Life is Not a Race

Don’t run through life so fast that you forget not only where you’ve been, but also where you’re going.

Life is not a race, but a journey to be savored each and every step of the way.

Source unknown
If food has spoiled in a refrigerator or freezer and odors from the food remain, they may be difficult to remove. The following procedures may help but may have to be repeated several times.

- Dispose of any spoiled or questionable food.
- Remove shelves, crispers, and ice trays. Wash them thoroughly with hot water and detergent. Then rinse with a sanitizing solution (1 tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water).
- Wash the interior of the refrigerator and freezer, including the door and gasket, with hot water and baking soda. Rinse with sanitizing solution as above.
- Leave the door open for about 15 minutes to allow free air circulation.

If odors remain, turn off power and try any or all of the following:

- Wipe inside of unit with equal parts vinegar and water. Vinegar provides acid which destroys mildew.
- Leave the door open and allow to air out for several days.
- Stuff both the refrigerator and freezer with rolled newspapers. Close the door and leave for several days. Remove paper and clean with vinegar and water.
- Sprinkle fresh coffee grounds or baking soda loosely in a large, shallow container in the bottom of the refrigerator and freezer.
- Place a cotton swab soaked with vanilla inside the refrigerator and freezer. Close door for 24 hours. Check for odors.
- Use a commercial product available at hardware and housewares stores. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

If Odors Cannot Be Removed

If odors cannot be removed, then the refrigerator or freezer may need to be discarded. If you need to discard the refrigerator or freezer, discard it in a safe manner:

- “Childproof” old refrigerators or freezers so children do not get trapped inside. The surest way is to take the door off.
- If the door will not come off, chain and padlock the door permanently and close tightly, or remove or disable the latch completely so the door will no longer lock when closed.

It is unlawful in many jurisdictions to discard old refrigerators or freezers without first removing the door.

Depending on where you live, your appliance will be picked up by your solid waste provider, a recycler, a retailer (if you buy a new unit), or program sponsored by local or regional utilities.

BE PREPARED FOR SEVERE SUMMER STORMS

Although thunderstorms are generally localized, they are dangerous due to the lightning that always occurs and the fact that severe storms can give rise to straight-line winds, hail, flash floods and tornadoes. Since NYS has experienced several severe storms in recent years, make sure you understand the potential dangers and how to be better prepared individually and in the office:

http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/tstorm.pdf

Being aware of upcoming storms is an important part of preparedness. Consider purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) with a tone alarm and automatic broadcast of ‘all-hazards’ messages. Digital technology allows a county code to be entered to receive Specific Area Message Encoding (S.A.M.E.) which provides alerts only relevant to your county. Information on the NWR can be found at:

http://www.weather.gov/nwr/

For fact sheets on summer storm preparedness and recovery issues, including hurricanes, visit the NY EDEN website:

http://emergencypreparedness.cce.cornell.edu/
“FOOD PRESERVATION 101”

These workshops will include basic home canning and freezing tips.

* Please note that class size will be limited, so be sure to call early if you are interested in attending.

**When/Where:**

Wednesday, August 6, 2008, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.
Salisbury Town Hall (corner of Route 29A and Mechanic Street)

OR

Wednesday, August 20, 2008
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County
5657 State Route 5, Herkimer
1:00 - 2:30 p.m. OR 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

**Instructors:**

Linda Robbins and Mary Ann Walrath,
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County

**Fee:**

No charge, but please call to register*

**To register:**

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension at 866-7920

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Mark Your Calendar!

**Herkimer County Fair**
August 12-17 at the fairground in Frankfort

**Central New York State Farm Progress Show**
September 10 & 11 at Len-Lo Farms in Mohawk

**Garlic & Herb Festival**
September 13 at Canal Place in Little Falls

Hope to see you there!

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Enjoy Fresh Produce

Take advantage of locally grown produce this summer by stopping at any Farmers’ Markets in Herkimer County, open weekly on these days:

**Herkimer:** Aubuchon Hardware lot, 105 Caroline St. 8 am - 1 pm

**Dolgeville:** Municipal lot, N. Helmer Ave, near Kinneys 8 am - noon

**Little Falls:** M&T Bank lot, Albany St. 8 am - noon

**Old Forge:** Park Ave between Crosby & Lamberton St. 2 pm - 6 pm
Salads are a great way to give a meal some summer style and variety. On a hot summer evening, salads are a good way to keep the kitchen cool by not using the stove or oven. Making salads with children is a good way to teach them the basics of cooking and to get them to eat their fruits and vegetables. Here are some ideas to try:

**Broccoli Salad**

2 cups shredded broccoli (found in produce section) or finely chopped broccoli florets  
2 cups shredded carrots (found in produce section) or finely chopped carrots  
1 cup light salad dressing (mayo type)  
3/4 cup black beans, drained and rinsed  
1-1/2 cups apples, chopped  
1 cup seedless grapes, cut into halves  
1/3 cup sunflower seeds (optional)

Mix all ingredients well. Cool and serve.

Yield: 15 servings; serving size 1/2 cup (70 calories, 3.5 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 2 grams fiber, 200 mg sodium)

**Pear Bistro Salad***

1 pound cooked, skinned chicken breast halves  
8 cups assorted torn mixed salad greens  
2 fresh pears, cored and sliced  
2 Tablespoons minced onions  
1/8 cup chopped walnuts (optional)  
1/8 cup crumbled blue cheese or favorite cheese, shredded  
3/4 cup balsamic vinegar (or favorite vinegar)

Cut cooked chicken into strips. Line platter with greens; top with pears, chicken, onions and walnuts, if desired. Top with cheese. Drizzle vinegar to taste over salad. Serve with crusty bread if desired.

Yield: 10 servings; serving size 1 cup (90 calories, 1 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 2 grams fiber, 70 mg sodium)

**Golden Pineapple Salad***

4 cups romaine or other dark greens  
1 20-ounce can pineapple chunks in 100% juice, drained (reserve juice)  
1 cup carrots, shredded  
2/3 cup raisins  
1/3 cup walnuts, chopped (optional)  
1/3 cup reduced fat mayonnaise  
1/4 cup pineapple juice from canned pineapple chunks  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Divide greens on six salad plates. Spoon equal amounts of the drained pineapple chunks and shredded carrots in the middle of each salad bed. Top with equal amounts of raisins and walnuts, if desired. In small bowl, make dressing by combining mayonnaise, pineapple juice and cinnamon. Using a spoon, drizzle dressing over each salad to taste and serve.

Yield: 6 servings; serving size 1 cup (130 calories, 2 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 2 grams fiber, 135 mg sodium)

**Grape Tasting Treat***

2 Tablespoons 100% orange or pineapple juice  
1 medium banana, sliced  
6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt  
1 cup seedless red grapes  
1/2 cup crunchy, nutty, nugget cereal

Combine juice and banana slices in a medium bowl. Stir gently to coat banana well to prevent browning. Drain juice from bananas and combine with yogurt; mix well. Add sliced kiwi, whole grapes and bananas to yogurt mixture and stir gently to blend all ingredients. Place equal amounts of combined fruit into each of the four small bowls. Top each with 1 Tablespoon of cereal. Chill and serve.

Yield: 4 servings; serving size 1/2 cup (120 calories, 1 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 2 grams fiber, 75 mg sodium)

*Recipe adapted from: www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Shared by: Meghan Murphy, Summer Nutrition Assistant
Howard Gardner introduced the theory of multiple intelligence in 1983. His theory changed teaching styles for the needs of all children.

Parents know how their children learn best. They experiment to find ways to create learning opportunities. Each new day presents a new way to expose children to the background knowledge essential for a good base for learning.

Parents of young children know the value of learning the alphabet and colors in the early years. They recognize that exposure to any new experience is a step towards learning!

Young children learn best when they have the opportunity to construct meaning from things that are familiar to them like their name. Once your child gets better at recognizing their name, encourage them to see the similarity between letters in their name and the letters in words that surround them in their everyday activities.

One of Gardener’s multiple intelligences is “Naturalistic”. Get outside and identify items in nature that represent different letters or colors. Use these wonderful summer days as a bridge to learning opportunities with your child.

The Even Start Book of the month is “Planting a Rainbow” by Doris Ehlert. Ehlert’s simple text and bright graphic art will introduce your child to colors, flowers, and gardening in this cheerful concept book. Seeds, bulbs, rhizomes and corms – all labeled – are planted and blossom into colorful flowers. Following is a series of cleverly eager pages. Each page is edged with a color of the rainbow and conceals flowers of the next color of the spectrum.

Create a personalized alphabet and color book for your child. It is a context in which to understand how the alphabet works and how it relates to reading and writing alphabet books introduce the letters and how each has a different name shape and sound.

Using photographs from magazines or seed catalogs, you can help your child learn the alphabet by having him connect letters to ideas and colors. Assist your child in mahogany alphabet look in which the contents are the letters of his or her name. Abby could have pages filled with colorful apples, beans, bananas, and yams!!!

Making connections between concepts, letters, and colors will help your child make the connection between ideas and words. Take a playful approach grounded in your child’s interest. Enjoy!!

http://www.preschoolcoloringbook.com is a resource for creating your child’s garden alphabet book.

Shared by: Rebecca Benson, Even Start Program
WAYS TO SAVE ON GAS

You can't control prices at the pump, but you do have some control over how much fuel you use. The Alliance to Save Energy recently launched the “Drive Smarter Challenge”, a web site that helps consumers figure out how much they can save annually, just by changing their driving habits. You can find it at: http://drivesmarterchallenge.org/

Prime Your Vehicle

Thanks to normal wear and tear, cars become less fuel-efficient over time. And while it's impossible to alter your car in a way that would increase its fuel economy beyond the manufacturer's estimated mileage per gallon — the Environmental Protection Agency has tested and dismissed hundreds of products that claim to do just that. In fact, a number of them actually caused damage to the engines in which they were used. You can get your car back in top-notch shape and maximize its fuel efficiency. Here's what you can do and how much you can save:

$ Check your tires: Under- or overinflated tires change the way a car handles, both adding drag and accelerating wear. That, in turn, reduces fuel efficiency by 3.3%, according to the Alliance to Save Energy. Look at your driver's side door panel or owner's manual to find out the proper inflation for your tires and make sure to check the pressure at least once a month.

$ Forgo premium fuel: Unless you drive a Dodge Viper or other high-end sports car that lists premium fuel as a requirement in its owner's manual, you should use regular unleaded gas. Premium fuel boosts engine performance, but not fuel economy. The savings in price would be far greater.

$ Get a tune-up: Maintaining your vehicle is one of the most important things you can do to aid fuel efficiency. A faulty engine can reduce fuel economy by 4%, for example, while a clogged air filter knocks off about 10%, according to FuelEconomy.gov, a Department of Energy-sponsored site. Driving a car with the check engine light on or one that obviously is not running properly can affect mileage drastically. An improperly functioning oxygen sensor can make the engine use as much as 40 percent more fuel.

Change Your Behavior

Driving responsibly is the key to reaping some of the fastest and most substantial gas savings, but only if you practice these driving behaviors consistently. Here's how:

$ Slow down: Every five miles per hour you drive above the speed limit adds 20 cents per gallon to your fuel bill, according to the Alliance to Save Energy. Don't trust yourself to stay within the limit? Use cruise control.

$ Combine errands: Cars use much more energy for cold starts (i.e; when the car hasn't been driven in a couple of hours and the engine is cool). In fact, making several cold-start trips to the store, the dry cleaners and the babysitter, will consume twice as much fuel than if you combine errands and make them all in one run, according to FuelEconomy.gov.

$ Let go of your aggression: Rapid acceleration and hard braking reduce fuel economy by about 10%, according to the Alliance to Save Energy. Pushing your car to the limit constantly burns more fuel than maintaining a steady speed. It also adds to wear and tear.

$ Pack light: Hauling a cargo carrier, kayaks or other gear on top of your car decreases fuel economy by about 5%, according to FuelEconomy.gov. They affect your car's aerodynamic performance and adds drag. Overpacking the trunk doesn't help, either. Every 100 pounds of added weight reduces fuel economy by about 2%, reports the Federal Trade Commission.

$ Swap vehicles: If you have more than one vehicle, drive the more fuel-efficient one. Don't discount even a small difference in miles per gallon. It adds up over time.

(continued on page 7)
Look for gas incentives: To help lure visitors, hotels and tourism boards are offering incentives to help offset travel costs such as discounted room rates or gas station gift cards. Yet more offers stem from individual chain properties, or bed and breakfasts.

Car pool. Combining trips with friends, family or co-workers not only saves gas money, but wear and tear on vehicles as well.

If you are in the market for a new vehicle, choose one that is more fuel efficient. According to the federal government Web site http://www.fueleconomy.gov, a person driving 15,000 miles a year can realize a savings of $878 per year by driving a vehicle that gets 30 miles per gallon versus one that gets 20 mpg. That is a savings of more than $4,388 in five years.

Sources: The Wall Street Journal (5-22-08) and North Dakota State Extension (5-2-08)

CHECK TIRES BEFORE SUMMER TRIP

The risk of a serious crash during hot weather can be heightened by tires that are worn out, under-inflated or too old.

To reduce the risk of a crash, have tires, including the spare, checked before embarking on a vacation journey.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) research shows that hot weather - and overloaded vehicles - can add significant stress to a tire, especially if it is not properly inflated. Old tires also are subject to greater stress, which increases the likelihood of catastrophic failure.

While tire condition is important for all vehicles, it is especially critical for those more prone to rollover when tires fail. That would include sport utility vehicles (SUVs), pickups or other vehicles with a higher center of gravity.

Consumers can check tire inflation with an inexpensive gauge, using the vehicle manufacturers’ recommended pressures, which are found on the driver’s side door pillar or in the owner’s manual.

The age of the tire can be determined by checking the identification number on the sidewall that begins with the letters “DOT”. The last four digits represent the week and year the tire was manufactured.

Some tire and vehicle manufacturers have issued recommendations for replacing tires that range from six to ten years of age. Consumers are advised to check with their tire or vehicle manufacturer for specific guidance.

Remember that it is vitally important to check your spare tire too. Your spare can be a real safety hazard if it is old or under-inflated.

For more information on proper tire care, along with NHTSA’s tire rating guide, visit www.safercar.gov
**HOME FOOD PRESERVATION RESOURCES**

Gardens are starting to produce fresh vegetables. A pressure canner is needed to ensure safe low-acid canned foods. There are no safe boiling water canning options for vegetables, meats and seafood, soups and some other mixtures of foods.

It is tempting to want to preserve your canned specialties in fancy jars and bottles. But the two-piece lid system and canning jars that take them are what is recommended for the home. When applied correctly, they are a good system for venting trapped air out of your jars during the canning process and can visually show that you have a vacuum seal when the jar cools.

For more information on basics of canning and freezing this season’s produce, plan to attend one of our sessions “Food Preservation 101” (see page 3)

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“Food Preservation Resources” lists all food preservation publications available from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County including some commercial sources and web sites. Topics included are home canning, freezing, pickling, dehydrating, and making jams and jellies.

For your free copy, stop at our office at 5657 State Route 5 in East Herkimer, or get a copy from our website at:


**Preserving Food at Home: A Self-Study Course**

Announcing a free, self-paced, online course for those wanting to learn more about home canning and preservation.

- Introduction to Food Preservation
- General Canning
- Canning Acid Foods
- Canning Low-Acid Foods

This course is offered in the University of Georgia WebCT system. UGA requires registration for you to receive a login. See the registration site at

https://www.uga.edu/nchfp/exception_account.html

For more information on food preservation, check out the National Center for Food Preservation at

www.uga.edu/nchfp

Asthma and allergy attacks are triggered by tiny airborne particles called allergens. These allergens lurk in dust mites, animal dander, cockroaches and their droppings, mold and mildew, and pollen. One way to help control these allergens is to get rid of the dust in your house, as well as the pollen that seeps indoors. Dusting with a dry cloth may make you feel like you are accomplishing something, but all it really does is spread the dust around, leaving it there to act as triggers for family members and guests who suffer from allergies and asthma. Fortunately, there are a host of dusting products to choose from that are designed to trap those triggers.

- **Dusting spray.** Apply the spray to your dusting cloth, and then wipe the desired surface.
- **Microfiber cloths.** These cloths are designed to gently grab and hold the dust, while eliminating the need for polish or a dusting product. They are available in disposable and washable versions.
- **Microfiber mitts.** This specialized version of microfiber cloth fits over your hand. It is especially useful for tight spaces where there would not be room for your hand and a rag.

**Microfiber dusters.** These are the modern version of Grandma’s feather duster. They are available in handheld styles and with extension poles for reaching high areas like the tops of appliances, cabinets, and furniture, and get into tight areas such as behind the computer and television.

**Electrostatic dusting cloths.** Available in mitt or cloth forms, these products have a built-in electrostatic charge that grabs and holds the dust. They are designed for hand-dusting; the cloth forms are also designed for floor dusting and fit most sweepers.

**Dust wipes.** These reusable cloths, pre-moistened with a dusting product, are stored in a re-sealable pouch to retain their moisture. Dispose of them when they get dirty or dry out.

**Vacuum cleaner.** If possible, use a vacuum that has a HEPA filter and/or exhaust filter; or use a special bag that holds allergens inside the bag. These are available in canister, upright, or handheld versions.

Source: Cleaning Matters Newsletter, May/June 2008
Power outages can occur at any time of the year and it can often take from a few hours to several days for electricity to be restored. Without electricity or a cold source, especially during the summer, foods stored in refrigerators and freezers can become unsafe. Bacteria in food grow rapidly at temperatures between 40° and 140° F, and if these foods are consumed, people can become very sick.

Here are some steps to follow to prepare for a possible weather emergency:

- Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer. An appliance thermometer will indicate the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer in case of a power outage and help determine the safety of the food.
- Make sure the freezer is at 0° F or below and the refrigerator is at 40° F or below.
- Freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator or coolers after the power is out.
- Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately. This helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours. Purchase or make ice cubes and store in the freezer for use in the refrigerator or in a cooler. Freeze gel packs ahead of time for use in coolers.
- Group food together in the freezer - this helps the food stay cold longer.

Steps to follow after the weather emergency:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after 4 hours without power.
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40° F or below when checked with a food thermometer.
- Never taste a food to determine its safety!
- Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic-foot full freezer for 2 days.
- If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer. If the appliance thermometer reads 40° F or below, the food is safe to refreeze.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. If the food still contains ice crystals, the food is safe.
- When in Doubt, Throw it Out!

For more information call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-674-6854 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)
BEAT THE HEAT WITH RED CROSS SAFETY TIPS

Everyone is at risk when temperatures rise above 90 degrees but the elderly and the very young are most susceptible to heat and heat-related illnesses. Heat-related illnesses can cause serious injury and even death if unattended.

Red Cross Heat Safety Tips:

- **Dress for the heat.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. It is also a good idea to wear hats or to use an umbrella.

- **Drink water.** Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which dehydrate the body. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.

- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid high-protein foods, which increase metabolic heat.

- **Slow down.** Avoid strenuous activity. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4 and 7 a.m.

- **Stay indoors when possible.** If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Remember that electric fans do not cool, they simply circulate the air.

- **Be a good neighbor.** During heat waves, check in on elderly residents in your neighborhood and those who do not have air conditioning.

- **Learn Red Cross first aid and CPR.**

Know What These Heat-Related Terms Mean:

- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe, they are an early signal that the body is having trouble with the heat.

- **Heat exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, causing blood flow to decrease to the vital organs. This results in a form of mild shock. If not treated, the victim may suffer heat stroke. Signals of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale flushed or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.

- **Heat stroke:** Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is life-threatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signals include hot, red and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can be very high—sometimes as high as 105º F.

**General Care for Heat Emergencies:**

- **Heat cramps or heat exhaustion:** Get the person to a cooler place and have them rest in a comfortable position. If the person is fully awake and alert, give half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not let them drink too quickly. Do not give liquids that contain alcohol or caffeine. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths, such as towels or sheets. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness.

- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation! Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Immerse victim in a cool bath, or wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. Watch for signals of breathing problems. Keep the person lying down and continue to cool the body any way you can. If the victim refuses water or is vomiting or there are changes in the level of consciousness, do not give anything to eat or drink.

Source: www.redcross.org
SAVE ON SUMMER COOLING COSTS THROUGH PROPER USE OF PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTATS

When used correctly, Energy Star qualified programmable thermostats can save money on energy bills and help fight global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If consumers manage their heating and cooling schedules accordingly, a programmable thermostat can save about $180 a year on home energy bills.

You can program your thermostat for savings this summer by:
- Raising your home’s usual temperature setting by 7 degrees when you’re away and 4 degrees when you’re asleep.
- Use the “Vacation” and “Hold” features to manage temperatures while you’re away from home for an extended period.
- Resist the urge to override the thermostat settings drastically, as this will not cool your home any faster and can cause your system to work harder, costing more on your energy bills.

EPA is also providing consumers with important tips and resources to help them get their energy use on the right track. By visiting: http://www.energystar.gov/pts consumers will find:
- Proper use guidelines for setting and maintaining their thermostat, proper installation tips and features of Energy Star qualified models.
- A new video podcast that guides homeowners through choosing the programmable thermostat that is right for you and setting it for maximum energy savings.

Additional ways to save this summer:
- Schedule an annual maintenance checkup with a licensed contractor to ensure your cooling system is operating efficiently and safely.
- Be sure to clean or change your system’s air filter according to the manufacturer’s instructions -- generally once a month.
- Find and seal air leaks that cause drafts and make your cooling system work overtime.
- Adjust your thermostat and use your ceiling fan in the counter-clockwise direction to create a wind-chill effect, making you “feel” cooler for additional energy and dollar savings. But remember, ceiling fans cool people, not rooms. So turn the ceiling fan off when you leave the room.

Source: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 6-5-08

ENERGY “SAVING STARTS @ HOME”

“Saving Starts @ Home: The Insider Story on Conserving Energy”, available at www.ftc.gov/energysavings, offers energy conservation tips to help consumers save money in every room of the house. For example, for the attic, the FTC explains the ABCs of insulation. Among other tips for the kitchen, consumers find advice on using the newly redesigned EnergyGuide labels available for all appliances.

Source: The Federal Trade Commission 5-22-08

TIPS ON HOW TO STAY COOL THIS SUMMER

The average family spends approximately $900 a year on heating and cooling their home. Don’t be average; try some of these tips to stay cool this summer.

- Keep drapes and shades closed - sunny windows can account for 40% of the heat in your home.
- Have ceiling fans? Make sure they are blowing down (moving counter clockwise).
- Use compact fluorescent light bulbs - they produce less heat.
- Unplug and turn off appliances that aren't being used - electronics give off more waste heat than you think.

For more tips on staying cool and saving money this summer visit: www.getenergysmart.org/resources/tips/aspx or call 1-877-NY-SMART.
SHOPPERS BEWARE: PRODUCTS SHRINK BUT PRICES STAY THE SAME

There's a reason why the tub of ice cream you bought last week looks a tad smaller than ones you bought last summer. It is.

Many major ice cream makers, hit by higher dairy costs, have shrunk their standard containers to 1.5 quarts from 1.75 quarts, about 1 cup less. The industry downsized from the traditional half-gallon (2 quarts) five years ago. In both cases, only the package shrunk, not the price.

"Downsizing is nothing but a sneaky price increase," says Edgar Dworsky, former Massachusetts assistant attorney general in the Consumer Protection Division, now editor of Mouseprint.org, a consumer website. "I'm waiting to open a carton of eggs and see only 11."

It's not that bad, yet. But as packaged goods makers' costs rise, they eventually have just two choices: raise prices or put less stuff in the package. While most are trying a price boost first, a growing number are shrinking the contents of their packages - from Frito Lay's chips to Dial soap to Dreyer's ice cream.

"We did not in any way try to hide this," insists Tim Kahn, CEO of Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream, which also makes - and has shrunk - Edy's. "The package-size change couldn't be any more visible."

Driving forces behind the downsizing: Commodity costs are way up. Egg prices rose 44.9% from April 2007 through April 2008, reports the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Corn costs rose 69.5%. And wheat rose 96.9%. Energy prices also are up. So are packaging costs.

Typically, shoppers are asked to pay more, but these are not typical times. Raising prices when strapped consumers are price-sensitive can be a formula for disaster. That's why there's often less in the box instead.

Few track this and those who do, such as The Nielsen Co., are tight-lipped about the data except to their clients, who pay big bucks for the proprietary stats. But Nielsen's executive for consumer insights says up to 30% of packaged goods have lost content over the past year. Some prices went down, others did not.

"I don't think we've seen anything like this since I've been in the industry," says Todd Hale, who has been with Nielsen for 29 years.

In an unscientific visit to a supermarket this month, Lynn Dornblaser, new-products guru at market tracker Mintel, looked at 100 products and found about 10% appeared to have shrunk in contents, but not in price.

Many were from the most familiar brands. Companies don't like to discuss it, but here are examples:

- Less crunch. Since January, Frito-Lay has cut the number of chips in bags across all brands from Lay's to Doritos, though not all product sizes, spokeswoman Aurora Gonzalez says. The biggest cut was to some 12-ounce bags of chips, which are now 10. Some Frito-Lay offerings got higher prices.

- Hold the mayo. A jar of Hellmann's mayonnaise that was 32 ounces is now 30. "The price of our ingredients has gone up dramatically," says Dean Mastrojohn, a Unilever spokesman. "Manufacturing and transportation costs also have increased significantly."

- Spread thinner. Shedd's Spread Country Crock was shrunk from 48 ounces to 45, due to higher commodity and energy costs, Unilever's Mastrojohn says.

- Grain shortage. The price of grains has been rising for a while, in part due to increased demand for corn to produce ethanol. Kellogg downsized Frosted Flakes, Rice Krispies and Mini-Wheats in 2006. Boxes shrunk from 24.3 ounces to 24 and from 19 ounces to 18. "I am not aware of consumer issues surrounding this downsizing," spokeswoman Susanne Norwitz says.

(continued on page 13)
General Mills began downsizing cereals last June. Some boxes of Cheerios and Wheaties shrank as much as 1.5 ounces. "Prior to the change, our package sizes were larger, in many cases, than competitors,'" spokeswoman Heidi Geller says.

Such reductions persuaded unemployed Aurora, Colo., resident Susan Kural to switch from top cereal brands to store brands. "Why should I buy 14 ounces when I can get 16?"

Slippery soap. Early this year, Henkel of America downsized its Dial soap bath bar from 4.5 ounces to 4, says Scott Moffitt, Dial's Personal Care senior vice president.

The decision was primarily due to the skyrocketing cost of tallow, the natural fat from cattle that's a key ingredient in the soap.

Less bountiful. This spring, Bounty cut the number of towels on a roll from 60 to 52. Procter & Gamble spokeswoman Celeste Kuta says the reduction was because the sheets are now "improved" and thicker.

Buyer beware - of unit price

More than ever, Dornblaser says, consumers need to check the tags on the shelf that list price per ounce, the so-called unit cost, rather than just the total price. "When consumers find it tough to pay bills, one of the things they look at first is what they're paying for products," she says.

Pricing an art - and a science

There's a science to downsizing products, and few have studied it as closely as John Gourville, a marketing professor at Harvard Business School. He studied purchasing patterns for 157 ready-to-eat cereals in 2004 and concluded that consumers are far more sensitive to higher prices than to less product. "People are generally unaware they're getting less," he says. Most of those who are aware say they'd rather get less than pay more.

All this price and size confusion has created a new job market: recession consulting gurus. Last month, retail specialist The New England Consulting Group, created a "Recession Price/Profit Management Consulting Practice."

In other words, a group to advise companies on when and how to downsize products or boost prices.

The need for expert advice is keen, CEO Gary Stibel says, because the last cost-driven inflation of this scope was decades ago. "So you have guys running companies with zero experience in this."

He's advised many clients to make product size reductions, but also to slightly lower prices. Most consumers like smaller-portioned packages that cost less, even when they're paying more per ounce.

It's a consumer mind game that's not always logical.

"This isn't mathematical pricing," the retail guru says. "It's behavioral."

If consumers want to check to see if they still are getting now what they used to get for their money, self-dubbed supermarket guru Phil Lempert says the best way is to hold onto supermarket register receipts for several months and then compare them. Most receipts not only show prices, but sizes of items.

Lempert says packaged goods makers should have to put the word "new" on the label if they take away even 1 ounce and explain very clearly what was changed.

That's because a typical supermarket has 50,000 products, while the average shopper spends just 24 minutes getting groceries. "When you've got a screaming kid or two with you," Lempert says, you need a heads-up on product changes.

Few shoppers notice subtle changes in product contents, says Bonnie Tandy Leblang, the syndicated supermarket columnist. "Most just toss things in the grocery cart."

Source: Adapted from an article by Bruce Horovitz, USA TODAY, as noted in Federal Info News, June 2008, photos courtesy of MousePrint.org
THE DTV TRANSITION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Although the majority of consumers, or 60%, know the DTV transition date, 54% do not understand why the transition is happening and what really needs to be done to prepare, according to a recent survey by Best Buy (BBY, Fortune 500).

There are 13 million households that rely on over-the-air TV, according to Nielsen Media Research, and that means that there are a lot of TV watchers that need to tune in to what's going to happen.

Changing channels

Because of recent legislation, on February 17, 2009 all broadcast television stations in the U.S. will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin broadcasting only in digital.

Converting to digital television, or DTV, means broadcasters will be able to offer better picture and sound quality, in addition to multiple programming choices, called multicasting, and interactive capabilities.

Converting to DTV also frees up parts of the broadcast spectrum for other important services, such as public safety communications for police, fire departments and rescue squads.

Digital air waves

Since the transition only affects over-the-air television broadcasting, if you subscribe to cable or satellite services, you don't have to buy a new TV or converter box.

Consumers who rely on antennas (including rooftop antennas and rabbit ears) to get reception on their TV sets will need to make changes in some of the equipment they currently use. But there are a few other options to avoid being left in the dark.

The cheapest solution is to score a set-top converter box to convert digital broadcast signals into a format your TV can display. These converter boxes plug directly into your television and are available at electronic retailers such as RadioShack (RSH), Best Buy and Circuit City (CC, Fortune 500), and cost about $50 to $80 each.

To help with the DTV transition, the government established a Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program.

All U.S. households are eligible for two coupons, worth $40 each, to be used toward the purchase of up to two, digital-to-analog converter boxes. To apply for a coupon online, go to https://www.dtv2009.gov/, but be aware that all coupons expire 90 days after they are issued. That means that consumers need to start shopping around for a converter box soon after they apply for a coupon.

Not all converter boxes are created equal. For example, some have special features, like an "analog pass-through" which allows reception for low-power stations with local religious programming.

Stay tuned

While the converter will allow you to watch digitally broadcast programming, your old analog television still may not deliver the video and audio performance improvements made possible by DTV. If you want to take full advantage of the better picture quality, then you should get a TV with a digital tuner.

That doesn't mean you have to run out and buy a fancy High Definition Television (HDTV). Upgrading to a less expensive Enhanced Definition Television (EDTV) or Standard Definition Television (SDTV) will also do the trick.

Keep in mind that beginning on March 1, 2007, all television reception devices made in or imported into the United States were required by law to be outfitted with a digital tuner. So if your TV is relatively new you probably don't need to upgrade. Or check your owner's manual for the words "digital tuner," "digital receiver" or "DTV." Some televisions manufactured before 2004 have digital tuners, but not very many.

Also, flat screen televisions and high definition monitors may be analog so consult your manual or the TV itself.

Sources: CNNmoney.com and National Consumers League 6-17-08
CONSIDER THE INSURANCE AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS BEFORE INSTALLING A SWIMMING POOL

With temperatures soaring throughout the country, many people will be taking advantage of the heat-beating delights of a swimming pool.

All pools - from a simple kiddy pool to an aquatic extravaganza - can be dangerous and need to be properly insured and comply with local safety standards.

According to a report issued by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the average number of drowning deaths involving children younger than 5 in pools and spas has increased from a yearly average of 267 (for 2002-2004) to 283 (for 2003-2005). The report also shows that the majority of deaths and injuries occur in residential settings and involve children ages 1 to 2 years old and that the victims were out of sight of their parents or caretakers for less than five minutes. Fatal drowning remains the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for children ages 1 to 14 years; for every child who dies from drowning, five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries.

The Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I) suggests taking the following steps when considering a pool:

Contact your town or municipality.

Each town will have its own definition of a “pool,” often based on its size and water depth. If the pool you are planning to buy meets the definition, then you must comply with local safety standards and building codes. This may include installing a fence of a certain size, locks, decks and pool safety equipment.

Call your insurance agent or company representative.

Let your insurance company know that you have a pool, since it will increase your liability risk. Pools are considered an “attractive nuisance” and it may be advisable to purchase additional liability insurance. Most homeowners policies include a minimum of $100,000 worth of liability protection. Pool owners, however, may want to consider increasing the amount to $300,000 or $500,000. You may also want to talk to your agent or company representative about purchasing an umbrella liability policy. For an additional premium of about $200 to $300 a year, you can get $1 million of liability protection over and above what you have on your home. This would also provide added liability protection when you drive. If the pool itself is expensive, you should also have enough insurance protection to replace it in the event it is destroyed by a storm or other disaster.

The I.I.I. also recommends taking the following safety precautions:

☐ Put fencing around the pool area to keep people from using the pool without your knowledge. In addition to the fences or other barriers required by many towns, consider creating “layers of protection” around the pool, i.e. setting up as many barriers as possible (door alarms, locks and safety covers) to the pool area when not in use.

☐ Never leave small children unsupervised - even for a few seconds. And never leave toys or floats in the pool when not in use as they may prove to be a deadly temptation for toddlers trying to reach them.

☐ Keep children away from pool filters and other mechanical devices as the suction force may injure them or prevent them from surfacing. In case of an emergency, know how to shut off these devices and clearly post this information.

☐ Be sure all pool users know how to swim. Learners should be accompanied by a good swimmer. If you have children, have them take swimming lessons as early as possible. And, don't allow anyone to swim alone.

☐ Check the pool area regularly for glass bottles, toys or other potential accident hazards. Also, keep CD players, radios and other electrical devices away from pools or nearby wet surfaces.

☐ Clearly post emergency numbers on the phone, in the event of an accident. Keep a first aid kit, ring buoys and reaching poles near the pool. You may also want to consider taking basic first aid and CPR training.

Source: Insurance Information Institute, 6-12-08