

Nature's Clues
to Gardening

On the Hunt with
Geocaching

Join the
Coupon Craze

HOBBY FARM HOME[®] HOBBY FARM HOME[®]

January/February 2012

True Country Living

LET'S eat!

- * Plan a Fresh Menu Year-Round
- * Make Sausage at Home
- * Get Comfort-Food Recipes

5 Themed Garden PLANS

Get Healthy Diet and Exercise Tips



DIY

- Replace Old Flooring
- Install a Tile Backsplash

Display until January 30, 2012

\$5.99 US/CAN



CLIP or CLICK



*With a snip of the scissors
or the click of a mouse, save
money on home and kitchen
essentials that supplement
your garden's bounty and keep
your home spick-and-span.*

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

You've seen them. They're the shoppers who stall in the grocery aisle to check their smartphones or accordion organizers for a discount or coupon. They arrive at the checkout counter with a stack of clipped coupons in hand and don't leave the store without carefully studying their receipts to see exactly how much money they saved that day. Maybe you've ended up behind them at the checkout and wished you had chosen a different line. Maybe you've assumed that people who rely on coupons can't buy the fresh, sustainable or organic products you prefer. Or maybe you've wondered if you're missing out on something big.

The coupon craze certainly is big right now. Motivated by local couponing classes and national media, including TLC's *Extreme Couponing* television show, American shoppers saved \$3.7 billion using coupons in 2010, according to a report by Valassis, a national media and marketing services company. That number represents a 5.7-percent increase from 2009. As the economy continues to sputter, coupon use isn't expected to slow down. The upside is that all types of manufacturers, retailers, and even farmers' markets and independent vendors are getting in on the action, so you can take advantage of coupons without forfeiting healthy and sustainable products.

Why Coupon?

With the economy dragging, most of us are interested in saving money wherever we can, and couponing is an easy way to cut costs. "People are finding it harder to pay full price for anything these days," says Isra Hashmi, who blogs at *The Frugalette* (www.thefrugalette.com) and teaches free couponing classes in Cambridge, Mass. "The one bill we have the most control over is food. If you want to trim your budget fast, grocery shopping is the one expense you can reduce immediately by using coupons. If you think of coupons just like cash, it's adding money to your budget rather than reducing it."

Because our budgets are tighter these days and coupons are more accessible than ever before, shoppers are more aware of coupons and the savings they offer. "The creation of online and mobile coupons made it possible for more people to readily identify and use coupons with less effort and organization," says Kate Forgach, content editor at Coupon Sherpa (www.couponsherpa.com) and an avid



Estrocell
www.estrocell.com

Let's keep it clean.



The Brilliance is really
so we made something for

SAVE \$1.00
off the purchase of
any 2 Estrocell (tampons or
sponge tampons)



SAVE 55¢



Thanks to increased coupon offerings from organic-food growers and producers, it's possible to save money on fresh, sustainable fare.

You may have to look beyond the Sunday paper for deals on organic goods. Some retailers publish their own in-store and online coupons for customers.

farmers' market and local-produce shopper. "It also helps that manufacturers and stores responded in kind. The face value of coupons in 2010 increased 6.6 percent to an average of \$1.46 per coupon."

But for many, using coupons is about more than just saving money. "Many couponers find it fun," says Sarah Eve Fulghum, social-media manager for the couponing website A Full Cup (www.afullcup.com). "They see it as a game and are thrilled to win big by walking away with more items for less money thanks to coupons. That's why couponers participate in forums like [ours], so they can share their victory stories as if winning trophies. It's fun to win the game and show off your prize."

Getting Started

Couponing can be overwhelming, so it's a good idea to start small, Fulghum says. She recommends starting with your favorite store and learning how to use coupons there. Become familiar with the store's coupon policy, a



STEPHANIE STATION/IST

list of rules on what coupons the store accepts and how you may use those coupons, which can be found online or by asking a store manager. Start collecting coupons for products you like through newspaper inserts and printable online coupons, then watch for those items to go on sale. "That's the time to buy, when you have both a coupon and a sale price on an item," Fulghum says.

To make it easier to match up coupons and sales, check bargain-hunting websites, such as A Full Cup, Southern Savers (www.southernsavers.com) and others, to locate deals where you shop the most. "Once you get comfortable using coupons and hunting deals at your favorite store, branch out and learn to coupon at another store, then build from there," Fulghum says.



LISA MUNNIESAMA

Buy Local

The best way to save money is to buy produce in season and as locally as possible.

To find local produce through co-ops, community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets and organic buying clubs, visit Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org) or Sustainable Table (www.sustainabletable.org).

If you don't know what produce to search for, Sustainable Table's website lets you search to see what's in season in each state for each month of the year.

Want to buy directly from the farm? For a searchable database of pasture-based, direct-market farms, visit Eat Wild (www.eatwild.com).

Stretch your savings further by eschewing your favorite brands for similar yet less-expensive options, Hashmi recommends. "If there is a sale on a competitor's brand and you have a coupon for it, you will get bigger savings than sticking to a brand you always use that never goes on sale," she says. "And you might end up finding a new brand you like."

Also develop a habit of buying products before you need them. "Most shoppers wait until they are out of an item, then go to the store and pay full price," Hashmi says. "When the item is on sale and you have a coupon, even if you are not out of the product, buy it so when you do need it, you are not paying premium price."

Keeping It Natural

Contrary to popular belief, it's possible to save money with coupons and still buy fresh, sustainable and local products, says Paige Wolf, author of *Spit That Out: The Overly Informed Parent's Guide to Raising Children in the Age of Environmental Guilt* (Lombard Books, 2010). "Unlike the people you see on *Extreme Couponing*, we pay attention to the quality and health benefits of what we are buying and don't just buy anything on sale. We are less likely to walk out of a store with \$500 worth of free groceries, but we can certainly shave a few bucks off our bill."

Thanks to increased coupon offerings from organic and natural-food companies, health-conscious consumers can save more than just a few dollars. "Organic, all-natural and sustainable-product companies are realizing the power of coupons," Hashmi says. "There has been a dramatic increase in the past two years of companies offering coupons and sales on all-natural, sustainable products."

However, you may have to look beyond the Sunday paper for coupons for organic products. Websites like Mambo Sprouts (www.mambosprouts.com) and Organic Deals (www.organicdeals.com) aggregate coupons from a range of organic and natural food companies, Wolf says. If you're interested in organic or natural products from a particular company, sign up for the company's newsletter, "like" the company on Facebook, or type the brand name and the word "coupons" into your favorite search engine. Many of these companies offer special "members-only" coupons to their newsletter subscribers or Facebook fans.



STEPHANIE STATION

Don't stop with manufacturer's coupons. Also check for coupons at your local health-foods store. Fulghum says. "These may be available in-store, online, or through a loyal-shopper card so you can save with a combination of manufacturer coupons and store coupons to maximize your savings," she says.

And couponing isn't just for packaged goods; you can also save money on fresh meats, seafood and produce. "Plan your menu around the protein that's on sale and the produce that's seasonal," says Jodi Furman, the blogger behind Live FabuLESS (www.livefabuleless.com). "If chicken breasts, ground turkey, salmon and T-bones are on sale, that's what you'll be eating this week. Next week, you might buy shrimp, whole chicken, mahi-mahi and filet mignon. You can also stock up on protein when it's on sale and freeze it so you always have the flexibility to select what you want to eat, regardless of what's on sale that particular week." ❄

A mother of three, Nancy Mann Jackson is always looking for ways to serve healthy food and save money. She writes regularly for a number of national publications. Learn more about her at www.nancyjackson.com.

Use bargain-hunting websites like A Full Cup to match your coupons with store-based sales.



NICOLE SIPE

Cash and Carry

Stop hauling your market buys in nonbiodegradable bags and save a little cash in the process. Many grocery and retail stores now offer cash refunds to customers with reusable bags. Put some of your old canvas totes to work or make your own bags and stow them in the car after each trip for easy access.

To make your own produce bags, cut two pieces of mesh fabric, pin with right sides facing in and sew three unfinished edges, fold and hem open side, flip inside out, and thread top with ribbon.