

Pre-Cycle: Buy Less Packaging

Tallahassee Democrat

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Earth Day was first observed on April 22, 1970. The idea for a nationwide support of the “Earth” came from the late Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. This year, Earth Day 2009, April 22, will mark the beginning of the [Green Generation Campaign™](#). This two year “Earth Day” initiative asks all individuals to commit to “do your part” in regards to responsible, sustainable consumption.

We all consume resources, but most of us do not have a direct role in producing or protecting our food, water, air and other natural resources which sustain us. Now is a great time to think about responsible, sustainable consumption.

Living sustainably is the concept of realizing the choices we make have social, environmental and economical effects. Can we live sustainably and still consume? Of course! One major concept of living sustainably is to be aware.

Consider... Floridians throw away about 8 pounds of garbage per person each day, almost double the national average. Admittedly, the Florida rate is elevated somewhat by trash from our visitors and the constructions industry. However, much of that garbage is considered WET refuse, food scraps, packaging, and other trash that we throw away in the can each week. Cindy Brantley of Leon County Solid Waste Management states that Leon County sent 185.489 tons of WET refuse to the Jackson County Transfer Station in 2007 – she estimates that 50% of it could have been recycled <http://www.leoncountyfl.gov/recycling/> (WET refuse is not recycled because it is contaminated... all kinds of stuff thrown together).

Thirty percent of our household waste is packaging. Most consumer products are encased in a package at some point on it's way from producer to consumer. Packaging performs several necessary functions and has become an essential part of our marketing and distribution system. Many packages are designed to provide an extra measure of convenience to the consumer.

Some packages contain ready-to-eat, single serving products and are disposable and/or microwavable. Packaging frequently is to give an extra boost to sales. Multi-packs encourage quantity purchases. The eye appeal of packaging draws shoppers away from the competitor's products. Larger packages occupy more shelf space to attract shoppers' attention.

Is all of that packaging really necessary? When out shopping considers **enviro-shopping**. You can try to shop with the environment in mind. Think about “Packaging with a Purpose” in other words, buy smarter – **pre-cycle** – reduce your garbage before you buy it. If you never buy it and bring in to your home in the first place, then you don't have to consider reuse or recycling.

Here are some examples of pre-cycling:

- Take your own bags to the store (or reuse the ones the store gives you multiple times)
- Look for products that use the least amount of packaging materials.
- Buy products in the largest quantity possible in one package (consider concentrated products then dilute them at home)
- Fresh produce is available unpackaged – select only what you use
- Recycle all the products that you can
- Compost your fruit and vegetable scraps and yard waste

If you do get products with a lot of packaging think about what can be done to reuse or recycle it. State Law requires Florida's municipalities to reduce solid waste through recycling. Leon County Solid Waste takes almost all paper and cardboard.

Recycling plastic is limited locally to items marked #1 and #2. Check the bottom of your plastics to see the number – the number indicates the type of plastic resin used to make the container (both the City and County waste management folks like to encourage folks to save bottles and jugs). Always remember to remove lids and caps as they are not recycled in this area.

Some types of plastic are recycled to produce items such as carpets, siding, geotechnical erosion materials, park benches, fence posts and non-food containers. Also, aluminum, which is 100 percent recyclable, and glass can be locally recycled.

Composting is a very easy way to eliminate yard waste and kitchen scraps from going to our Landfill. For more information contact The Master Gardner Program/Leon County Cooperative Extension Office at 606-5202 with questions.

Enviro-shopping is important. It makes good sense to reduce environmental pollution to extend the earth's resources. But equally important it makes good economic sense. Why be wasteful.

In fact it has been suggested that a few more **R's** be added to the slogan Reduce -Recycle – Reuse. The new R's are Refuse and Respond. When you refuse to purchase items wastefully packaged manufacturers will respond by making package changes. Use those consumer hotlines. Let stores and manufactures know that you appreciate their efforts when they are making good environmental choices and let them know when their packaging needs some tweaking!

Learning new habits can be challenging, but time taken evaluating our choices makes a difference to our environment!

UFIS EDIS PUB: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HE790>

City of Tallahassee Web page: <http://www.talgov.com/you/solid/beyond.cfm>

Leon County Government web page: <http://www.leoncountyfl.gov/recycling/RR.asp>

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida IFAS - Leon County Extension office at 606-5203, weekdays 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m.

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