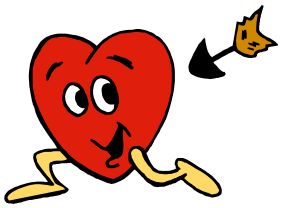
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA | IFAS EXTENSION



Consumer Highlights

SANTA ROSA FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES NEWSLETTER

February 2005

Contents:

Smart Uses For Your Tax Refund	1
Benefits Alzheimer's Drugs May Go Longer	3
Pro and Cons of Debit Cards	4
Living Alone Creates A Nutritional Risk	4
Gardener's Corner	5
Recipes	6
HCE News	8
February Calendar	9

Smart Uses For Your Tax Refund...

A tax refund is always a welcome bonus. Whether it's $300 or $3,000, the way you use that money can have a real impact on your personal and financial well-being.

New computer? New recliner? Nice vacation? *Those are all nice ideas, but...*

Before you spend your refund, try to think through *all* the options — even ones that aren't especially glamorous.

Follow Three General Rules;

1. **DO plan ahead before spending your refund.** Without a plan, you may use the money on the first important thing that comes to mind, and then later realize something else was *more* important. Planning ahead and involving the family increases the chances you will identify all the possibilities, and think about which are most important.
2. **DO devote a portion of your tax refund to build long-term financial security.**
3. **DON'T throw away part of your refund on loan fees.** Did you know that those companies that offer "quick refunds" are just giving you a loan? It's a high-cost, high-risk loan. [For more information on refund anticipation loan, see www.consumerlaw.org, and follow the logical links.]

Santa Rosa County Extension Service • 6263 Dogwood Drive • Milton, FL 32570-3500
Phone: (850) 623-3868 • (850) 934-5278 • Fax: (850) 623-6151

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, disability or national origin. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.

Four Smart Uses For Your Tax Refund

1. Pay off bills

- First priority: regular monthly bills if you have gotten behind (utilities, phone.)
- Most other debts should be prioritized with highest-interest rates paid off first.

Suppose you have a credit card balance of $2,000 at an interest rate of 18%, and you're making payments of $50/month. At that rate it will be 62 months before the bill is paid off, and it will cost you $1,077 interest. **If you use your tax refund** to pay off $1,000 of that bill, and then continue to pay $50/month, the bill will be paid off in 24 months, at an interest cost of only $198. **You save $800** interest by paying $1000 toward the debt now.

Do you find yourself in a yearly cycle?

- Using your tax refund each spring to catch up.
- then gradually getting more and more behind throughout the year, (and more and more stressed out), until…
- you can once again use your tax refund to get caught up.

You can prevent this common cycle, and save on late fees and finance charges, by putting more money in your regular paycheck, instead of getting such a large tax refund. (See page 3, "How can I get … "

2. Save for needs in the coming year

Emergency Funds. Having money saved for emergencies can get you through small emergencies like car repair or medical bills without breaking a sweat. In the ultimate emergency (loss of income), an emergency fund can keep you afloat until you find another income source.
Use part of your tax refund to start or build your emergency fund!

Occasional Expenses. Those big bills that come once a year or every few months can cause huge problems for families. Avoid those problems by being ready for the bills! Use your tax refund to start a special savings fund, then keep adding to it throughout the year.

3. Long-term savings!

You CAN make progress toward long-term goals, and your tax refund can help make that happen.

Even small amounts add up. Adding just $500 a year into a retirement account such as an IRA can make a difference over a period of decades. Earning an average annual return of 9%, a contribution of $500/year would yield $68,100 after 30 years.

Take the "small amount" theory one step further. Build on the momentum created by that once a year contribution, and make a monthly contribution too.
If you contribute $500/year *and* $25/month, earning a 9% return, in 30 years you will have $113,800!

Contributing to your retirement *may* pay off with a tax credit!
Moderate-income workers who contribute to their retirement accounts may qualify for a tax credit! For example, a married couple filing jointly with earnings of $32,000 would qualify for a 20% credit. That means that if they contribute $2,000 to retirement accounts, they will receive a direct tax credit of $400! Consult with the IRS for details!

4. Special Purchases

What about that new refrigerator?
Or the sofa? Or … ?

Those purchases are valuable, too. Some may be essential, while others simply add enjoyment to life.

Your best bet:
First put some of your tax refund toward financial security:

- pay off some debt,
- plan for needs in the coming year,
- set some money aside for long-term goals.

Then use part of your tax refund to make your day-to-day life better. Among all the items on your "wish list," choose the most important and shop wisely for it!

How can I get part of my refund money throughout the year instead of waiting?

1) Change your Withholding Instructions on Form W-4. If you receive a large refund, it may be because you claim too many exemptions. Talk with your payroll office at work about this.

2) If you have children and qualify for the Earned Income Credit, you can request to receive part of it throughout the year.
How? Ask your payroll office for Form W-5—Earned Income Credit Advance Payment Certificate.
How Much? Using IRS guidelines which estimate what your Earned Income Credit amount for the year might be, your payroll office distributes about half of that amount in your paychecks throughout the year.
Example: a worker earning between $500 and $1200 per month might receive $60 extra in each bi-weekly paycheck.

Workers who receive part of their Earned Income Credit in advance benefit in two ways:
- they can still expect a good refund check in the spring.
- they will have more money throughout the year — for paying the bills, paying off debts, or contributing to a retirement account.

Iowa State University
Extension - 2/04

Benefits of Alzheimer's Drugs May Go Longer

HOW LONG is it worthwhile to continue patients on medication to treat Alzheimer's disease? Until recently, drugs that slow or slightly counteract the disease's effects, called cholinesterase inhibitors, were thought effective for only 6 to 12 months. Given the side effects and cost — about $150 a month — some physicians have been reluctant to continue the medication for longer periods.

But new research suggests the drugs may have benefits over a longer period than previously thought. A study reported in the British journal *Lancet* found that patients on Aricept fared slightly better than those on a placebo for at least two years. Another study, focusing on Reminyl, saw a slowing in patients' cognitive decline for up to four years. A third such drug, which works similarly to boost the levels of a neurotransmitter in the brain that's important to memory and learning, is Exelon.

While cautious, Neil Buckholtz, chief of the Dementias of Aging Branch at the National Institute on Aging, suggested in press reports on the studies that the results may show that these drugs do more than merely affect symptoms: "They may have a disease – modifying benefit."

Tufts University Health & Nutrition
Letter - 11/04

Pros and Cons of Debit Cards

Pros

- Obtaining a debit card is often easier than getting a credit card. If you qualify to open a bank account, you can usually get a debit card.
- Unlike when you write a check, using a debit card saves you from having to show identification or give out personal information at the time of the transaction.
- If frees you from carrying cash or a checkbook.
- It can save you from having to stock up on traveler's checks or cash when you travel.
- Debit cards may be more readily accepted than checks, especially in other states or countries.
- If you return merchandise or cancel services paid for with a debit card, the transaction will be treated as if it were made with cash or a check. Check the store's return policy for debit card transactions.

Cons

- Unlike a credit card, debit card transactions give you no grace period. They are a quick, pay-now deal.
- They can make balancing your account tricky if you are not fastidious about keeping receipts and recording transactions in a timely fashion. It is easy to forget, for example, when you pay at the gas pump with a debit card and drive off without your receipt.
- Using a debit card may mean you have less protection than you would with a credit card for goods that are never delivered, are defective or were misrepresented. But, as with credit cards, you can dispute unauthorized charges or other mistakes within 60 days. Contact your bank if a problem with a merchant cannot be resolved.
- Fees — The conveniece can be costly, especially when using an ATM that is not affiliated with your bank.

Living Alone Creates Nutritional Risk

THINK "SINGLE," and perhaps the words "unfettered" and "carefree" come to mind. But from a nutrition standpoint, "single," which covers all 73 million Americans who live by themselves-either because they have never been married or are divorced or widowed-means a heightened risk for poor nutrition.

One reason is that singles, from new college graduates to those closer to retirement age, cook fewer of their own meals. And take-out and restaurant portions, as everyone knows by now, tend to be much too large for one person and contain too many calories, too much saturated fat, and too much sodium-and too few vegetables and fruits for maintenance of healthy weight and protection against illnesses such as heart disease and cancer.

On the flip side, a number of singles don't eat *enough.* They find it too depressing to stare at the four walls as they dine and therefore don't make eating a priority. Consider a California study conducted some years ago in which it was found that men and women 55 and older were more likely to eat a poor-quality diet if they lived alone than if they were married, lacking in

nutrients such as vitamin B_6, calcium, and magnesium. It wasn't that they were choosing less nutritious foods than those who lived with a spouse; they simply were eating less of them.

To make it easier for singles to eat well no matter what their current situation, the American Institute for Cancer Research has just published a free booklet, *Cooking Solo: Homemade for Health*, that covers everything from recipes that work well for one to "Standard Serving Sizes for the Average Adult." We especially liked the section on "Making Cooking and Dining Enjoyable." It reminds "families of one," as American Institute for Cancer Research dietitian Melanie Polk calls them, to treat themselves well by setting a nice table for themselves and also by getting together with others for dinner-either by preparing a meal with a friend or by taking a cooking class or joining (or starting) a potluck dinner group.

To order a single copy of *Cooking Solo,* call (800) 843-8114, extension 457, or download it from www.aicr.org.

Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter - October 2004

Gardener's Corner

February is an "in between month," known by some gardeners, probably northerners, as the "blah" month. That is not the case for gardeners along the Gulf Coast. There is always something to do.

February Tips

● Obtain bedding plants and establish Baby's Breath, Calendula, China Doll Carnation, Dianthus, Dusty Miller, Margeurite Daisy, Pansy, Petunia, Snapdragon and Statice.

● In the vegetable garden, plant seeds of beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, parsley, English pea, radish and turnip. Obtain bedding plants and establish broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collard, lettuce and bunching/multiplying (not bulbing) onions. Establish Irish potatoes from certified seed potatoes by planting two ounce seed pieces with eyes.

● Plant trees and shrubs using container grown nursery stock.

● Control over-wintering scales, mites and other pests on shrubs by spraying with a solution of horticultural oil emulsion. Follow label directions.

● Finish pruning peaches, plums, nectarines and grapes.

Delay Some Pruning Jobs

Don't jump the gun and prune too early. It is better to wait until late in the dormant season (late February or March) to do any needed pruning of perennials, summer flowering shrubs and broadleaved evergreens. Pruning now, before the danger of a late freeze has passed, can stimulate growth which would be damaged. It is also too early to detect all cold injury to tender shrubs and perennials.

Definitely delay the pruning of azalea, spirea, camellia, forsythia and other early spring flowering shrubs until after flowering is completed.

Stinking Mushrooms Common This Winter

Commonly known as "stinkhorn" this mushroom occurs sporadically in area landscapes, but this winter we are seeing an exceptional number of them. The fungus that results in these bad smelling structures is a naturally occurring organism that is active in decomposing organic matter such as dead leaves and branches.

There are several different species, but the one that is giving some homeowners problems is the squid stinkhorn. There is no safe chemical control. If they pop up in your landscape beds, just scoop them up and move them away with a shovel – preferably a long handled one!

"Green Garden News" –
An Excellent Local Newsletter

Theresa Friday, our Extension Residential Horticulture Agent, offers a monthly gardening newsletter that contains a wealth of information. It is available on the Santa Rosa County web site.
Go to: http://www.co.santa-rosa.fl.us/santa_rosa/extension/
Once on the site, click on County Extension, and then on Horticulture.
It can also be sent via e-mail by contacting Theresa at theresaf@co.santa-rosa.fl.us
to receive a copy by mail call 623-3868.

Dan Mullins
Horticulture Agent

Recipes

Pan Seared White Fish with Lemon Mustard Sauce

2 Tbsp. olive oil or vegetable oil
1 Tbsp. butter
8 thin fish fillets, about 1 lb.
Seasoned salt
Juice of 2 large lemons (about 1/3 cup)
1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
1/4 c. of white wine (optional)

- Heat oil and butter together in a large skillet.
- Sprinkle fish with seasoned salt.
- Place fish in hot oil and sear until golden brown. Turn and sear again until second side is golden.
- Remove fish to serving platter.
- Add lemon juice to the pan and whisk in the mustard. Then add the wine. Simmer for a few minutes to reduce the sauce slightly.
- Pour sauce over the fish and serve.

Yield: 4 servings

Chicken Cacciatora

1 fully cooked rotisserie chicken
1 can (28 oz.) chopped tomatoes
1 can (8 oz.) sliced mushrooms
2 Tbsp. capers
1/4 c. roughly chopped Calamata olives
1 tsp. dried thyme
1 tsp. oregano
Salt and pepper to taste

- Cut the cooked chicken into 8 to 10 pieces and place in a large covered skillet or Dutch oven.
- Add remaining ingredients. Cover and simmer 20 minutes.*

*Longer simmering will produce more flavor.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

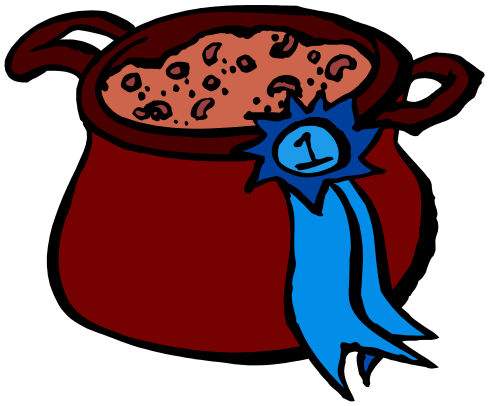
Barbeque Chicken Chili

1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1 c. chopped onion
1/2 lb. sliced mushrooms
1 Tbsp. cumin
2 c. chopped or pulled fully cooked chicken meat (use a roasted deli chicken or other cooked meat)
1 1/4 c. water
1 can (14 1/2 oz.) diced tomatoes
1 c. of your favorite barbeque sauce
1 small can chopped green chilies
1 can (15 oz.) kidney beans, drained
1 can (15 oz.) canellini beans, drained
1 c. frozen corn
1 c. fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped
Chopped scallions and grated cheese for garnish

- Heat oil in Dutch oven and sauté onion, mushrooms, and cumin for 3 minutes.
- Stir in chicken, water, tomatoes, barbeque sauce, green chilies, beans, and corn. Cover and simmer 15 minutes.
- Stir in cilantro and serve with chopped scallions and grated cheese.

Great Sides: Cornbread, corn chips, tossed salad

Yield: 6 servings



Chocolate Pound Cake

3 c. sugar
5 eggs
1/2 tsp. salt
1 c. Crisco
3 c. flour
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1 stick butter or margarine
1/2 c. cocoa
1 c. milk
1 tsp. vanilla

Cream sugar with Crisco and butter, add eggs one at a time. Sift together flour, cocoa, salt and baking powder 3 times. Add alternately with milk to creamed mixture. Add vanilla. Bake 1 1/2 hours at 325 degrees. Start in **cold oven**. I use the sticks of Crisco and White Lily plain flour. The **sifting** makes the texture of the cake finer than most pound cakes.

Frosting:

1/2 c. cocoa
1 stick butter
2 c. sugar
1/2 c. whole milk

Put all in small saucepan. Bring to a **boil** for 1 or 2 minutes. Remove from heat and add 1 tsp. vanilla. Beat until you can spread. I usually end up pouring it over the cake. If you have a rack you can put it on the rack with a pan under it. This makes a big cake. It never hangs around long.

Submitted by: Louise Taylor
Wallace HCE Club

HCE NEWS

Leader Training/Council Meeting

Feb. 3, 2005 - 9:30 AM
Extension Auditorium

The topic for this month's training is **Feng Shui**. The hostess club is Skyliner's.

HCE Workshop-Flower Pot Frog

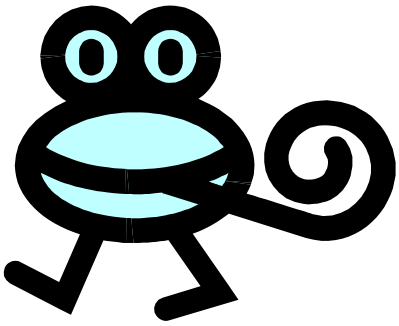
February 23 -10:00 AM
Wallace Clubhouse

We will have a council workshop in conjunction with Wallace club meeting. All members and guests are invited.

You will need the following supplies:

1 - 4 1/2" clay flower pot (head)
1 - 6 1/2" clay flower pot (body)
6 - 2" clay pots (legs)
2 -1 3/4" wooden balls (eyes)
2 - 1 in. wiggle eyes
½ yd. ¼ burlap cord
½ yd. decorative braid

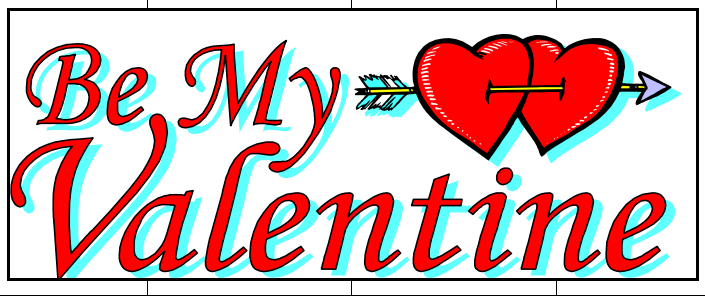
You will need to spray paint the pots an olive green color before you come to the workshop. I would recommend spraying them with a sealer before you paint them. You can view a sample of the finished project on the shelf behind the desk in my office.



Family Resource Program

The Family Resource Program needs protein foods such as canned tuna, canned spaghetti and meatballs, peanut butter, pork and beans etc. They have had a large increase in demand for food since the hurricane.

February 2005

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3 Leader Trng./ Council Mtg. 9:30 AM Extension Auditorium	4	5
6	7	8 Skyliners Club Mtg. - 9:30 AM Paula Ernest Extension Auditorium	9	10	11	12
13	14 Valentine's Day	15	16	17 Milton Club Meeting 9:30 AM Extension Conference Rm.	18	19
20	21	22	23 HCE Workshop Flower Pot Frog 10:00 AM Wallace Clubhouse	24 Pace-Pearidge Club Meeting 10:00 AM Pace-Pearidge Clubhouse	25	26
27	28					

The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product names and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

Sincerely,

Linda K. Bowman, R.D., L. D.
Extension Agent IV
Family & Consumer Sciences
Santa Rosa County

LKB:emt

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
IFAS EXTENSION
Santa Rosa County
6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL 32570-3500

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
MILTON FL
PERMIT NO. 68