

The Daily Gleaner

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By Sonya Hull

Green is the Color of Back to School

School days are almost here, and the new school year brings with it the opportunity to set new everyday habits and practices that can launch a positive environmental tone for our families.

Let's start with packing lunches. Challenge yourself to pack your children's lunch boxes with zero-waste, also called a 'litter-less lunch'. This means everything in the lunch box that is not eaten by your child must either come home to be washed (containers, spoons); go into the recycling bin at school; or home to your backyard composter (apple cores, banana peels, etc.). So now is the time to wean your children off of drink boxes, cheese strings, and other individually packaged foods such as cheese and crackers, yogurt tubes, etc. And if you do still choose to buy small containers of yogurt – check the bottom for the recycling symbol first. Try to put drinks in a reusable bottle; and yogurt, applesauce, muffins, sandwiches, etc. in containers. And if your child likes to have a napkin packed, use cloth not paper. Having a zero-waste lunch is something that your child can feel great satisfaction about if you 'market' it in the right way!

From experience I know that it is a challenge to get into the habit of packing a litter-less lunch when plastic cling wrap and baggies have become so pervasive in our convenience society. But remember cling wrap is often a #3 plastic (polyvinyl chloride - PVC), which is considered one of the 'leaching' plastics to avoid, along with #6 (Polystyrene) and #7 (Polycarbonate). Plastic cling wrap is also much less recyclable than other plastics because it contains a variety of additives and lacks a uniform composition and it is not accepted at all by Fredericton Region Solid Waste Commission (FRSWC) due to these characteristics. Make sure your plastic containers have the numbers 2, 4 or 5, which are deemed healthy to use. And when you to retire your old plastic containers, remember that FRSWC accepts numbers 1 through 7.

Now let's have a look at our practices around getting to school and home again. If your child takes the school bus, this is already an eco-friendly option, but if you have to drive your child to school and pick them up maybe you could consider several other options to lower your transportation carbon footprint. Is the school close enough that you can walk or bike your child to school? Are there other children in the neighborhood, so parents can take turns walking children to school and/or carpooling? Even if you commit to walking or biking your child to school one or two days a week, this is a step in the right direction! And if your children are involved in after-school and evening activities try to carpool as often as possible, or coordinate your errands with drop-offs and picks-ups, to help lessen your family's total carbon footprint.

There is still time to re-think your family's school-year ways of living, so take the chance in the next week to set some realistic environmental goals. Just like children, environmentalism starts small and grows.

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