

# Filter tap water rather than buy bottled water

Dear EarthTalk: Isn't it a waste that we buy water in plastic bottles when it is basically free out of our taps? Even health food stores, which should know better, sell it like crazy. When did Earth's most abundant and free natural resource become a commercial 'beverage'? – A. Jacobs, via e-mail

Bottled water has been a big-selling commercial beverage around the world since the late 1980s. According to the Worldwatch Institute, global bottled water consumption has more than quadrupled since 1990. Today Americans consume over 30 billion liters of water out of some 50 billion (mostly plastic) bottles every year. The Beverage Marketing Association reports that in 2008 bottled water comprised over 28 percent of the U.S. liquid refreshment beverage market. The only bottled drinks Americans consume more of are carbonated sodas like Coke and Pepsi.

And frankly, yes, it is a ridiculous waste that we obtain so much of our drinking water this way when it is free flowing and just as good if not better for you right out of the tap. According to the Earth Policy Institute (EPI), some 2.7 million tons of petroleum-derived plastic are used to bottle water around the world every year. "Making bottles to meet Ameri-

cans' demand for bottled water requires more than 1.5 million barrels of oil annually, enough to fuel some 100,000 U.S. cars for a year," says EPI researcher Emily Arnold. And just because we can recycle these bottles does not mean that we do: The Container Recycling Institute reports that 86 percent of plastic water bottles in the U.S. end up as garbage or litter.

The financial costs to consumers are high, too: According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), bottled water costs up to 1,900 times more than tap water. And the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reports that 90 percent or more of the money consumers shell out for it pays for everything but the water itself: bottling, packaging, shipping, marketing, other expenses – and, of course, profits.

EWG is particularly appalled at the lack of transparency by leading bottled water sellers as to the sources of their water and whether it is purified or has been tested for contaminants. According to a recent survey by the group, 18 percent of the 173 bottled waters on the U.S. market today fail to list the location of their source; a third disclose nothing about the treatment or purity of the water inside their plastic bottles.

"Among the ten best-selling brands, nine – Pepsi's Aquafina, Coca-Cola's Dasani, Crystal Geyser and six of seven Nestlé

brands – don't answer at least one of those questions," reports EWG. Only Nestlé's Pure Life Purified Water "discloses its specific geographic water source and treatment method...and offers an 800-number, website or mailing address where consumers can request a water quality test report."

EWG recommends that consumer resist the urge to buy bottled water and go instead for filtered tap water. "You'll save money, drink water that's purer than tap water and help solve the global glut of plastic bottles," the group advises, adding that it supports stronger federal standards to enforce consumers' right to know about what's in their bottled water besides water. Until that day comes, concerned consumers should check out EWG's Bottled Water Scorecard, a free website that provides information on various bottled water brands, where they originate and whether and how they are treated to remove contaminants.

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## K-State working to minimize generational differences

Older, but wiser, the saying goes.

While some will say that wisdom is one of the benefits in aging, wisdom isn't limited to any age or group, and that's why Kansas State University is working to help educators of varying ages develop a better understanding of the changes that accompany the aging process.

"Changes are part of the natural progression of life – and aging," said Debra Sellers, Kansas State University Research and Extension specialist on adult development and aging.

Sellers, who actively works to combat false beliefs about the aging process, acknowledged that "people often don't realize that many stereotypes and widely-held beliefs about aging are false."

"There are changes that come with aging, but there are also changes that may happen as the result of a disease process, and not because someone is getting older," said Sellers, who recently organized and hosted an "Aging Simulation" that focused on explaining these differences.

During the event, 25 K-State Research and Extension agents were able to experience what life might be like as an older adult ex-

periencing typical changes, as well with challenges that may arise as the result of a disease process:

1) So what's life like after a stroke, with little or no movement on the left side? In the simulation, attendees were asked to try putting on a pair of pants and a shirt without use of their left arm or leg.

2) How about looking up a telephone number, location on a road map or sorting freshly-laundered socks when vision is limited by cataracts, macular degeneration, or glaucoma?

3) Imagine, if you can, with limited mobility, vision, hearing and strength, trying to shop for groceries and check-out.

The afternoon experiences prompted observations such as "I had no idea..." questions such as "How can we do this better?" and, for some, a firm resolve to choose socks that are all the same color, as well as take-home ideas that will help to shape future educational programs offered throughout the K-State Research and Extension system.

"The goal," said Gayle Doll, an assistant professor and director of the Center on Aging at K-State who managed the grocery shopping simulation, "is to develop a greater un-

derstanding of changing needs, accessibility – and adaptability."

"An accessible meeting room will, for example, typically be on one level; if meeting with older adults, a meeting room also should be evaluated for lighting (as older adults require more), and color," said Doll, who explained that the chair seats need to be a differ-

ent color than the carpet or other flooring and easily defined.

Information on aging successfully is available at K-State Research and Extension offices throughout the state and online: [www.aging.ksu.edu](http://www.aging.ksu.edu) and [www.he.k-state.edu/aging/](http://www.he.k-state.edu/aging/).



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