

Everyday Cheapskate: Plug your biggest budget leak

by Mary_Hunt

Dear Mary: In tracking our expenses, I've found that the category I call "Household Supplies" represents a massive leak in our budget. What is the least expensive way to purchase trash bags, dishwasher detergent, toilet tissue and other household supplies? â€” Andrea, e-mail

Dear Andrea: Never pay full retail price for the products you mention. When not on sale, these items are the most expensive at the supermarket. However, everything you mention comes on sale routinely, especially if you are not brand-loyal. Pair that with a manufacturer's coupon (doubled if you are near a store that doubles) and you get a best buy. When you hit it big, stock up to last until the next time that item goes on sale and you have a coupon. Also, compare the supermarket's prices with the prices at warehouse clubs and discount department stores, such as Wal-Mart and Target (both of which take coupons).

You will drop your bargain price even further when you reduce the number of trash bags you need by recycling, use cloth napkins and dish towels in place of paper towels, and make your own cleaning supplies.

I don't have a recipe for dishwasher detergent, but you'll find recipes for almost every other kind of household cleaning supply in my handy booklet "Cheapskate Solutions." You can get it at www.DebtProofLiving.com (click on "Bookstore" and then "Booklets"), or call 800-550-3502 during regular business hours Pacific time. For \$6, including shipping, you'll save hundreds each year on supplies. That will go a long way to pay for the trash bags, paper products and dishwasher detergent you still need to purchase.

Dear Mary: I gave my daughter \$10,000 when she graduated from high school, with a promise of another \$10,000 if she graduated from college with no credit card debt and student loans of less than \$10,000. She spent the first \$10,000 on a new car. Then she went to a junior college and lived at home until she completed enough units to transfer to a university as a junior.

During her time at home, she worked as a waitress to cover her expenses. When she transferred, she became a resident adviser. The program paid for full tuition, books and a meal plan and provided a private room and a stipend. She graduated with less than \$4,000 in student loans and no credit card debt. The only other thing I paid for was her monthly cell phone bill, which cost \$20 a month. It cost me \$21,440 to put my daughter through college. She graduated with \$10,000 in her pocket, \$4,000 in student loans and no credit card debt. The choices were hers, and I had to say very little to keep her on the right track. â€” Linda H., e-mail

Dear Linda: What a great story! I would say you gave her more than \$21,440. You gave her wings to fly with confidence and self-reliance because you required that she participate in the cost of her education, a degree she will value even more than she otherwise would have because it cost her something.

Do you have a question for Mary? E-mail her at mary@everydaycheapskate.com, or write to Everyday Cheapskate, P.O. Box 2135, Paramount, CA 90723. Mary Hunt is the author of 17 books, including "Debt-Proof Living."

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