

Frugal Living for Households

Public Meeting of the Brockville Climate Action Group
March 27, 2011

Frugal Living: Why now?

- Reduce CO2 emissions
- Adapt to increasing energy prices arising from peak oil
- Save money
- Reduce impact on our biosphere
- Reconnect with each other, reconnect with the real world
- Increase self-sufficiency
- Build local resilience
- Take some control back

Tips for Frugal Living

These tips were developed by the 50 attendees during the workshop portion of the presentation.

1. Household budgeting

- Get out of debt: resources and help available through 1000 Island Credit Counselling
- Run the numbers on your or your spouse's job: after-tax income vs job-related expenses (incl. vehicle, clothes, phone, fast food, etc.)

- Use credit card wisely (full repayments monthly) or cut it up
- Wait 3 days before making an expensive purchase
- Use jars or envelope system to limit
- Track every expense for three months, and then calculate totals in categories

2. Health

- Regular exercise
- Build exercise into other activities rather than paying for a gym
- Choose whole foods rather than processed foods
- Lobby to remove HST on gym fees and sports equipment, team memberships
- Resist temptation to avoid physical work
- Choose pasture-raised meet rather than feedlot meat

3. Obtaining food

- Write up a weekly meal plan
- Grow your own: containers, bartered gardens (space for produce), group gardens
- Buy through a food co-op
- Buy in bulk
- Buy in season
- Buy on sale
- Buy less meat: we eat 50 pounds more meat, chicken and fish/person/year than we did 50 years ago
- Buy less processed (eg. avoid individually packaged bananas!)
- Mark source, price and date on items before storing them

- Sprouts = economical winter greens
- New King Street butcher
- Share large packages with friends

4. Storing food

- "Put food up": dehydrating, cold storage, in-ground storage, canning, freezing
- Use sun drying (solar dehydrator or use your car)
- Portion frozen foods for ease of use
- Store grain whole for long storage, then grind for use
- Use inventory lists taped to cupboards, containers – less waste

5. Preparing food

- Prepare for more than one meal at a time - portion the extras and freeze
- Arrange for group use of a community kitchen (fun!)
- Bring beans/grains to a boil, then keep pot wrapped in a towel overnight to finish cooking
- Use a solar oven
- Brown bag it to work; prepare the previous evening
- Use microwave, slow cooker, toaster oven rather than full-size oven
- Eat food raw
- Steam rather than boil
- Cook more than one thing at same time
- Be aware of time-of-use hydro rates, cook when rate is low and store for use during the week

6. Cleaning

- Vinegar and water for windows, use newspapers
- Baking soda rather than commercial cleansers
- Make laundry detergent (castile soap, borax, washing soda)
- Half lemon and salt for scrubbing
- Dry clothes on indoor rack or outdoor clothesline
- Leave heat off when drying in dishwasher
- Use cold water for laundry

7. Heating

- Keep thermostat lower in winter; wear layered clothing to keep warm
- Use extra blankets or comforter, instead of electric blankets
- Use programmable thermostat with about 5 degree range between low and high settings
- Close drapes at night in winter, in daytime in summer in sunny windows
- Use heat reflectors behind radiators
- Insulate water heater and pipes
- Use plastic film on windows
- Use reflector sheet under mattress
- Improve insulation in house

8. Water

- Use grey water to water your garden

- Use a timer on your electric water heater
- Shower instead of bathe
- Fix leaking faucets
- In winter, keep used hot water in the room until it cools (kitchen sink, bathtub)
- Use on-demand water heating
- Use rain barrels, cisterns
- Use dual-flush, low-flow toilets
- Boil only the amount of water you plan to use
- Turn off water while brushing teeth, shaving
- Showering: wet down / wash / rinse
- Use low flow shower head
- Use composting toilet
- Use front-loading washing machine

9. Transportation

- Consider alternatives such as car sharing (VRTUcar, Zip car), car pooling
- Dispose of car and walk, transit, cycle instead
- Access to car often leads to impulse purchases (“just need to run out for ...”; enables lack of planning)
- Bike racks on buses, trains
- Remove roof storage when not in use
- Remove excess baggage from trunk
- Provide more bike racks

10. Recreation

- Be participant rather than spectator
- Get rid of your television
- Play games

11. Reduce, Repair, Reuse

- Tie a knot in that broken shoelace, darn your socks
- Avoid fee-based recreational activities: walk to stores instead of going to a gym
- Save good elastics, string

12. Purchasing

- Look for durability rather than cheapness (May Court, Salvation Army, Goodwill rather than dollar stores)
- Avoid stuff being sold as "disposable"
- Use only cash
- Avoid the "I deserve it" mentality
- Is it a "need" or a "want"?
- Do comparison shopping including bank fees, services
- Watch for the sales cycle – match it to your purchasing cycle
- Use reusable bags
- Use reusable produce bags
- Use any coupons you can find – but JUST for things you would buy anyway
- Use Habitat for Humanity ReStore

13. Other

- Share tools and equipment: neighbours, co-op
- Barter your skills for goods and services
- Use online tools to find free goods: Brockville Reuses, Kijiji, freecycle
- Use online tools to find remove clutter: Brockville Reuses, Kijiji, freecycle
- Ditch the TV (lifestyle advertising, wasted time)
- Ditch the cellphone(s)
- Avoid prepared meals: restaurants, delivery, take-out, reheatables

Barriers to Frugality

- Cultural resistance, eg. subject to mockery, embarrassment?
- Learning curve: changes take time and effort
- Social context: being with friends and doing things with them
- Need for “rewards” when times are tight: risk of returning to old habits

Dealing with the Barriers

- Similar to breaking addictions
- “Knowledge is power”: continue exploring the reasons for doing what you’re doing
- Change who you spend time with: if you’re spending time with people who drag you back, remember that they don’t have your best interests at heart!
- Meet regularly with others doing the same: neighbourhood coffee clubs, dinner clubs, bulk buying, garden clubs, tool sharing

- Start slowly; set a goal but pace the changes
- Know how to pick yourself up when you fall. You can choose to pick yourself up every time you fall. Forgive yourself for your past, and move on to your brighter future!
- Practice mindfulness ("be-here-now") to get the most out of all your new activities
- Remember to separate "wants" vs "needs"
- Extricate yourself wherever you can from the cash economy
- Identify some yardsticks, eg. less garbage (waste) can be an indicator of savings
- Think about the energy embedded in each of the things you do
- Seek improvement rather than perfection
- Acknowledge your successes, eg. invite your neighbours over for a meal from your garden