



Living Well in the Panhandle

Solutions For Your Life!

Provided By Family & Consumer Sciences Agents in Northwest Florida

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The holiday season is approaching and you may have begun making your shopping gift list. For the hard-to-buy-for person or the one who seems to have everything, gift cards can be a

convenient and practical solution. However, not all gift cards are alike. Check out, "Gift Cards - What You Need to Know!" for information on the risks, cons, and new regulations for gift cards. If your holiday plans include traveling, be sure to read "Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite" for important tips for avoiding bringing home unwanted "souvenirs." Is eating more healthily one of your New Year's Resolutions? "Thyme for Herbs" offers helpful tips for adding flavor to your favorite dishes while reducing sodium.

Season's Greetings!



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The University of Florida/IFAS Subscription Management System is a new online feature that allows you to subscribe to additional Extension newsletters and e-mail updates. Directions for signing up are in this issue.

We hope you enjoy this issue. We wish you a safe and blessed holiday season and a healthy, prosperous 2011! Feel free to contact the editor or the article authors with any comments or questions.

Wow! What Did We Do Before Bottled Water?????

Does the timing to Florida as my permanent residence correspond to the introduction of bottled water into our society or are Floridians just more prone to littering than Kansans? I can't believe the amount of litter I see along the roadways in some parts of the Panhandle. I have been outspoken enough about my feelings that I was named to work on a Wakulla County Commissioners' committee to suggest ways of changing the habits of many as it concerns littering. I continue to be surprised at people's willingness to litter and much of what I see includes plastic water bottles.

It makes me wonder what we did before we had them and why are we so inclined to buy our water instead of relying on tap water? UF/IFAS Food and Nutrition Specialist, Dr. Karla Shelnett, and an UF Intern recently wrote a new publication called “Facts about Bottled Water” that addresses this issue. You may wish to request a copy from your County Extension Office or go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/FY/FY113800.pdf> to have immediate access.

Today, I want to focus on why we need to drink lots of fluids, choosing beverages that are best suited for our body, and how we seem to “miss the mark” when making environmentally-friendly water choices. Do you realize that about 60% of your body weight is comprised of water? We get about 20% of the needed water from the foods we eat and the remainder must come from beverages. One of the best sources is WATER.



Recycle bottled water containers.

Photo Credits: Judy Corbus, Washington and Holmes Counties

Dr. Shelnett’s research reveals that half of all Americans now consume bottled water regularly. As the popularity of it has increased, so have the questions about its safety. Dr. Shelnett answers many safety questions in the referenced UF/IFAS publication. I particularly appreciate the inclusion of some of the popular myths that she addresses. She calls this section of her article, *Don’t*

Drown in the Myths. For example.....

MYTH: All bottled water comes from a natural spring.

FACT: About 25% of all bottled water is taken from city water sources and then purified multiple times. If the bottled water comes from a city source, it must be stated on the label unless it has been further purified; in this case the label will say purified water.

MYTH: Bottled water is cleaner and more pure than tap water.

FACT: As long as both the city water and the bottled water are following regulations, bottled water is no safer than tap water. Tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Agency creates guidelines for what can be in the water and have high standards that must be met. Bottled water is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, which has guidelines that are not as strict as the EPA guidelines for tap water. Neither is required to be 100% free of contaminants. I encourage you to get this publication to dispel more water-related myths.

According to Dr. Shelnett, more than 80% of Americans have access to a plastic recycling center. My advice is to **USE IT**. Recycling reduces the litter that finds its way to our highways and waterways. It also allows the material to be used for things such as toys, sleeping bags, and other goods. **BUT** according to the Container Recycling Institute, about 86% of the 30 billion disposable water bottles sold each year are thrown in the trash and not recycled.

Most disposable water bottles are considered one-time use bottles. Take the plunge and buy one of the many reusable water bottles available for purchase. When purchasing, make sure you buy bottles that are labeled bisphenol A-free (BPA-free). The materials from which these bottles are made are listed on the bottom of the bottle.

In summary, my advice is to frequently drink appropriate beverages. Be aware that water is the most important nutrient in the body. In addition, act responsibly. When you purchase beverages in disposable containers, recycle them!!! Let’s be proud of the roads and water-

ways as we travel and enjoy the sights in the Panhandle of Florida!!



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Consumer Tips for Egg Safety

The next time you are in the grocery store, observe the variety of eggs that are available for purchase. It is interesting to note the types of containers, colors, and even sizes of eggs on the market today. Egg safety issues have been in the forefront over the last several months with the largest recall in U.S. history. No doubt, the consumer might be confused as to what to purchase and how to protect their families from potential harm from food poisoning.

While the consumer may be cautious, there are many steps to follow to prevent illness from bacteria and unsafe cooking practices. Selection is the first step to food safety. You should only buy eggs from a refrigerator or refrigerated case. While at the grocery store, open the carton and check for cracked or broken eggs. Also check for cleanliness and the sell by date. After purchase, eggs should be stored promptly in a refrigerator and in their original carton.

There are a variety of egg sizes, grades, and colors available for the consumer to purchase. It is important, as a consumer, to know what you are purchasing. You should be aware that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) checks for both interior and exterior egg quality. The grading of eggs is voluntary so check the label for the USDA seal. Grading of eggs is for size and weight. The following are the three grades as determined by USDA grading standards:

- U.S. Grade AA eggs have whites that are thick and firm; yolks are high, round and practically free from defects; and clean, unbroken shells. Grade AA and Grade A eggs are best for frying and poaching where

appearance is important.

- U.S. Grade A eggs have characteristics of Grade AA eggs except that the whites are "reasonably" firm. This is the quality most often sold in stores.
- U.S. Grade B eggs have whites that may be thinner and yolks that may be wider and flatter than eggs of higher grades. The shells must be unbroken, but may show slight stains. Grade B eggs are mainly used to make liquid, frozen, and dried egg products.

The sizing of eggs is determined by net weight per dozen. Eggs within the carton may actually be of different sizes due to the weight by dozen standards. Here are the list of sizes as established by USDA:

- Jumbo 30 Ounces per dozen
- Extra Large 27 Ounces per dozen
- Large 24 Ounces per dozen
- Medium 21 Ounces per dozen
- Small 18 Ounces per dozen
- Peewee 15 Ounces per dozen

Practice safe cooking and preparation tips for effective ways to prevent egg-related illness. Notice the safe handling instructions on all egg cartons sold:

To prevent illness from bacteria: keep eggs refrigerated; cook eggs until yolks are firm; and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.

Cook eggs thoroughly until both the yolk and the white are firm. Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160 F. If a recipe calls for a raw or undercooked egg, use either shell eggs that have been treated to destroy Salmonella by pasteurization or another approved method or pasteurized egg products.

Serve egg dishes immediately after preparing. Remember to serve hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Store any leftover egg dishes in the refrigerator and reheat to 165 F. Egg-containing food should not sit out for more than 2 hours. Any egg dishes left out longer should be thrown out.



Eggs should be stored in the refrigerator and in the original carton.

Photo Credits: Pamela Allen, Escambia County

Raw shell eggs purchased from the grocery store should be good for three to five weeks from date of purchase. Remember: When in doubt, throw it out...any suspicious food product should be discarded.

Follow these food safety tips and enjoy the versatility and nutritional value of eggs.

Have more questions?

Visit this website from USDA that has an excellent question and answer format:

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Focus_On_Shell_Eggs/index.asp



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Gift Cards--What You Need to Know!

Gift Cards Are a Top Choice: Purchase and Use Them Wisely

The Holiday season is coming, which means selecting gifts for friends and family members. Increasing numbers of shoppers are choosing gift cards rather than the traditional shirts, toys, or bedroom slippers. If you ask many people what they want to receive, gift cards are a

favorite response. The National Retailers Federation reported that the average person spent \$139.91 on gift cards in 2009. According to Consumer Federation of America (CFA) estimates, nearly \$4 billion was spent on prepaid gift cards in 2009.

Whether you are a gift recipient or a giver, gift cards are an easy choice. Gift cards allow recipients the option to pick out the exact item, color, and size they want and provide givers with one-size-fits-all convenience and easy availability. If you are planning on purchasing a gift card, be aware of the risks, costs, and new regulations. There are two types –retail gift cards and bank gift cards. Retail cards are sold by retailers and restaurants and can be used only with those merchants. Bank gift cards carry the logo of a payment network such as one of the major credit card companies. They can be used at any location that accepts those cards. Bank gift cards are likely to carry fees for activation, maintenance or transactions.

There are new rules for gift cards that became effective August 2010.

Monthly Fees: Gift cards can't charge you a monthly fee unless you haven't used the card for 12 months. They can only charge you one fee per month, and fees must be clearly stated on the card.

Longer expiration date requirements: When you buy a gift card, the balance can't expire for at least 5 years from the time you buy it. Or, if it's a reloadable card, 5 years from the time you last reloaded it. (In practice, this means many cards won't expire at all.) This applies both to retail cards and bank general-use gift cards.

No Maximum on monthly fees: If a store wants to charge you \$100 a month after your card has been sitting unused for a year, that's their prerogative, as long as they warn you.

Your Card could still expire: While the balance can't expire for at least 5 years, the card itself can expire. This is mostly an issue with general-use cards, which carry an expiration date like a credit card. And it works the same way: you have to get a new card, but nothing about the underlying account changes. The card issuer has to ex-

plain clearly on the packaging how to replace the card when it expires, and they're not allowed to charge you for the new card.

Finally, the new rules don't do anything to specifically address the issue of **breakage**, or unclaimed gift card balances. Breakage occurs for a variety of reasons: you lost the card, it expired, the balance is too low to bother with, etc. There's big money in breakage. Market research company TowerGroup estimates that out of \$87 billion in gift cards sold in 2009, \$5 billion went unredeemed.

The Federal Trade Commission offers the following suggestions for buying gift cards:



Check the merchant's rules for redeeming gift cards before purchasing.

Photo Credits: Judy Corbus, Washington and Holmes Counties

– Buy cards from sources you know and trust. Avoid buying gift cards from online auction sites because the cards may be counterfeit or may have been obtained fraudulently.

– Read the fine print before you buy. If you don't like the terms and conditions, buy elsewhere.

– Consider purchase fees. Is there a fee to buy the card? If you buy the card online or on the phone, is there a fee for shipping and handling? Does expedited delivery cost more?

– Inspect the card before you buy it. Verify that none of

the protective stickers have been removed or the codes on the back of the card haven't been scratched to reveal a PIN number.

– Give the recipient the original receipt to verify the card's purchase in case it is lost or stolen.

– Consider the financial condition of the business and whether it has filed for bankruptcy. Cards purchased from troubled businesses may turn out to be worth less than face value.

Lucky gift card recipients need to plan for wise use of their card. Treat the card like cash. If your card is lost or stolen, report it to the issuer immediately. Some issuers don't replace lost cards, but others may if you pay a fee. If the issuer charges for a replacement card, you'll likely need to document the purchase and provide the ID number on the card. Most issuers have toll-free numbers for reporting lost or stolen cards.

If you have a problem with a gift card, contact the store or financial institution that issued it. If you can't solve the problem at that level, you may want to file a complaint with the appropriate authorities. For cards issued by retailers, contact the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov or call 877-FTC-HELP. To address problems with cards issued by national banks, contact the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency's Customer Assistance Group by calling 800-613-6743 or by sending an e-mail to customer.assistance@occ.treas.gov.



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Teach Children Manners While They Are Young

The older I get, the more I enjoy observing people. In my observations, I have become more aware of the lack of manners among children, teens, and even adults. I recently held a "Manners Matter" training for early

childhood professionals and thought I would remind you of the importance of teaching young children or grandchildren these important skills. As you know, when children are young, they want to do things that please you. Take this opportunity to teach them appropriate behavior.

Our daily lives are filled with manners as we strive to get along with our family, peers, and co-workers. However, good manners don't come naturally to a child. Children want to be first in line, want the biggest piece of birthday cake, and want to be the one noticed in a group. Children need to learn to respect and care about others' feelings, and it's never too early to start.

Good manners mean, "I can make other people feel special" according to Judi Vankevich, entertainer and educational speaker who is known as The Manners Lady. "And that's what good manners are all about – making other people feel valued and special." Good manners won't be found on television or learned by watching other children. Adults must get involved to teach children these important life lessons. We need to equip our children with the skills and attitudes that will help smooth their way through life. Children love to learn to do things the "right way." They want to do the right thing – they just need to be taught how.

You can begin introducing manners into your child's daily routine practically from infancy. If your youngster likes to hand you his favorite stuffed bear, give him a smile and an enthusiastic "Thank you" when you accept it. When gathered at the dinner table, be sure to say, "Please" or "May I?" when requesting the salt. A thankful attitude is inspiring and makes you want to even do more for others. Learning manners is easier for your child when it is the common practice in your household. Even the youngest children can learn to have a penitent heart and sincerely say, "I'm sorry," says Vankevich. "When they have to ask forgiveness and wait for a response, it keeps them from just flippantly saying 'sorry' and moving on."

Be a role model; children may pick up bad habits from a rude cartoon character or a playmate who whines to get her way. Try to supply good examples to counteract the negative influences. Read storybooks that showcase

good manners. Remember, the best way to make sure children are polite is to be polite yourself.



Teach manners early - they will last a lifetime.

Photo Credits: Judy Corbus, Washington and Holmes Counties

Start small and expand on rules. Learning is gradual. Don't expect it all to come together in a snap. Young children can be forgetful, especially if too much is thrown at them at once. Give reminders and reinforcement. If a child backslides, offer a gentle reminder. You should use silverware properly and they will form habits like yours. If a child reverts back to using her hands, point out quietly how good she is at using her fork. Don't scold her. Children need positive reinforcement, so let them know when they have done a great job.

Ignore poor behavior; reward good performances instead. Always emphasize what is good and what you want from a child much more than honing in on punishment. Be clear and consistent; explain why. Make sure any punishment fits the offense. If a child understands why they are not allowed a privilege as a result of their misbehavior last time, they will be less likely to act out again. By the same token, if you let them slide, they will pick up on the inconsistency and try to get away with more next time around.

Remember "The Golden Rule?" We all learned it as kids, but sometimes we forget to live it. Treat others nicely and with respect. If you don't want someone to be mean to you, then don't be mean to them. If you

want people to say nice things about you, then say nice things about them. This may seem like common sense, but, unfortunately, there is not much common courtesy anymore. However, there seems to be a renewed interest in good manners. Join in on the excitement and share your knowledge with your younger family members.



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Thyme for Herbs

Sodium is a mineral which is necessary for fluid balance, blood pressure maintenance, and normal functioning of nerves and muscles. Salt is the main source of sodium in the American diet. It is used to cure meats, prevent spoiling, preserve foods, and even to increase sweetness in cakes and cookies. Many of us use salt because it tastes good. According to the American Heart Association, most Americans consume two to three times more sodium than they need. This often happens from eating foods prepared outside the home and eating processed and packaged foods. For some people, too much sodium can promote hypertension, also called high blood pressure.

Cooking more often at home and using herbs to enhance flavor is a great salt alternative. The tongue has five tastes: bitter, sour, sweet, salty, and umami (or savory). Many herbs provide this savory taste. If you grow some of your own herbs, you also can save some money. Experiment with herbs to find what works best for you. Use both fresh and dried herbs. About three teaspoons of fresh equals one teaspoon of dried. Recipes often call for only 1 or 2 Tablespoons of herbs. If you pay \$3.00 for a bunch of basil at the grocery store, you may end up throwing half into the composting pile. For about the same \$3.00, you can buy a packet of seeds or a plant from a nursery. Add a few more dollars for potting soil and fertilizer. You can grow herbs inside, outside, or on

a small patio. A few months later, you will be amazed at the abundant results. Pick only what you wish to use.

Here are just a few ways to add herbs to your meals: Add chopped basil to spaghetti sauce, whole leaves to a salad, or process into a pesto sauce to top slices of crusty bread. Thyme works great in lean pork dishes, sauces, and soups. Fresh cilantro makes a great salsa and adds a distinctive Mexican flavor to dishes. It grows well in the Panhandle's cooler months. Rosemary, a rugged year-round herb, goes great with both hearty dishes like potatoes or more delicate dishes like fish. It also can add a little something special to old standby snacks like cheese and crackers.



Sweet Basil

Photo Credits: Angela Hinkle, Escambia County

Cut back on salt, enhance the flavor of your foods, and save some money...with herbs.

For more information on cooking with or growing your own herbs, call your local County Extension Office.



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Check Your Filter

One of the easiest ways to save money on your home heating and cooling costs is to check and clean the filter on your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning

(HVAC) system monthly. The filter is designed to capture dirt to prevent buildup on fan motors and coils. Some filters also collect smaller particles such as viruses, bacteria, some mold spores, a significant fraction of cat and dog allergens, and a small portion of dust mite allergens, improving indoor air quality.

The MERV rating (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) is a standardized filter efficiency rating system. The higher the number from 1-20, the more and finer particles it captures. Some filters are designed to be removed, washed, and reused; it is crucial to clean them thoroughly and often. Most reusable filters and flat, disposable filters are designed to protect the equipment, but not to filter small particles. Flat filters commonly used in homes have a MERV of 1-4.

Pleated filters have more surface area and can capture more particles with less restriction to airflow. They are recommended over basic, flat filters, and are available in a range of filtration efficiencies. Medium efficiency filters with a MERV of 5-13 are efficient at removing small to large airborne particles. Filters with a MERV of 7-13 are likely to be nearly as effective as true HEPA filters at controlling most indoor airborne particles.

They are generally less expensive than HEPA filters, allow quieter HVAC fan operation, and have higher airflow rates than HEPA filters, since they have less airflow resistance.

Higher efficiency filters with a MERV of 14-16, sometimes misidentified as HEPA filters, are similar in appearance to true HEPA filters, which have MERV values of 17-20. True HEPA filters are normally not installed in residential HVAC systems, because of their physical dimensions and increase in airflow resistance.



Check and change your air filter monthly to save energy and money.

Photo Credits: Judy Corbus, Washington and Holmes Counties

For best results, follow these tips:

- Check your HVAC filter once a month. To help you remember, pick a day of the month, such as the 1st, or check it when you receive your electric bill in the mail.
- Know the size of filter needed for your grille, and keep a good supply on hand. In most cases, the size is printed directly on the filter itself.
- Replace disposable air filters as recommended by the manufacturer and whenever they look dirty. Change pleated filters at least once every 3 months. Some will need it more often, especially if there are furry pets, smoke, or dusty conditions in the home.
- Some residential HVAC systems may not have enough fan or motor capacity to accommodate higher efficiency filters. To prevent damage to your unit, check your HVAC manufacturer's information prior to upgrading filters to determine whether it is feasible to use more efficient filters.
- Air should circulate freely. All air vents should be

open to ensure that the HVAC system is functioning to its maximum efficiency.

- Furniture, rugs, or drapes should not block supply and return vents.

Source:

http://www.extension.org/pages/Home_Air_Filter_Changes_and_Cleaning_for_Energy_Efficiency



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Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite

Most of us have heard the saying “Don’t let the bed bugs bite” but few people from recent generations have ever actually seen a bed bug. Improved hygiene and widespread use of DDT in the 1940’s and 50’s had bedbugs nearly eradicated. Today, these insects are making a big comeback.

The National Pest Management Association reported a 71% increase in infestations between 2001 and 2009. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the exact cause for the increase is unknown but experts believe that pesticide resistance, increased tourism, and an overall lack of knowledge about the prevention and control of the bugs have led to this resurgence.

Bed bugs are small, reddish-brown insects that feed on the blood of humans and animals. Infestations often occur where people sleep or spend a great deal of time. This includes areas such as homes, hotels, hospitals, apartments, and dorms. Because bed bugs are expert hidiers, they can be difficult to detect and easy to transport. Making matters worse, bed bugs can survive several months without a blood meal. These characteristics make the bed bug difficult to control and eliminate.

To prevent bed bugs, follow these tips:

- Bed bugs may be spread through used furniture and bedding. Carefully inspect the seams and stitching for blood spots from bed bugs.
- In hotels, avoid placing luggage on or near beds. Inspect headboards and mattresses for blood spots. When packing to leave, inspect the seams of clothing and suitcases. At home, immediately launder clothes and inspect luggage.

Removal of bed bugs can be costly and time consuming. Removal usually includes a combination of chemical and non-chemical methods. If you discover an infestation:

- Vacuum all carpets and furniture to remove bed bugs. Seal vacuum contents in a sealable bag and place in an outdoor garbage container.
- Eliminate hiding spots for bed bugs by reducing clutter.
- Enclose mattress and box springs in zippered covers such as ones used for allergies for at least one year.
- Bed bugs cannot climb smooth surfaces so place the bed posts in glass dishes. Move the bed away from the wall and keep the covers from touching the floor. Wash all bedding with soap and a borax additive and dry at a high temperature. Dry clean clothing, pillows, and draperies.
- If necessary, contact a professional pest control company. Several treatments may be necessary.



Feeding adult bed bug

Photo Credits: Koehler, Pereira, Pfiester, and Hertz "Bed Bugs and Blood-Sucking Conenose"

Bed bugs are not known to transmit disease, but infestations do have physical, psychological, and economic consequences. For more information on preventing and controlling bed bugs, contact your local UF IFAS Extension office.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

US Environmental Protection Agency

UF/IFAS Extension publication: "Bed Bugs and Blood-Sucking Conenose"



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University of Florida IFAS Extension Needs You

The University of Florida IFAS Extension works towards agricultural, environmental, and economic sustainability in our rapidly growing state and communities. We accomplish this through research-based educational programs, publications, and opportunities provided to you locally. Please consider donating to the UF IFAS County Extension office in your county. Your monetary gift is greatly appreciated and will be used to continue our efforts at providing information and education you want and need. To find out more about making donations and endowments to University of Florida IFAS Extension, please contact your County Extension office, or Joe Mandernach, IFAS Development Office at 352-392-5457 or jmandern@ufl.edu. Thank you!

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Calendar of Events

Northwest District Calendar Of Events

Bay County

November 4: BFIT-BWISE Health Fair

December 1: Restaurant Managers/Food Handlers Food Safety Class

January 24: Restaurant Managers/Food Handlers Food Safety Class

Escambia County

November 19, December 17, and January 29: Nutrition education and meal planning for families picking up food supplies at Angel Food Ministries

December 10: The *Five Little Piggies* Showcase of all the programs UF/Extension has to offer Escambia County at the annual Christmas *Deck the Stalls* night

Gadsden County

November 8, 9, 10: First time Homebuyers Class

Wakulla County

October 19, 21, 26, 28 and November 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18: Computer/Hypertension Classes

Dates Pending: Food Preservation Training: Call if interested

Washington County

November 6: Homebuyer Education Class: Washington County Ag. Center

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