All for only $3: A grandmother’s story

Elizabeth Reinsch, Ph.D., LCSW/ACSW, Human Development Specialist
ReinschE@missouri.edu

You often hear today how money doesn’t go as far as it used to. This may be true, but let me share a grandmother’s story.

On a sunny Saturday morning in early spring, a grandmother takes her 2-year-old grandson for a walk across the park to the neighborhood coffeehouse, where they purchase the usual medium decaf coffee and one blueberry muffin costing $3. Coffee is for Grammy, and the blueberry muffin is for the grandson, who quickly picks out all the visible blueberries and gulps down a big bite of muffin.

Now that’s a pretty good value for $3, yet if we backtrack to the beginning of our journey, those three dollars add up to so much more.

Consider the chubby cheeks of the 2-year-old, awaking early in the morning, running to Grammy with a smile on his face and in his impish way saying, “Coffeehouse, coffeehouse, Grammy!”

Grammy knowingly replies, “Yes, we can go to the coffeehouse. Get dressed.”

We get the red wagon out. My grandson and I are soon off on a journey, heading down the street, into the park. At this time of year, the park explodes with color. The magnolia trees of pink and white are in full bloom, the yellow forsythias are spilling over with abundant flowers, the jonquils and daffodils of various colors are spread throughout the lush green areas to brighten the day.

Neighbors and strangers walk, run or bike on the paths. Dogs, birds, squirrels are everywhere. The park is full of life. The short 15 minutes it takes to walk across the park to the coffeehouse have instilled memories that hopefully will last a lifetime.

In our society today, where the value of the dollar has decreased, there are some things that have not been affected. Regardless of the buying power of the dollar, we as grandparents, parents and families can many times get the best for our buck by giving time. How precious it is!

Remember: The only time we actually have is the present. Not the past, which is gone. Nor the future, which is to come. Only the present is what we have to give. Give it wisely, and enjoy the little things around us.

Yes, $3 can purchase a lot. Try it sometime!
How to keep fruits and vegetables safe

Mary Schroepfer, MED
Nutrition & Health Education Specialist
 SchroepferM@missouri.edu

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. Careful handling of these products reduces the risks of foodborne illness.

Recently there have been cases of fresh melons, prewashed spinach, raspberries, herb mixtures, and green onions being contaminated with germs (bacteria, viruses, and parasites), usually from the intestinal tracts of animals. Harmful bacteria may be in the soil or water where produce grows. Or fresh produce may become contaminated after it is harvested, such as during preparation or storage.

Consumers can take steps to avoid contamination of fruits and vegetables.

Purchasing

- **Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged.** When selecting fresh-cut produce—such as half a watermelon or bagged, mixed salad greens—choose only those items that are refrigerated or surrounded by ice.
- **Put fresh fruits and vegetables in separate bags from meat, poultry and seafood products** when carrying them home from the store or farmer’s market.

Storage

- **Store perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like strawberries, lettuce, herbs and mushrooms) in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40 degrees F or below.** Refrigerate all pre-cut or peeled produce to maintain both quality and safety.
- **Keep your refrigerator set at 40 degrees or below.** Use a refrigerator thermometer to check.

Harmful bacteria may be in the soil or water where produce grows.

Preparation

- **Wash hands frequently when handling foods.** Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
- **Cut away any damaged or bruised areas before preparing or eating produce.** Discard produce that looks soft or rotten.
- **Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water before eating, cutting or cooking.** This includes produce grown conventionally or organically. (Organics are grown without pesticides, but may still have bacteria.) Rinsing or scrubbing produce is important even if you plan to peel it. Do not use dishwashing soap or hand soap to wash produce. Commercial produce washes are not recommended.
- **Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.**
- **Dry produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel.** This may further reduce bacteria that may be present.

Pre-washed produce

Precut, bagged produce items like lettuce are often pre-washed. If so, it will be stated on the packaging. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), pre-washed, bagged produce can be used without further washing. As an extra caution, wash the produce again just before you use it. Precut or prewashed produce in open bags should be washed before using.

Avoiding cross contamination

- **Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods,** such as raw meat, poultry or seafood, and from kitchen utensils used for those products.

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Ah, spring! Ah-choo! Gardening tips for allergy sufferers

Timothy W. Horton, MS
Horticulture Specialist
HortonT@missouri.edu

With the emergence of flowering plants of spring also comes allergy-causing pollen. If you are a gardener who suffers from allergies, how do you feel about the arrival of pollen-producing plants? Are you excited to go outside and enjoy the warmth of spring? Or do you dread the suffering of allergies that can come along with it?

By following a few recommendations, you can get out and enjoy the garden while minimizing your exposure to allergens in the garden.

Types of pollination

Pollen is a powdery substance produced by flowering plants that contains the male reproductive cells of the plant. It is carried by wind and insects to other plants, which it fertilizes.

Insect or self-pollination. Some plants produce pollen grains that are large in size so they can be easily picked up and moved by insects. This heavy, large pollen is not blown by air, so it is hard to inhale. As a result, it is responsible for fewer allergic reactions in people.

Plants that are either self-pollinating or cross-pollinated by insects fit into this category. These include rose, geranium, petunia, pansy and salvia, for example. Generally speaking, plants with bright, showy flowers tend to cause fewer allergy problems because they are insect-pollinated rather than wind-pollinated.

Wind pollination. Wind-pollinated plants produce small, light pollen that is easily picked up by the wind. It can travel great distances in the landscape and is easy to inhale, resulting in more allergic reactions. Weed and grass pollen fit into this category.

Are you excited to go outside and enjoy the warmth of spring? Or do you dread the suffering of allergies that can come along with it?

Many trees, including oak, birch, cedar and cottonwood (to name a few) produce wind-blown pollen, but tree pollen generally doesn’t travel great distances. (An oak tree in your yard will expose you to 10 times more pollen than an oak tree one block away, so avoid planting high pollen-producing trees in your landscape to minimize your exposure.)

Tips to avoid allergic reactions

- Plant aromatic herbs such as mint, rosemary and oregano if you like fragrant plants.

These don’t cause allergic reactions. Avoid heavily-scented flowers that can trigger allergic reactions.

- Do necessary gardening work following heavy rainstorms to take advantage of lower pollen levels. Environmental conditions affect the amount of pollen present in the atmosphere. Warm, gentle breezes raise pollen levels, while heavy rains cleanse the air of pollen. Also, sudden temperature drops (often associated with heavy rains) will lower atmospheric pollen levels.

- Know what you are allergic to so you can plan your activities to avoid the worst parts of the allergy season. A person who suffers from allergies needs to be aware of what is causing the allergic reactions. Allergens, which include airborne plant pollen and mold spores, can trigger allergic reactions in people. Different plants produce different types of pollen at different times of the year.

Tree pollen hits its peak in April, so if you are allergic to this, postpone gardening activities to later in the year to avoid much of this type of pollen. The hot, dry part of summer is the peak for weed pollens such as ragweed and pigweed. Having garden plants that don’t require much care during this time will enable you to avoid exposure to these weed pollens.

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How to keep fruits and vegetables safe
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- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot water and soap between preparation of raw meat, poultry and seafood and preparation of produce that will not be cooked.
- Use kitchen sanitizers periodically on cutting boards and countertops for added protection. Try a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water.
- Run plastic or other non-porous cutting boards through the dishwasher after use.

Sources
Safe Handling of Raw Produce and Fresh-Squeezed Fruit and Vegetable Juices. (Updated July 12, 2006). FDA, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodsafe.html

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Ah, spring!
Ah-choo!
Gardening tips for allergy sufferers
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- Consider gravel or synthetic mulch. Organic mulches and compost are generally good for your plants but can provide a breeding ground for fungus and mold.
- Wear clothes for gardening that you keep separate from your everyday clothes. Take off gardening clothes after returning indoors. Wash them separately from other laundry.
- Wear gloves, masks and goggles or sunglasses to minimize your exposure to pollen. You should also shower immediately after gardening to wash off any pollen.

Hopefully, following these tips will help reduce your exposure to pollens causing allergic reactions. Happy gardening!