Green, her husband, and her two boys' wardrobes were largely purchased at the wonderful PTA thrift shops in Chatham county. Ms. Green can attest that these include many brand-name items (not that her kids care, but she understands some children do) as well as her younger son's winter coat and every single sports cleat her children have ever needed. Between the thrift shops, consignment stores, Craigslist and yard sales it's completely possible to outfit your entire family, including bed linens and other household goods on the cheap. This is the very essence of “reuse,” as in “reduce, reuse, recycle,” so while these items may have

origins in China or Burma or Indonesia, by reclaiming what others have thrown out you are adding value to items that may not have been created under the best of circumstances. Or at least that's what Ms. Green tells herself.

As far as the rest of it goes, Ms. Green's biggest tip is this: if you don't LOVE it and don't NEED it, don't BUY it. Profound, right? But true. Most stuff in our homes sits unused, unwanted, and unloved. It's the curse of modern America. In the month of January – traditionally a purging month for Ms. Green – eight bags of clothing, six boxes of STUFF, and two boxes of books have been taken out of Ms. Green's house to the thrift shop. And guess what? None of it has been missed so far.

Now Readers, Ms Green has a suspicion: if you've read this far, you either have too much time on your hands, are one of Ms. Green's 12 regulars (Hi there! neighbor Catherine, Elaine from the Piggly Wiggly, and Mom!) or your phone needs charging and you have nothing else to do while you eat your lunch. She also suspects that nothing that she's written in this column is news to you: we all know how to live a thrifty, more sustainable life. It's not lack of knowledge that's keeping us back. It's habit, or laziness, or even the speed of modern life that makes us value convenience and ease over anything else. Do you agree?

Ms. Green is Adrienne Bashista, co-owner of Home Performance NC, an energy auditing, energy rating, and home weatherization contracting company and a freelance writer/PR/marketing professional. Home Performance NC can be found on the web: www.homeperformancenc.com and by phone: 919.360.1570. You can contact Adrienne directly at adrienne@drtpress.com.

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