

THE SHOPPING MAGAZINE FOR NATURAL LIVING

better nutrition

2008
SPECIAL
ISSUE

buyer's guide!

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Sustainable Shopping

Weigh your options when choosing food packaging

Food manufacturers are becoming increasingly savvy about packaging and waste. Consider the following options for low-waste shopping:

BEVERAGES Glass bottles are a good choice for soft drinks, water, and other beverages. They're reusable and easily recycled. But they're heavy, which increases shipping costs, and they don't utilize all the space in packing cartons. For example, 30 rectangular aseptic containers or aluminum cans might fit into the same size carton as 15 long-neck glass bottles.

Cans are a good option for beverages, since most are easily recycled, but they aren't reusable. Aseptic packages for beverages such as soymilk are fairly

sustainable. They pack well in cartons, and most are at least 70 percent paper; but because most have a plastic coating on the inside, they're harder to recycle in some communities. Flexible packages, such as juice pouches, are made of laminated foil with two to five layers of plastic, so they're hard to recycle and can't be reused. But they're light and easy to ship, and they take up less space in landfills—which, sadly, is a consideration as well. If you're stumped, call your local recycling company and find out which materials are most easily recycled.

SNACK FOODS Chips, pretzels, cookies, crackers, and other snacks usually come in plastic bags or molded

plastic trays, which usually can't be recycled. More manufacturers, however, are now using bioplastics, which can be recycled or, in many cases, composted. However, few recycling infrastructures exist for bioplastics, and if they're combined with other forms of petroleum-based plastic, they can contaminate the entire batch—so many communities are concerned that bioplastics will damage existing recycling projects. As for composting, bioplastics can't be tossed into a simple backyard compost pile; most require a larger-scale composting operation, which is relatively easy to locate in a larger city. Check with local manufacturers or farmers for composting options in your community. In all cases, choose snack foods with less packaging, or buy larger bags and repackage in your own smaller containers at home.

CHEESE AND MEATS They're usually found in plastic shrink-wrap packaging for food safety and shelf life, which reduces waste. Buy your meat and cheese (organic, of course) from the deli or butcher counter, and ask that it be wrapped in butcher or wax paper instead of plastic. Or bring your own reusable container.

BAKED GOODS Most come wrapped in plastic bags that can't be recycled. Buy breads and other baked goods in your store's bakery section if possible; bring your own bag, or ask for a paper bag if you'll be eating it soon. If you do buy prepackaged bread, look for those without the additional inner cellophane wrap; save the exterior bag, and use it for your next bakery bread purchase.

CONDIMENTS. You'll usually have to choose between glass and plastic containers for condiments. If you choose plastic, look for lightweight PET (recycling code 1) containers, which are readily recycled in most communities. Many stores offer such liquids as oil, tamari, and honey in bulk; choose these whenever possible, and bring your own (preferably glass) container to refill. ♦