

REAL LIFE

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Think outside the bottle

Photo courtesy, Zsuzsanna Kilian, stock.xchng

As the hot season gets into full swing, we find out how much bottled water costs you — and the environment

Break the habit

Bottled water is hard on the environment due to the energy and resources needed to manufacture the bottles, and also because of the pollution created by transporting these bottles — sometimes thousands of kilometres.

Drinking bottled water is also an expensive habit (costing many Canadians hundreds of dollars a year), especially considering two of Canada's largest bottled water brands actually use purified municipal water.

Both the David Suzuki Foundation and Environmental Defence say Pepsi's Aquafina and Coca Cola's Dasani get their water from municipal supplies. One of Dasani's water sources is Calgary tap water, according to the organizations.

Save yourself some dough without sacrificing taste by taking these steps:

■ If you're worried about chlorine in your water, put it in a pitcher and let it stand overnight to allow the chlorine to evaporate. Or buy a carbon activated filter for your tap.

■ "It's not our view that tap water on its own is dangerous, but if taste is an issue, use a filter," Aaron Freeman of Environmental Defence says.

A variety of water filters are on the market, depending on how much you want to spend and what you're most concerned about filtering. Compare them at waterfiltercomparisons.com

■ Buy a reusable metal water bottle, ideally one made from stainless steel. Look for them at Community Natural Foods, Planet Organic, Mountain Equipment Co-op and other outdoors and natural food stores around the city.



THE GREEN GUIDE

EMMA GILCHRIST
CALGARY HERALD

Imagine buying a bottle of water for a buck.

Now imagine choosing to buy a different bottle — containing exactly the same water — for \$1.250.

Sounds like a waste of money? Exactly.

But one-third of Canadians buy bottled water rather than drinking water from the tap, according to a study released last week by Statistics Canada.

That's despite the fact bottled water costs at least 1,250 times more than what comes from your faucet. Yes, millions of Canadians are actually paying more for water than they do for gasoline.

To drink the recommended amount of water (eight to 12 cups per day), you'd spend about \$2,500 per year on bottled water. The cost for the same amount of tap water in Calgary? Less than two dollars.

While many people drink bottled water because they think it tastes better or believe it to be of higher quality than tap water, two of Canada's largest bottled water brands use purified municipal water — from cities including Calgary — says Aaron Freeman, an Ottawa-based policy director for Environmental Defence, which works to protect the environment and human health.

In other words, buy bottled water and you could be buying filtered tap water — possibly

even from your own city.

And you're paying a lot for it, whether you're picking it up by the case at your local grocery store or paying top dollar for it at a fancy restaurant.

"One of the best and most simple things you can do to reduce your ecological footprint is to stop buying bottled water," says Freeman.

In fact, it's hard to think of a worse product in terms of ecological footprint, especially when you consider water shipped from faraway lands, says Freeman.

"It's put into an energy intensive container — plastic — and then shipped long distances. It's a very wasteful product," Freeman says. "Bottled water in most cases... is a totally unnecessary product."

What's more, The Polaris Institute estimates that 70 million plastic water bottles end up in landfills in North America alone.

But even if you recycle, don't let yourself off the hook. Imagine a water bottle filled a quarter of the way up with oil. That's how much oil is needed to produce the bottle, according to the National Geographic website.

This, folks, is why recycling

is the third "R" and reduce is the first.

"This is an industry — in which the growth has been unbelievable over the past decade — that has created an image of mountain streams and glaciers," Freeman says.

That image has worked wonders to convince Canadians — who have access to some of the cleanest, safest water in the world — to pay thousands of times more for water that comes in a bottle, instead of out of the tap.

Between 2000 and 2003, Canadian consumption of bottled water doubled, according to the International Council of Bottled Water Associations.

And that's in a country where tap water is actually safer than bottled water, according to Freeman.

"We have so many more safeguards on tap water than on bottled water," he says, noting regulations for testing tap water are far more rigorous than those for testing bottled water.

There is a backlash against it — the U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution last week calling to phase out of bottled water used by municipalities and an Ontario school

district has voted to remove the stuff from vending machines.

That's why some companies have devised strategies to make their products appear more "green." They're using less plastic, donating money to charity or carbon offsetting.

But there are better ways to use your money, says Lisa Gue, an Ottawa-based environmental health policy analyst for the David Suzuki Foundation.

"Consumers really need to beware of greenwashing efforts in general. The bottled water industry provides some great, but sad, examples," she says.

Corporate efforts to be socially responsible are worthwhile, of course.

But if you live in a country where you are privileged enough to have clean tap water, you have no excuse for buying bottled water, Gue says.

Best-selling author David Bach, who coined the term "the latte factor," lists eliminating bottled water in Tip No. 2 in his book *Go Green, Live Rich: 50 Simple Ways to Save the Earth (and Get Rich Trying)*.

Break your a bottle-a-day water habit, he says, and you will save \$500 a year.

This tip is right up front in the book, he says, because it's the perfect example of how wasting money and hurting the planet go hand in hand.

Case in point: if bottled water were history, enough oil would be saved from the making of the bottles to run 100,000 cars for a year.

That's a whole lot of oil going down the drain for a habit that costs you — and the Earth — a whole lot of capital.

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Herald Archive, Canwest News Service

Imagine these bottles filled a quarter of the way up with oil. That is how much oil is typically needed to produce the bottle.

VITALS

Vegetarian BBQ coming up

STAMPEDE • If you enjoy veggie food, check out Planet Organic's Yves Veggie Barbecues on July 5 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at both Calgary locations (4625 Varsity Dr. N.W. and 10233 Elbow Dr. S.W.).

The barbecues — which will feature hot dogs, hamburgers and gluten-free options — are free, but you're encouraged to make a donation of at least \$2 to support local charities.

For more information, call 403-288-6700 or 403-252-2404.

— Calgary Herald

Grape daiquiris

RECIPE • Here's a cool grown-up treat for summer, courtesy of the California Table Grape Commission.

- 1 cup** (250 mL) green, red or black California seedless grapes
- 4 oz** (114 mL) white rum
- 3 oz** (90 mL) sweetened lime juice
- 3 cups** (750 mL) ice

Place all ingredients into the bowl of a blender and puree until blended and slush, about 2 minutes. Serve in tall glasses. Makes 2 drinks.

— Calgary Herald

Green tea protects against heart disease

STUDY • A few cups of green tea each day may help prevent heart disease, Greek researchers said this week.

A study published in the European Journal of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation showed further evidence of the potential health benefits from a brew already linked to a reduced risk of cancer.

The study showed green tea improves blood flow and the ability of arteries to relax.

Heart disease is the world's leading cause of death.

— Reuters

Kids getting more cavities

DENTAL HEALTH • Tooth decay among young Canadian children is on the rise and current models to address their oral health lack critical education and prevention components, according to Dr. Ian McConnachie, past president of the Ontario Dental Association.

Provincial dental programs offer mostly stop-gap measures aimed at urgent care rather than early intervention, he said at the International Association of Dental Research conference in Toronto on Thursday.

"Decay in children is the most widespread chronic disease of childhood, much higher than the No. 2 which is asthma," McConnachie said. "Decay rates in kids are rising again where they have been falling for decades."

National tooth decay rates have not been studied since 1972 but are currently being assessed by Statistics Canada.

A patchwork of Canadian studies show access rates to dental care are low among low-income families, First Nations and new immigrants.

The growing rate of tooth decay has occurred in children around the world. Part of the problem is diet but there is also a lack of understanding about the importance of oral health.

— Canwest News Service

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