

## Eat “Green” for St. Patrick’s Day

By PATRICIA BANNAN, M.S., R.D. 03.10.2009

Born on St. Patrick’s Day, I grew up eating “green” once a year when my mother served green milk and cookies at my birthday parties. Fast forward a few years and the green milk turned to celebratory green beer, another St. Paddy’s Day favorite. But today eating green has a whole new meaning, and what better time to embrace some eco-friendly tips than on the most emerald holiday of the year!

There is still much confusion about the best (and easiest) ways to eat an earth-friendly diet, so I enlisted the help of two green experts: Kate Geagan, MS, RD author of [\*Go Green Get Lean: Trim Your Waistline with the Ultimate Low-Carbon Footprint Diet\*](#) and Jackie Newgent, RD, culinary nutritionist and author of [\*Big Green Cookbook\*](#). Here, I asked them each to dispel some myths to find out if what we hear is green fact or blatant blarney.



### **Green Fact or Blatant Blarney: Your BMW is worse for global warming than your Big Mac**

Blatant Blarney! According to Geagan, “the American Diet is the SUV of eating styles. Research has found that what you eat impacts the environment as much as what you drive.” And while you might not be able to go out and buy a hybrid today, you can certainly start eating like one.

#### **Geagan’s quick green tips:**

- **Focus on the food chain.** Enjoy a flexitarian diet: limit red meat, eat more vegetarian meals each week, and reduce your dairy intake.
- **Tap your tap.** Bottled water takes about 2200 fossil fuel calories to produce a plastic bottle, which you use for about an hour or so, before it heads to a landfill to take hundreds of year to decompose. A recent consumer reports study found that tap water was significantly safer from contaminants and pollutants — because it is more tightly regulated. Invest in a good filter and start using it!
- **Eat more beans.** If you do one thing, start adding more luscious legumes to move towards a leaner, lower carbon diet.
- **Snack sustainably.** Pack your snacks at home using real foods like crackers and hummus, a handful of pistachios or seasonal fruits and veggies. This will not only boost your health, it will help trim another big area of your food footprint: the amount of highly processed foods that are in your diet.



### **Green Fact or Blatant Blarney: What we eat is more important than how we eat**

Blatant Blarney! For the health of the planet, what we eat is as important to consider as how we store and prepare our food. According to Newgent, “replacing meat and dairy with chicken, fish, or eggs just one day a week may reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving over 750 miles in a year. Switching to veggies one day is week is like cutting over 1150 miles a year out of your driving.” But

whatever foods you choose, it’s important to know that about one-third of the total energy used in the entire U.S. food system is for home preparation and refrigeration.

#### **Newgent’s quick green tips:**

- **Power up green.** Contact your energy supplier and switch your source of energy to wind or green power. You don’t actually need your own solar panels or windmill. Click [here](#) to find out more.
- **Go vegetarian (more often).** If not already a vegetarian, go vegetarian one day every week. Every month, try to add another day. Before you know it, you’ll be eating vegetarian most days of the week.
- **Recycle with a difference.** Each community has its own recycling policy, so take time to learn about yours and then recycle everything allowable.
- **Cook in little packages.** When considering how to cook, the general rule is: the bigger the appliance, the bigger the carbon footprint. So opt for the toaster oven or microwave oven instead of a large conventional oven whenever possible.

~Patricia Bannan, M.S., R.D.

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