



Waste-Free Lunches

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Everyone is interested in saving money, correct? Do you know how you can save over \$250.00 a year? Start bringing your own lunch to work or sending a sack lunch with your children and make the lunch waste free!!! A waste-free family lunch program starts with a statement. A family decides that it is going to make waste reduction in their home a priority, and one of the best places to start is with lunch and snack waste. A waste-free lunch program is a process of educating family members where our trash ends up and how a family can reduce the amount of trash generated. Waste-free lunches favor the use of reusable food containers, drink containers, utensils and napkins. They discourage the use of disposable packaging, such as prepackaged foods, plastic bags, juice boxes and pouches, paper napkins and disposable utensils. If carefully and thoughtfully done, over \$250.00 a year per person can be realized.

A typical American disposable lunch looks like this: sandwiches sealed in plastic bags, fruits and vegetable in plastic bags, prepackaged chips, cookies, fruit bars, granola bars, cheese and fruit leathers, prepackaged yogurts, applesauce and puddings, crackers, pretzels, chips or other snack foods sealed in plastic bags, disposable juice boxes, juice pouches, soda cans, water bottles and milk cartons, plastic forks and spoons, paper napkins, reusable lunchboxes and disposable paper and plastic bags.

A waste-free, reusable lunch consists of sandwich or other main dishes, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and treats in a reusable lunch containers, cloth napkins, stainless-steel forks and spoons, reusable drink containers, and a reusable lunchbox. This type of lunch food items can be bought in larger quantities and the packaging can be left at home for reuse or recycling. A waste-free lunch is not only a wise environmental choice, but they are less expensive as well.

As Americans we have come to depend on the many convenience products that are available to us, and nowhere is this more evident than at lunch time. Most parents pack lunch items in single-use plastic bags, aluminum foil or they purchase single serving items that come in their own disposable package. Admittedly these products are extremely convenient, but what is the environmental cost to a country that relies so heavily on them? Landfills are full and overflowing. Incinerators pump the container's fumes into the air. Communities are battling over who will accept the nation's trash. We all enjoy these conveniences, but few of us are willing to allow new landfills and incinerators to be built in our own back yard.

Remember, much of the trash we generate comes from the packaging on the food we buy, and lunch foods are no exceptions. In fact, it has been estimated that an average one school-age child using a disposable lunch generates 67 pounds of waste per school year. That equates to 18,760 pounds of lunch waste for just one average-size elementary school.

Packing a waste-free lunch is a money- and environment-saving suggestion for you to consider!