

A New Take on Resolutions for the New Year

Every year, millions of Americans make sweeping New Year's resolutions. Lose 30 pounds. Work out at the gym three times a week. Give up sugar. Quit smoking. Stop drinking. With the exception of a few hardy souls, most of us slip up before the Spring Equinox.

So why join the masses in a venture almost surely guaranteed to fail? Why not, instead, embark upon a New Year's goal that's easy to reach, and can be completed in just one month?

Below is a checklist of simple action steps, culled from the first four issues of *The Frugal Environmentalist*. Perhaps you've read about these simple tips. Maybe you've even tried some of them, but haven't gotten around to implementing all of them. This year, instead of making sweeping New Year's Resolutions, vow to spend the month of January working through any uncompleted items on this fourteen-point checklist. By February, you will have changed your life for the better, and will reap the rewards for years to come!

Call Amica (1-800-242-6422) for a quote on Renters' or Home Owners' Insurance. I saved almost 50% on my renters' insurance by switching to Amica. If you pay the one-year premium up front, instead of in installments, you'll get a substantial "shareholder" rebate at the end of the year.

Make your own Furniture Polish. In a pint-sized spray bottle, mix together 3 tablespoons of oil, 1/3 cup of white vinegar, and enough water to fill the bottle. Add in a few drops of lemon essential oil, if you like. Shake well before each use.

Make your own All-Purpose Cleaning Solution. In a pint-sized spray bottle, mix together one cup of water, one cup of white vinegar and a few drops of tea tree oil. Shake well before each use.

Check out your local food co-op or health food store for eco-friendly dish detergent sold in bulk. When purchased in bulk, vegetable-based biodegradable detergent will cost little more than the artificially-colored, chemical smelling, petroleum-based detergents that grace the shelves of most grocery stores. And by reusing containers and buying in bulk, you'll help save on plastic packaging too!

Stop Junk Mail. Perhaps you weren't ambitious enough to tackle all two pages of suggestions in the Spring 2003 edition. No need to beat yourself up. Go back and read the article if you'd like. Or, to reduce your junk mail volume by 50—70% with one simple step, send your address, as well as the name of everyone in your household, to:

Mail Preference Service
Direct Marketing Association
P.O. Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

Install a low-flow shower head. If you can't find one at your local hardware store, ask your local water company, electric company or gas company. The new-and-improved low-flow shower heads provide a good strong water flow while simultaneously reducing the amount of water you use.

Set up a box with 8.5" x 11" scrap paper next to your printer. That way it's easy to reuse scrap paper for printing out rough drafts, or personal copies of documents.

Invest in a surge-protecting power strip. This will help prevent damage to your computer during a power-surge or electrical storm. It will also allow you to completely turn off the power to your computer and its peripherals, eliminating the "phantom load" phenomenon that causes some electronics to suck power even when "turned off". To make an informed decision about a surge-protecting power strip, reread page 12 of the Summer 2003 issue of *The Frugal Environmentalist*.

Spend the month of January experimenting with a prepaid long-distance calling card from either BigZoo.com or OneSuite.com. You need only buy the calling cards in \$10 increments. See the Fall 2003 edition for tips on making these calling cards as easy to use as possible. If you like the service, consider dropping your long distance service at the end of the month.

Register with the National Do Not Call Registry. Either call 1-888-382-1222 or register online at www.donotcall.gov. You must call from the phone number you wish to register. There is no way to register a "distinctive" or "custom" ring number by phone; you must register such numbers online. Despite the ample controversy over this registry, I've found it to be effective in virtually eliminating telemarketing calls, since most telemarketing firms are voluntarily complying with the list while they wait to see what will happen in court.

Read your dishwasher manual. Find out just how much automatic dishwasher detergent you need to use. Call your local water company, or check the results of your most recent well-water test, to

figure out if you have soft, medium or hard water; the amount of detergent you need to use will depend in part on how hard your water is.

□ **Comparison shop for the best rates on auto insurance.**

Three simple phone calls are all you need to make. Check out Amica (800-242-6422), Progressive (800-776-4737), and Geico (800-861-8380). Before you call for quotes, be sure to take out your current policy so you can compare apples and apples. There are many different components to auto insurance—collision, comprehensive, liability, and uninsured motorist, just to name a few—and each component has its own deductible and maximum payout. To truly compare quotes, give the agent all the details so he or she can work up a quote for a comparable policy.

□ **Switch from AAA to Better World Club.** See page 14 for details.

□ **Call 1-888-OPT-OUT.** This will stop those annoying “you have been pre-approved for a credit card” letters.

Turkey Soup
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the frozen cooked turkey breast on the counter to at least partially defrost. Normally I would let frozen items defrost overnight in the refrigerator, because the thawing process helps keep the refrigerator cool without consuming electricity. But now time was of the essence.

After I was done chopping, I had quite some time to resume packing. Once the stock was ready (I usually let it simmer an hour or two), I turned it off, and let it cool. Once cool, I strained it. Then I stir-fried all the soup veggies (minus the squash and the greens) in some butter. Once

the veggies were glistening and fragrant, I added the stock plus the turkey breast and the butternut squash. Then I resumed packing yet again. After 15—20 minutes, I plucked the breast out, chopped it into small pieces, and returned it to the soup, along with the greens. I simmered for a few more minutes, and *voilà!* Turkey soup, a clean refrigerator, and enough food to get me through until we got on the road. An elegant solution!

But you don't have to be moving across country to take advantage of this recipe. Rather, be sure to save miscellaneous parts, and focus on using up whatever's hiding in your fridge.

Rule #1: Save, Save, Save. Don't throw something away just because you don't need it now. Poultry organs and necks are virtually essential for a flavorful soup. Freeze them if you're baking a bird and don't currently have enough time to make soup. Ditto for carcasses of baked birds. If you don't have time to make soup, freeze the carcass. I also like to freeze miscellaneous chicken bones and pieces of chicken fat for later use in soup.

Rule #2: If you plan on making a soup within the next two days, start saving vegetable scraps.

Almost any vegetable and herb scraps will do, as long as they aren't from the cruciferous family; even a small amount of broccoli, cauliflower or cabbage will overpower the delicate flavor of a homemade soup. Don't overlook the peels and seeds of tasty winter delicacies like butternut squash. They impart a rich, sweet flavor to the stock, and give it a nice color too. Herb scraps, like stems, are a wonderful addition to stocks, although I would avoid putting dill into stocks. Like the cabbage family

veggies, the flavor of dill is just too strong and will dominate what should be a multi-flavored stock.

Rule #3: Multi-task. Sure, you *could* say that it takes three hours to make a homemade soup. But most of the time, the stock is either simmering or cooling down. Yes, you have to be *home* for those three hours, but you could be working on other projects: cleaning, folding laundry, helping the kids with their homework. Or even packing for a cross-country move!

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attach it to your letter. It's a great way to help spread the word.

1. Verify that your home is leak free. Many homes have hidden water leaks. Read your water meter before and after a two-hour period when no water is being used. If the meter does not read exactly the same, there is a leak.

2. Check your toilet tank for leaks by adding food coloring to the tank. If the toilet is leaking, color will appear in the toilet bowl within 30 minutes. Check the toilet for worn out, corroded or bent parts. Most replacement parts are readily available and easily installed. (Flush as soon as the test is done, since the food coloring may stain the tank.)

3. Repair dripping faucets by replacing washers. If your faucet is dripping at a rate of one drop per second, you can expect to waste 2700 gallons per year.

4. Break the garbage disposal addiction. Garbage disposals require lots of water to operate properly. Instead of using a garbage disposal, start a compost pile as an alternative method of disposing of food waste. Garbage disposals also add 50% to the volume of solids in a septic tank, which can lead to malfunctions and maintenance problems.