

# To Your Health

April 2009

## Managing Tough Times

Tough times force hard choices. And for many of us, these are some of the toughest times we have seen. As you search for answers to "making the most of what you have," Iowa State University Extension brings resources and experts to you at **Managing Tough Times** - [www.extension.iastate.edu/answers](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/answers).

Get help with personal challenges such as managing money, dealing with stress, and providing nutritious low-cost meals. Find information that can help your small business, farm, or community survive - even thrive - in these tough times.

Managing Tough Times brings together research and advice from Iowa State University and other government experts by way of publications, worksheets, tips, hotlines and an "Ask an Expert" tool. Get the information you need *today*, go back tomorrow and explore even more.

## Spend Smart. Eat Smart.

People are concerned about getting the most nutritional value for their food dollars. So questions about organic foods are coming in. Here's a piece that I found on the Spend Smart. Eat Smart blog from Ruth Litchfield, Extension nutrition specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

### Organic, Locally Grown - Are They the Same?

"The nutritional value of food depends on the soil in which it was grown, cultivar of the plant, growing conditions (weather), degree of maturity at harvest, handling after harvest, and time spent in transport or storage to name a few. Research suggests organic food production does not produce nutritionally superior food. It is more likely that 'locally grown' food may have a nutritional advantage because it isn't picked prior to maturity, transported, and stored - factors that decrease nutritional value. Bottom line: organic and locally grown are not the same; the primary advantage of organic food production is not nutritional value, but environmental friendliness.

"Does this influence my grocery shopping habits? Sure does! I am not inclined to purchase organic foods, which are typically more expensive, for better nutritional value. Instead, I look for nutritious foods by visiting my local farmer's market where I can support the local economy, and being physically active in my garden."

... Ruth Litchfield, Extension nutrition specialist, ISU Extension

For more information visit **Spend Smart. Eat Smart** - [www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings).

Follow Blog conversations. Register to receive a weekly e-mail tip. Look for recipes, tips on using convenience foods, tips on eating out, ideas for family meals at home, information on the safe handling and preparation of food, and more!

## Can a Vegetable Garden Save You Money?

There's a surge of interest in gardening this spring. And the big question is - *can a vegetable garden save me money?*

Cindy Haynes, Extension horticulturist, Iowa State University Extension, says that growing a garden has the *potential* to reduce the amount of money spent on groceries. But this potential depends on the costs involved in growing the crops, types and amounts of vegetables grown, yields that are derived from the garden, and other factors.

Here are some important factors to consider when growing a vegetable garden to save money on a grocery bill or two.

**Start small.** Limit yourself to a few types of vegetables and a small plot or some containers. Gardening takes practice. Plants need regular watering, maintenance and harvesting. Increase garden size as you become more confident in your abilities and resources.

**Do some research and start with a plan.** Decide how much space you have, what will be necessary to be successful, and what you want to grow. Plan the garden on paper.

**Establish a network** of family members, neighbors, friends that can help you answer your gardening questions.

**Consider how you will reduce your inputs:** water, fertilizers, pest control, etc. Saving money with vegetables usually means keeping the costs as low as possible while growing productive plants.

**Select vegetables that you like.**

**Select vegetables that are expensive to buy in the grocery store** -- like tomatoes, or large quantities of vegetables that you purchase regularly - such as beans, beets, onions, spinach, broccoli, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, summer squash, potatoes, lettuce, peas.

**Select vegetables that can be easily stored or preserved.** You'll also need to think about whether you have freezer space to store extra produce, and whether you have the equipment and skills to can food.

For more information check out the "yard and garden" section of publications at [www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store).

## Stay Fit While Gardening

The increased interest in gardening is good - in more ways than one. You can enjoy being out in the fresh air, burn some calories, build some muscles, beautify your yard, maybe grow some vegetables.

Raking and bagging leaves, picking up branches and twigs, and pushing a mower can all get your heart pumping. So can hauling bags of soil, or fertilizer, and shoveling and tilling your garden plot. Spreading mulch or pinestraw can add to the workout for your arms and legs. And your shoulders may feel the burn from planting seeds or trimming shrubs.

So get outside and get gardening!

## Reduce Kitchen Waste/Save \$\$\$

Consider food packaging carefully. As you shop for groceries and kitchen items, check out the amount of packaging around various brands and sizes. Buy products with the least amount of plastic, paper, cardboard, and metal surrounding them. Choose the type of packaging that is easiest to recycle in your community. Reduce waste and save money by avoiding prepared and highly processed foods. These products usually have excessive amounts of packaging, as well as a high cost for the amount of food you get.

Source: [www.eatrightmontana.org](http://www.eatrightmontana.org)