

OfferBug.com & GopherCentral.com
presents...

Thrifty Tips

www.OfferBug.com

www.gophercentral.com

Published By GopherCentral.com

© by Penn, LLC & GopherCentral.com

Cover Design: PMT, Frankfort, IL

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrievable system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requested to the Publisher for permission should be addresses to the Permission Department, Penn LLC, 7851 W. 185th Street #106, Tinley Park, IL 60477, +-1-(708)-478-4500, fax 708-478-5470, E-Mail:

anisa@gophercentral.com

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Penn, LLC. And GopherCentral.com

<http://www.gophercentral.com>

ISBN 1-931258-08-2

It takes a great deal of time and effort to put a book together, even one as seemingly simple as this one. It wouldn't have happened without support and encouragement from family and

friends, the great professional staff at GopherCentral, and all of the faithful readers Thrifty Tips.

I thank you all from the bottom of my heart and dedicate this book to you.

I give special thanks to:

Jaffer, Anisa, and Tom – for your leadership

Allison, Gail, and Joe – for your patience

John, Rosa, Johnny and Alex – for your encouragement

Jennifer and Ger – for your technical support

Mum – for your household assistance

Callie, Tribble, Caesar, and peavey – for your presence

Jan – for your inspiration

John, my sweet husband – for your unconditional love

God – from Whom all blessings flow

A note from Thrifty Tips Editor, Penny

“Pinch your pennies until Lincoln squeaks!”

How many times have you made old Abe holler lately? If you’re living thriftily, then your pocketbook is quite a noisy place! If things are to quiet, then it’s time to start practicing some ways for you to spend less, save more, and put those savings to good use.

What does it mean to be thrifty or frugal? The words mean basically the same: to be marked by economy and good management; prosperous, prudent, conserving, careful, meticulous, discreet, prudent. Who wouldn’t want to be described in this positive way?

Don’t confuse thrifty and frugal people with cheapskates, tightwads or misers. These are the unhappy types, who, although they like to save money, are mostly negative about it. They are normally seen as stringy tightfisted, and love only their bank accounts. Miser is actually the root of the word miserable! Please avoid getting this reputation!

Why are thrifty people so happy? They know that “a penny saved is a penny earned.” Their dedication to pinching those pennies will lead them to an ultimate goal of financial freedom. They know that they don’t have to make a fortune to have a financial security. They just have to spend smarter.

What does having financial freedom mean? It usually means being debt free, having little or no stress about money, knowing the satisfaction of beating the system, and having control over their lives. Perhaps financial freedom is not your immediate goal. You’d be happy just to make ends meet because you’re tired of them only waving to each other at the end of every month.

Regardless of your goal, it all boils down to this one indisputable fact: it’s not what you make, it’s what you spend. We all know people who make two or three times more than we do, but they are more broke than we are! Making more money, you see, is not the answer. I love the wisdom of Ben Franklin: “Beware of small expenses. A small leak will sink a great ship.”

So if your ship is sinking, don’t abandon ship! Start bailing and find that leak and plug it up. Use this little book, containing hundreds of tried and true tips to get you started on a thriftier lifestyle. Learn money saving techniques for every aspect of your life from auto purchases to zipper repair and everything in between.

Live long and be thrifty,

Penny

1

Financial News

You've heard the old expression, "There are only two things certain in this life – death and taxes." We are affected by taxes from the moment we're born (as someone's little tax deduction) to the second after we die (as someone's tax liability, depending on how we're arranged our affairs). Filing taxes, it seems can be the death of us every April.

I would like to add a few more "certainties" to that death and taxes list. Everyone from time to time will have to have some contact – like it or not – with banks, insurance companies and, alas, lawyers. Even those of us who live the simplest lives need a bank account, a credit card, life and health insurance, and a will, at the very least. There may be no way of escaping the "necessary evils" of assistance from an insurance salesman or lawyer. We just have to be sure we protect our pocketbooks and don't pay too much for their services.

So, let's learn how and where to save and invest our cash, get discounts on services, avoid identity theft, use credit wisely and generally learn how to keep more of our hard earned money, no matter what our income is. We need to use it the way we see fit for ourselves and families. These tips and bit of consumer advice should provide you with a good start on saving money in these areas.

Bargain Legal Services for the Over 50 Crowd

Over 50? It's okay to admit it, because if you 'fess up, you can get some money-saving discounts on many things, including valuable legal services.

AARP keeps a roster of lawyers with experience in areas of interest to people 50 and over. The Legal Services Network is available in 300 locations in 31 states.

AARP members are entitled to a free 30-minute consultation with a lawyer with the AARP Legal Services Network. For a set fee you can get a simple will drawn up for \$50 for singles (\$75 for a couple), and a power of attorney for \$35. Other legal services cost about 20 percent less than the usual fees.

Banking Tips

Are you paying a big service charge to your bank every month on your checking account? Well, you don't have to!

With just a little bit of research you can find a bank that won't charge you service fees. You should be able to find a bank that offers free checking as well as other free services that you are currently paying for.

If you can, have your paycheck directly deposited to earn some extra services. So get going and find those FREEBIE bank services!

Free Banking Service

If you're a member of the 50-and-over crowd, you can qualify for free banking services. Many banks offer totally FREE services, such as free checks, free money orders, free overdrafts and more to customers over age 50. It's worth it to invest a little time to find the banks that will reward you in this way. You can also join AARP which will keep you informed of many other valuable benefits and discounts on other services as well.

Save on Banking Services

Are you paying for bank too much? Could be! Many banks charge too much for everything from "per check" service to stop-payments to overdraft protection. See what you can do to eliminate some of these costs:

Don't write checks when you don't have to. Keep cash (and a tight fist) for all purchases except for bills that would be less expensive to pay though the mail. Look for interest-bearing accounts if you can possibly qualify. They sure won't make you rich, but they'll at least help offset the other costs of banking.

Never buy checks through your banking establishment. They add on extra charges to cover their expense (and then some) for ordering and handling. Do it yourself for free. There are several trustworthy companies that print checks for up to 75 percent less. If you want to shop around you can take advantage of "first time" deals, but you really don't have to in order to save substantially.

As a general rule, smaller banks have lower (and fewer) fees. Check out the banks in your area that are owned locally, and make a switch. Savings and loan associations are on the lower end when it comes to fees and charges, too.

Bank savings accounts are poor investment places at two to three percent return. Almost any other investment will provide a better return. There's only one time they come in handy, and that's if you need to hide money from your checking account so you won't spend it!

Ask about discounts for seniors or checking accounts with no fees. Some banks give you free checking or lower costs if you have your paycheck deposited automatically.

Bank by phone or online whenever you can instead of going to the bank. Save gas, wear and tear on your vehicle and time.

Credit unions usually have lower overall rates and higher interest on savings. So if you qualify for one, join up.

Shop for these services the same way you'd shop for anything else: take your time, comparison shop and get picky. Ask questions and expect good answers. Remember, it's YOUR money!

It Never Hurts to Ask for a Discount

When it comes time for asking your credit card company for a lower interest rate, don't be Bashful like one of the seven dwarfs. Be assertive and ask for what you want. You may be surprised and get it! This was a lesson that took me a while to learn, but once I learned it my pocketbook felt the difference.

If you receive an invitation to accept a new credit card with a remarkably lower interest rate, go ahead and call your current credit card company and tell them about this competing offer.

If you have a good track record with them, and they get the message that you just might leave them in favor of the more attractive rate, you could receive an "on the spot" interest rate deduction. You'll see that it was so easy to accomplish and you'll wonder why you didn't call them sooner.

Are you learning that the trick to being frugal is to NOT be bashful? It never hurts, and almost always helps, to ask for what you want. You will probably get it.

Avoid Buying Credit Card Insurance

So, you have a credit card or two. Are you constantly being bombarded in your mailbox by those enticements to buy credit card insurance? Know what you should do with

these offers? Put them in the shredder. Get your wallet as far away from them as you can!

Why? What they're trying to sell, in a most convincing way, is credit card life insurance. This insures your balance in case you die before it gets paid off. But you won't be convinced once you take a look at the cost.

It costs typically 80 cents per month for each \$100 in credit card balance. So for a \$4,000 balance, that amounts to a whopping \$384 per year! That is nearly 100 times the expense of your normal life insurance. So be smart and don't waste your money. Put those offers immediately into your shredder. Besides, who is it REALLY protecting anyway? Right! The credit card company.

Make a Video Recording of Your Possessions

You'll need an inventory of your household possessions if your home suffers a casualty such as a fire, flood or theft, in order to make an insurance claim or take a tax deduction to cover your losses.

The best and easiest way to do this is to simply make a video recording of your valuables and describe them on the soundtrack. Be sure to include serial numbers where appropriate. Of course, be sure to keep this tape in a secure place where it won't be vulnerable to the same casualty that strikes your home. Give a copy to a trusted friend or family member, or better still, place it in your safe deposit box. Be sure to update the tape periodically as you will most likely be adding or deleting valuables as time goes on.

Avoid a Giant Tax Rip-off!

Can't wait for your tax return? Well, patience will pay off. Using a rapid refund service to get your refund money in a few days rather than a few weeks could result in your paying the equivalent of from 200 to 600 percent in interest. This is NOT a good idea. In fact, it's terrible and should be avoided. Be smart and keep your good standing as a "Thrifty Tipper" and wait for that money.

Protect yourself from Identity Theft

Did you know that identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States? Once thieves get your Social Security number and some credit cards, they can do a lot of damage. Here are a few quick tips to help you keep from becoming a victim:

Don't carry around your checkbook. Always pay with cash or credit card. Eliminate most credit cards from your wallet that you rarely use, or really don't need.

Never carry your Social Security card in your wallet. Leave it at home in a safe place. If your driver's license number is your Social Security number, get it changed to a random number at the next renewal or sooner, if possible.

Never carry a medical insurance ID card that uses your Social Security number as your membership ID. Leave that card at home and verbally give that number when necessary.

Buy a paper shredder. Shred any documents listing your Social Security number or any other financial information such as your bank account numbers and credit card numbers. This is the single most important way to prevent identity theft.

Avoid Identity Theft by Protecting Your Mail.

Identity theft can wreak havoc on your credit standing and good name, not to mention causing you a lot of grief, hassle, time and money.

What is one of the most common ways a thief obtains our identities? They get our personal and financial data from outside mailboxes.

An identity theft ring that has operated recently in the U.S. used this technique: ring members jogged behind mail trucks and then took out the financial info from the mailboxes. They would use the stolen information to create an identity, open checking accounts or credit card accounts. Over 100 members have been arrested, but new members continuously feed this operation. What can we do about it?

We as consumers should opt out of receiving all those pre-approved credit card offers we get bombarded with by making a simple toll-free phone call. The call can stop the flood of these offers to our mailboxes for up to two years. Call 1-888-5-OPT-OUT.

Another way to prevent this crime is to use mailbox inserts. Inserts slide inside traditional home boxes and contain a slot. The mail carrier inserts the mail through the slot and you can unlock the separate box with a key. These locking systems normally cost from \$20 to \$30.

Tips on Credit Card Use

Paying Down a Credit Card Quickly

Did you realize that on an average credit card debt of \$3,500 that the amount of debt is actually \$11,000 if you pay only the minimum monthly payment? Yikes!

Have you got some credit card debt you'd like to pay down more quickly? Aside from paying off the entire balance, here is a unique way to pay off the debt quickly and save on interest:

Let's say you're facing a minimum monthly payment of \$100 on your credit card bill. This new method requires that you mail in half, or \$50 EVERY 14 DAYS. The debt is paid off quicker and the interest rate paid is less. That's because the interest on the debt is calculated daily. The sooner a payment is made, the less the interest due. More of your payment is applied to the debt and less to the interest. Makes sense! Give it a try. Try to make it go away even faster by increasing the amount paid every 14 days. You'll be glad you did.

Leave "Small" Credit Cards at Home

Do you carry gas company credit cards? Leave them home. If you're carrying these around you will frequently fill up at only those stations and probably end up paying far more per gallon than at stations with lower prices. Most places accept Visa, MasterCard and American Express.

Do you have department store credit cards? Sign up for them to receive special sale notices, but don't use them. Keep them at home and use the major ones for purchases.

Check Up on Your Credit Report Now!

If you are planning on purchasing home, be sure to request your credit report from all three major bureaus at least four to six months in advance of applying for your mortgage. Most states charge \$8 per report, while some will provide them for free. It may take a struggle to clear up any errors, but your loan process will move smoother with a clean and fair report.

Contact:

Experian: 1-888 397-3742; <http://www.experian.com>

TransUnion: 1-800 916-8800; <http://transunion.com>

Equifax: 1-800-685-1111; <http://www.equifax.com>

Reduce Your Interest Rate

What about this scenario: You have a credit card BANK A with just an average rate. You keep seeing ads from the same bank offering the same card with a much lower rate to new cardholders. You think, hey, what about me over here? Am I chopped liver? I'm a good customer, so where's MY low rate?

Your bank won't call you to tell you they are automatically lowering your rate. You've got to take action yourself. Call and ask for a rate reduction. Tell them that you're a good customer who has given them a lot of business and you want your finance charge lowered. And if they refuse or offer an unacceptable rate, tell them you'll close the account, pay off the balance, and go elsewhere. You may be surprised at how accommodating they'll be. Folks who have tried this have gotten their rates reduced to 10 percent and lower, and sometimes have gotten the low introductory offer they've been advertising.

So, assertiveness pays. But if they stubbornly refuse, be prepared to follow through on your "promise" to take your business elsewhere. (I hope they're smart enough to keep you!)

A Warning About "Contests"

You have seen these so-called "contests" everywhere in grocery stores, auto shows, malls, and exhibits where you can win a new car, a trip or big money prize. But before you fill out any entry blanks, take a closer look at the form.

You may have seen this one for a \$50,000 cash prize where they request way TOO MUCH personal information about income and contacts. You'll find in the "mice-type" (that's the fine print) on the back of the entry, that your odds of winning are one in 250,000! Plus it is revealed here that everyone will win a two-night vacation somewhere, but will have to see a 90-minute timeshare presentation. This is just a way for this outfit to get lead information.

So, beware! Don't be lured by a big prize. Read the fine print before giving out your info. By entering some contests you may even be agreeing to have your long distance phone service switched to a company that will end up charging you a horrendous per-minute rate (that you won't even know about until you get a bill). Always keep a look out for the "catch." Remember: if something seems TOO good to be true, MOST of the time, it probably is!

Keep Those Ticket Payment Centers

So, you messed up and got a parking or traffic ticket! Oh no! Well, as careful as most of us thrifty types are, once in a while we goof and get nabbed, and end up having to pay the fine. Try to avoid this because fines are a terrible waste of money, plus they could make your insurance premium go up. If you should happen to get one (and you absolutely cannot talk your way out of it), remember this one thing: be sure that you keep the record of payment of the fine forever and ever! Yes, forever! Why?

A national database tracking system for various fines is so messed up, to put it nicely, that drivers can find out one, two or even several years later that their licenses have been suspended “due to lack of ticket payment.” If you cannot prove that you paid the fine, you may be faced with massive charges. So, keep the paperwork in a safe, yet easy to find place. Did I mention you should keep it FOREVER?

Savings and Investing

What to Do With a Tax Rebate

Are you one of the millions of Americans waiting for a tax rebate or refund check? Well, you have been wooed by WalMart and Sam’s to come spend it on merchandise from them. They are offering to cash the check at no cost. Well, so what?!

Instead of spending it on more consumable stuff, you will be much better off if you use it in one of these two ways:

Pay off a debt. It’s a great return on your money if you have a high interest rate.

Open up a low-cost Roth IRA for a saving account for retirement.

How to Have a Savings Plan

The best advice you could ever hear and then act upon about saving money is this: pay yourself first! Don’t wait until you’ve paid all the other bills and then see what’s leftover to save. You’ll probably never get a healthy savings or investment plan going this way.

Instead, resolve to set aside an amount between five to 10 percent of your earnings BEFORE you pay the bills. If possible you could have this amount deducted automatically from your paycheck or account and deposited into a separate savings or investment account.

Try it, you've got nothing to lose, and everything to gain! You may have to make a few adjustments at first, but it will be well worth the effort.

Investing Versus Paying Off Debt

Okay, say you have this scenario: you have just acquired a substantial sum of money (from wherever). You think it would be a great idea to invest it. But, you are also carrying a pretty big credit card balance, or some other debt, with a pretty high interest rate. What is the best thing to do?

Paying off a credit card balance, accruing at 18 percent interest, for example (a rate FAR higher than you could get anywhere else), would probably be the better thing to do. This would give you the same benefits as investing and getting the 18 percent return on your money.

Before doing anything, compare your "debt portfolio" and your investment opportunities. If the interest cost on the debt is higher than the after-tax gain from investments, pay off the debts first.

Buying Real Estate Investment Property

Investing in real estate is a good way to develop wealth over time. Many people have created sizable assets in rental properties. But there is a tendency for buyers to become too emotionally involved in a home purchase and end up overpaying. The key to rental properties is to purchase properties below fair market value, or 20 percent below other comparable homes, and 30 percent for condos. Basic condition of the property is the key factor to use when comparing one home to another. Wise investors look for "sad-sack" properties to fix up and resell. If you do purchase a place, fix it up and live in it for at least 24 months, then you're allowed to pocket up to \$250,000 (\$500K for married couples) tax free from the profits of the sale.

Benefits of College

What is the most important factor that affects how much someone will earn during their lifetime?

- a. Being born wealthy
- b. Working hard
- c. Education level

Of course! You're right if you chose c. Education level.

College graduates in general earn twice as much over a working lifetime that that of high school graduates. A graduate degree could bring salaries three times greater over a lifetime career than that of a high school graduate. Also graduate students can expect to earn 60 percent more throughout a career than undergraduate students.

BUT college tuition costs are rising at a much higher rate in comparison to the economy. Most increases are resulting from labor costs, or administrator and instructor salaries.

How can you save money on tuition? Seriously consider attending a junior college or community college for the first two years. Credits can be transferred to a traditional four-year college toward the same degree. Paying \$2,000 or less for community college tuition would be a lot better than paying \$16,000 per year for traditional college tuition.

Ways to Save on College Costs:

Get this, all you parents: recent studies set the figures of raising a baby to age 17 at \$165,630. Wow! Plus, that figure rises if a child attends a private school or college. And you have how many kids?

What can you do to lower the cost of a college education? Here are a couple of suggestions:

A Five-Year Plan:

Have a talk with your soon-to-be college-bound child about attending a two-year community college program and taking an additional three years to complete the remaining two years while working part time. Attending a community college just about cuts the cost of a four-year degree in half. Stretching out the remaining two years to work will also provide savings benefits. There's no shame in it either!

My daughter was on, would you believe, the eight-year plan! She went to school part time and worked full time five years (part of it at a community college) then went to school full time and worked part time for the last three. She graduated with a BS in nursing from a private college without having any huge loans to pay off! I was happy, she was happy, and her fiancé was really, really happy!

A Three-Year Plan:

Another way to save is to complete a four-year degree in just three years. (It's possible you know!) Also, apply for every single scholarship and grant available. You just might get them!

Save Those Coins Every Day

What's that stuff jingling in your pockets or purse at the end of the day? No, I don't mean your car keys, it's all that change! Use this change as a way to get into the savings habit.

At the end of every day, empty your pockets or purse of all the coins, take them and deposit into a jar or some other container. Every time you buy something with cash during the day, don't use coins, but break a bill instead. You won't miss this change! You will be amazed at how much you can save in a short time just by doing this simple little thing.

This is a great way to fund your budget for that holiday spending in December and give your credit cards a break. Just don't break into the jar and raid it!

Once you've gotten into the saving habit and realize you don't even miss the change, you can start adding to the coins your lowest denomination bill you have at the end of the day. This will really increase your savings amount with little effort.

Get a Roth IRA

I sincerely hope that you are saving for your retirement! If not, it's never too late to start. Go ahead and get a Roth IRA going. It is an excellent vehicle and is better than the traditional IRA because of the tax advantage.

If you deposit money into a Roth IRA account and leave it there until retirement, you never pay taxes on the earnings. That's right: I said NEVER! With a standard IRA, the money grows tax deferred. You pay federal and state income tax on it as you withdraw funds in your retirement years, which can eat up a quarter to a third of your money. With a Roth, you can build a nest egg that in 30 to 40 years from now contains \$1 million, and it's yours tax free.

What you don't get from the Roth is an income tax deduction in the year you make the contribution. So you pay the taxes up front. But the tax-free compounding over the years makes the tradeoff more than worthwhile. It's the best savings deal we've had since the income tax went into effect.

(There is an income limit that applies, so not everyone will be able to participate. Make sure to check with your investment company for more information.)

Alaska! Sure It's Cold, But...Look What You Save!

Do you think you could stand the cold? Would it be worth it if you knew you would spend less on your taxes in retirement? Well, then, you qualify to retire to... are you ready... Alaska! Sure, it's cold (and also beautiful), but Alaska is a tax haven! There is NO state income tax, and there is NO sales tax. Residents also share profits of the state's oil industry, receiving annual disbursements that can exceed \$1,000.

Residents age 65 and over receive generous exemptions from property taxes and are exempt from car registration fees. Most cities, including Anchorage and Juneau, have no local sales tax, either. So there! Are you packed yet? This could be a good thing!

Saving a Million Bucks

Who wants to be a MILLIONAIRE? Who doesn't? Is there a way to really do it so you won't have to make a fool of yourself on TV with Regis? Yes! If you plan carefully, you can do it! (No, you don't even have to win the lottery.)

The latest statistics say you need a million dollars in order for you to have a secure retirement and live comfortably in your later years. Yeah, I know, it sounds like a big task. But you can do it with planning! So let's get started!

To have \$1 million at a future date, with an average annual rate of return of 10 percent and making regular monthly investments, here's what you need to invest each month to reach the goals:

\$5,000 a month for 10 years = \$1,024,225

\$2,600 a month for 15 years = \$1,077,623

\$1,400 a month for 20 years = \$1,063,116

\$800 a month for 25 years = \$1,061,467

\$480 a month for 30 years = \$1,085,034

\$300 a month for 34 years = \$1,027,617

\$100 a month for 45 years = \$1,048,250

So the important questions are: How old are you now? How many years until you want to retire? How much do you need to be setting aside each month?

You say you can't afford the monthly amount? Well, start looking for ways to increase your income and/or decrease your expenses. The earlier you start, the better off you will be.

So, say you CAN do it and find a way to make it happen. Who needs Regis or Lotto?

15 Money-Saving Goals:

Here are just a few simple ideas of some goals you can set in different areas:

1. Put out the piggy bank for your left-over change at the end of the day.
2. Set up an automatic transfer from your checking account to a savings account each week.
3. Buy a savings bond once a month.
4. Attend one garage sale every month! (Depending on the weather, of course.)
5. Set up a coupon and rebate system.
6. Buy only classic-style clothes (instead of trendy items) that will last and still be fashionable for many years.
7. Set an agreed amount with your spouse that will never exceed when purchasing anything (without first discussing it).
8. Have a "meatless Monday" serving only veggies for the entire evening meal.
9. Eat leftovers once a week.
10. Have soup for a meal once a week (use veggies or leftovers).
11. Have breakfast once a week for dinner. (This has been one of my favorites for many years, especially on the weekends)!
12. Decide on a money-saving hobby you will take up, and set the time aside to pursue it.
13. Ask a friend to share babysitting a couple nights each month.
14. Again, the specific possibilities are endless. Whatever you pick as a goal, stick with it and you will reap great rewards later on!
15. If you don't have a will yet, and you have any assets at all, please get one!

I am reminded of a very wise quote: "If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail." Consider these quick bits of advice on what you should do.

Tips on Completing That Will!

I know this is something you'd rather not talk about, but have you got a will? If you do, congratulations! You're doing better than most folks! You've accepted your morality and are showing you care about what happens to your assets.

It's very important to have a will, but it's amazing how many people of all income levels don't have one. People prefer to avoid the reality that they're going to die some day. The greatest favor you can do for your survivors is to stipulate in your will what you want to happen to your assets.

Do you know what happens if you die without a will? The state will write a will for you, in most states, and will distribute your assets to your family based on its own formula. This means that someone you don't want your assets to go to could end up with most of them, and someone you really want to have them could end up with little, if any!

With that in mind, here are a few tips:

It's simpler than you think to create a will. For a will to be legal in most states you have to be at least 18 years old and of sound mind. The will must be written, signed by you and witnessed by two people who won't receive anything from your estate.

You can draw up your own will using a computer program, or have a lawyer do it. WillMaker is a good program and can be ordered at www.nolo.com. If you have too many questions or there are too many things you don't understand when you try to do it yourself, stop and get a lawyer to do it. Lawyer fees vary according to the complexity of your estate and their hourly charges.

Don't do a will yourself if you have a blended family, if people are likely to fight over money, or if you have a great deal of assets, like more than \$1 million (but that's only about two percent of us).

You have probably heard of a living trust, an alternative to a will in which your assets pass immediately to your designee when you die without going through the probate process.

But this is complicated and expensive, and very few people really need it, so don't get talked into taking on one of these. A living trust is appropriate in rare circumstances such as when someone owns property in several states, for example, and they want to avoid multi-state probate.

So as soon as you can, either see your lawyer or get a program and get the process going!

(Avoid These) 10 Ways to Waste Money

The following is a list of 10 things to absolutely avoid if you are to keep your Thrifty Tips membership card. They are extremely hazardous to the health of your wallet, pocketbook, bank account, or wherever you keep money.

1. Buying anything at convenience stores (except maybe for the gas if it is the cheapest around).
2. Paying an annual fee on a credit card. There are plenty of no-fee cards out there.
3. Paying fees on your checking account. There are banks that offer free checking, just look for them.
4. Buying lottery tickets. You have a better chance at getting struck by lightning seven times than you do of winning the big money.
5. Lending money to friends. You know you'll never get it back. Consider any loan a "gift".
6. Buying credit life insurance. Not necessary!
7. Purchasing extended warranties on appliances and electronics. Never a good deal for most things!
8. Keeping money in low-interest savings accounts. Better interest is earned in money market accounts, or get a CD, just do a little homework to find something ELSE!
9. Purchasing a new car every two years. This is VERY costly. Buy a new car if you must, but keep it for eight to 10 years!
10. Using credit cards like a regular loan. Have you looked at the interest rates on these? Not a good way to borrow money!

If you're doing any of these, STOP right now, okay? You can change your ways! If you're not doing any of these, I congratulate you on your thriftiness, frugality, and common sense! Keep up the good work!

A Unique Savings Plan: Two Ways to Save

1. If you are a coupon clipper, make them do double-savings duty for you. For every amount saved with a coupon, treat it like real money and put that amount into a savings jar or piggy bank. You'll be amazed at how much you can quickly save!
2. If you don't use coupons, then just make a quality decision that you are going to save something every day. Drop something, no matter how small, into a jar or piggy bank. Even just putting \$1 in a jar every day will give you \$365 at the end of the year. And it didn't kill you, did it? Next year you can save \$2 a day!

You may want to at least drop a built-up amount into a savings account periodically and earn a little bit of interest on the money. This will also keep you from raiding your piggy bank in a moment of weakness.

2

Clothing

We've come a long way since fig leaves as clothing, and many have made their fortunes in designing clothing for the human race. Until we depart this earth, we will have to keep ourselves clothed to protect us from heat, cold, wind, rain – and all those stares and laughter! Ha! We are all created equal in God's eyes, but some of us have bodies that are more equal than others, if you know what I mean. I heard someone say once, "I may not be perfect, but parts of me are excellent!" Clothing can be a blessing or a curse. It's one of those necessary evils to some or something that covers a multitude of sins to others.

Our clothing expenses can be a very big chunk of the family budget, especially if you've got two or more kids who insist on growing. You not only have to buy them, you have to take care of them with the added expense of washing, drying, dry cleaning and an occasional mending or alteration. These expenses can add up.

This is a fun chapter chock-full of money-saving tips that will help you trim your clothing and laundry budget. See how to find clothing bargains at your dry cleaner's, turn unused clothing into cash, and "defuzz" your favorite sweater to get another season out of it. How many ways do you know to recycle old panty hose? There are a million of them, and I have a few favorites to share.

Garage Sale Tips – No Clothes, Please

I don't mean have a garage sale in the nude. Just keep reading, okay?

The date for your garage sale is set! While you're tromping around up in the attic, down in the basement, or wherever it is that you've stashed your stuff, be on the lookout for some of these "hot" sellers:

*pictures

*frames

*desks

* tables

*chairs

*toys

* books

* old music recordings

*garden tools

* sporting goods

What shouldn't you bother selling? Yeah, NO CLOTHES! Typically, it's a major pain trying to sort and price them all. It's better to just load them up and take them to your local Salvation Army or Goodwill stores. When you get a receipt, you'll have a nice tax deduction.

Turn Old Clothes into Cash

Do you have a closet or drawer bulging with clothes you never wear? If you do, I have to ask...

What are you hanging onto them for, The Antiques Roadshow? How about turning them into a little useful cash?

Find a consignment store in your area and give them some business. One of these stores will sell your clothes for you and give you 30 to 50 percent of the selling price. Not a bad deal! Don't let all those unused clothes take up so much valuable space. Someone else could be getting some good use out of them, and you could be doing something good with the money.

Dealings with Dry Cleaners

It is best to choose a dry cleaner that will not only do a good job of cleaning your clothes, but will treat you fairly if problems ever develop. Price may be less important in this case.

You should choose a cleaner that is a member of the International Fabricare Institute. If there's a dispute over how a garment was damaged, the cleaner can submit the item to IFI for testing.

If it turns out to be the manufacturer's fault, most retailers will look at the report and give you a credit or put you in touch with the manufacturer, who will then reach some form of settlement with you.

If an item is destroyed in the cleaning process, the cleaner does not owe you the amount of money needed to replace the item, only a depreciated value based on the number of years the item is expected to last.

The do-it-yourself kits, by the way, that have been advertised a lot (such as Dryel) are okay for very basic stains, but in tests, were found inadequate to handle tough stains. Also, you still have to do the pressing yourself, which does not sound like fun to me!

Buy Unclaimed Goods from the Dry Cleaner: Ask your cleaner (or local alterations shop) to let you know when they will have any unclaimed items for sale. This is another great way to find terrific clothing bargains.

Uses for Old Panty Hose

Got a drawer full of damaged, unwearable panty hose? If so, I'm glad you hung onto them, because I have a few things you can use them for that will save you money. You may never throw another pair away again. (Men, you are welcome to read and use these, too. It's okay!)

NEVER throw away your old panty hose! Consider these possibilities for making the best use of them in other ways, and therefore, saving you money:

Keep a pair in the trunk of your car, as they can serve as a replacement for a broken engine belt. Honest!

Cut them into strips and use them to tie up plants in the garden. It's kinder and gentler to your plants than string.

Use them to buff freshly-polished shoes. They'll give a great shine.

Pack one of the legs with ice and use it as a nice ice pack for an injury, such as an arm or leg.

Keep them in the garage to use to strain old paint. They will filter out any lumps and debris that could mess up your paint job.

And my personal favorite...

Use them to store your beautiful Vidalia onions (which you may buy in large quantities.) Cut the legs off and knot one end. Drop the onions in one by one, tying a knot in the hose after each onion. This allows circulation of air, keeping them fresher longer. Then hang the string in the pantry for ready access.

Streeetch the Life out of Those Old Panty Hose!

I can't believe it, but I've discovered a new use for salt. Perhaps some of you have heard about this. Ladies, this one is for you. (Well, maybe there are a couple of you guys who might need this tip, too.) It has to do with panty hose!

Straight from the Morton Salt people comes this tip for longer lasting panty hose. Your hose will resist snagging and running if you do this simple trick BEFORE you wear them for the first time.

Mix two cups of salt with one gallon of water. Immerse the hose in the solution and soak for three hours. Rinse in cold water, and drip dry. It seems that the ordinary table salt acts to toughen the fibers. This also works well on broom bristles! So after you do your hose, you can soak your broom! Cool!

Another Use for Old Panty Hose

Got a garden planned for this season? That's great if you do! It's fun, relaxing, and saves on food costs. Save your ruined panty hose, as the work great in the garden for tying plants to stakes (especially tomatoes.) They are sturdy but stretchy and won't harm the stalks or branches.

Hang Those Panty Hose!

Here's another clever way to give those wrecked panty hose a new lease on life, plus get your complete money's worth:

Cut the legs from the panty and braid them around a metal clothes hanger. Now you have a very nice hanger for some of your most delicate things, like silky blouses and such. You'll avoid getting any rust stains or any picks from rough spots on the metal. Also, you can hang wet items as the hose dries quickly. Great idea!

Stock Up on Socks, No Mismatches, Please!

What is it about socks? You put six socks through the washer and dryer, but only five socks come out! (There must be a place in another dimension in space full of odd socks.)

For those costly mysterious sock disappearances that also cause you embarrassment by having to wear socks that don't match, here is a trick that will solve the problem (although I have no clue as to how to get the lost socks back)!

When socks go on sale, buy a dozen pair that are all the exact same type and color. If you lose one, then you will still have ALL the other socks that will match that one sock. You won't end up with the one useless sock and will never have a mismatch again!

Some of you may be eccentric enough not to care if your socks match (like my son and husband), and that's okay, too. But for the rest of us who really care, we would like to be spared the "agony of da feet" with mismatched socks!

"Sock" It to Me, But No Heels, Please!

How about buying tube socks for your kids and rest of the family rather than the regular "heeled" type? They will last longer because the heel will not always wear in the same spot. So, buy a bunch of "tubes" that are all the same (when they're on sale, of course). There's no need to spend so much of your laundry time matching up socks anymore! (Seems like there's always an odd sock, isn't there? One of life's great mysteries is what happens to socks in the washer?)

"Sachet" on Outta There!

Yes, we all enjoy the nice scent from those dried flower sachets and potpourris we put in our drawers. But they could be doing more harm than good. It's a good idea to use this stuff only with articles you will be using and laundering regularly, rather than with items that you will keep stored for a longer period of time. Why? The oil from the flowers can eat away at your fabric, and who needs that?

Try placing unwrapped bar soap in your drawers. This keeps your clothes smelling fresh and repels moths from getting into your woolies, too! This is a quick and scented solution!

Rotate Those Shoes for Longer Wear

What do your shoes have in common with your car's tires? Among other things, you can make them last longer by rotating them!

Rotating your footwear, just like rotating tires, can help make them last much longer. Would you believe that your feet actually produce about a cup of water every day? So wear a pair of shoes no more than once every three days, and you will make three pairs of shoes last as long as four pairs worn more often. Your shoes need at least 48 hours to rest, dry out, and regain their normal shape after a full day's wear.

What a Replacement Guarantee

Good old Sears has a return policy for clothing in sizes newborn through 16. If any items wear out, return it to Sears and it will be replaced in the same size, style, and color at no additional cost.

There is no time frame that says you must be the original owner or that limits the number of times an item can be replaced. The only requirement is that it must be identifiable as a Sears's product. Keep the labels! Almost sounds too good to be true!

Dryers Can Beat Up Your Clothes

Most of us could probably not live without our washer and dryer, especially if we've got kids. But all that fuzzy, woolly lint found in your dryer trap is visual proof that a wonderful convenience can be a source of destruction. Sounds bad, doesn't it?

You could collect enough of it over time to stuff dozens of pillows! (I guess this is okay if you're REALLY into recycling...) But my point is that your dryer can really beat up your clothes and wear them out more quickly. So, you're not getting your hard-earned money's worth. And if that's not enough, the heat causes gradual shrinking, with your preshrunk garments losing another five percent.

Whenever possible, air-dry your clothes. You will not only prolong the life of your duds, but you'll cut energy costs as well. When you do use the dryer, be sure to turn dress and delicate garments inside out to reduce friction and minimize pilling on the outside.

Item to "Dye" For

Not too many of us use dye to update or change clothing (and household items) anymore, but it still works well and can save us a good bit of money. If a fabric has a lot of cotton and natural fibers in it, it will absorb the dye quite well. You can transform the old into the new with just a little color bath.

You can update home linens and fabrics quickly and cheaply and give a whole new look to clothing by boosting the original color or changing it completely. You can even use it on your upholstery.

Remember this trick as you shop thrift stores or garage sales or when you receive any hand-me-downs. For many outdated items, "a little dye will do ya!" Please be careful to follow the directions on the package!

Shave That Fuzzy Sweater

Got a sweater you love to wear, but it has those unsightly fuzz balls all over that make it look just too ugly to wear anymore? Before you toss it into the give-away pile, STOP! You can give it new life with a simple trick: give it a shave.

Just take a regular razor and gently scrape it over the surface of the sweater. You'll be amazed at how you can remove enough of the fuzzies to make it presentable again so that you will feel comfortable wearing it for another season.

I have shaved many of my sweaters more than one time, and they have continued to look good for one or even two more seasons!

You can also use one of those battery-operated shavers. They work well too, and aren't very expensive.

No More Lost Mittens

Do you live where the weather gets cold enough for your kids to have to wear mittens? If so, how many pairs of mittens have they lost? Mittens are like socks; one seems to always be lost. If you have to keep buying, eliminate the problems by trying this:

Sew a button to each mitten or glove and teach them how to button them into a buttonhole in their coat or jacket when they take it off. No buttonholes in the coat? You could make two secret but convenient holes or loops in places somewhere on the inside of the coat. The mittens won't get lost, and there are no alligator clips to keep up with.

More Clothing Saving Tips

Tired of spending a lot of money on clothes while trying to keep up with all the changing trends in colors and style? Forget the trendy and keep a "classic" look to make your clothes last for years. You can save money on clothing by learning what colors, fabrics and styles to buy to keep clothes looking fashionable.

Classic colors include black, white, taupe or beige, grey and navy. Fabrics that last include cotton, silk, gabardine, corduroy and wool. Classic lines in clothes are usually very conservative and traditional and include slim skirts and princess seams. If you wear neutral colors with skirts and pants, you can mix and match any color you want in blouses, shirts and sweaters. This will make your wardrobe seem much larger and you will always look in fashion. Classic is always "in."

Tips for Saving on Kids' Clothes

Here are a few tips to help keep your kids' clothing budget in check:

1. When shopping for newborns and infants, buy items that can be worn by girls or boys. They make better hand-me-downs.
2. Make a list of what clothing they absolutely need and stick to the list when you shop. Try to limit these trips to twice a year – in the spring and when school starts (shop during sales, of course!).
3. Buy your kids clothing in neutral colors and get colorful accessories to go with them. They will probably beg you to get them the trendy styles and colors, but don't give in. Trendy colors change frequently and you don't want to have to buy additional items when they change.
4. Buy less expensive T-shirts with team names or logos. Kids will love them and they're pretty cheap. Avoid "designer" ones.
5. Buy a lot of white items. Huh? Yes, white! You can bleach the white clothes and keep them looking good, even after they've gotten really dirty.
6. Buy clothes and shoes that are just a teeny bit bigger than needed so there's "room to grow." Also, buy items with elastic waistbands and straps that adjust.

The best tip of all is to buy items that your kids will like and will really want to wear. Your good deal won't be so good if your kids refuse to wear the clothes you've bought, right? Been there, done that, and have loft-over unworn duds to prove it.

Thrifty Clothing Repair: Zippers 'N Velcro

So, one of your zippers just couldn't take anymore of your "ups and downs" and has lost a few teeth? Don't fret; there just might be a fix for it you can do yourself. Instead of paying for a replacement, try this:

Pull the slide up beyond the broken teeth and slide it back and forth over the remaining teeth to see that they align smoothly. Then stitch by hand or machine to create a block of thread over the bottom few teeth, making a new base. This should work in most cases, unless the teeth are too near the top of the zipper.

ALSO, if the bum zipper is on a bag or jacket, consider using Velcro, which will secure an opening that's not subject to too much stress. Just use a razor blade to remove the old zipper, then sew (or stick) the strips onto each side of the opening. Guys, you can even do this one.

Keeping It Zipped and Hooked

If you want to make sure the zippers in your clothes last, then before you throw the garment in the washer or dryer, be sure to simply zip 'em up. Zipper teeth are more likely to get bent out of shape and to cause jams or breaks, jams if left unzipped during their trip through the laundering cycle. Another way is to lose a few pounds, but that's a whole other story!

Also, the same thing goes for your undies, ladies. Be sure to fasten all hooks on your more delicate items before running them through the wash. Loose hooks are more likely to snag other clothing, plus they can get tangled and cause a twisted mess. It's a good idea to put these in a lingerie bag, too.

Storing Seasonal Clothing: Put 'Em in the Can!

A great way to store your seasonal duds is to store them in clean garbage cans. Put the clothes in plastic bags, put them in the can, and close the lid tightly. This way you'll have no moisture, no mildew and most importantly, no bugs. Your clothes will last years longer.

Be sure you clue in the rest of the family that this garbage bag can NOT be the one to set out at the curb on the next trash day! It's a good idea to put it in a safe storage area when it's all packed up. If this were my house I wouldn't have to worry about someone putting the trash out without being nagged, I mean, lovingly encouraged repeatedly.

A Starch Stretcher

In spite of all the permanent press items of clothing that we own, the fact remains (alas) that we all have several things we need to IRON and STARCH (can you tell that these are NOT my favorite things to do). If we've got to do it, then we might as well ease the pain and save money while doing it, right?

So, if you use a lot of spray-type starch, you've probably noticed that those aerosol cans don't last very long. A cheaper and better way is to purchase the concentrated liquid type and mix it in a spray bottle. Combine two parts water to one part starch. You'll notice that a 32-ounce bottle of this liquid starch will last longer than at least three cans of the spray.

Save Those Boots!

Do you live where it snows in winter? Do you ever get those unsightly white salt stains on your nice leather boots?

For many of us, the winter months mean snow, and with the snow comes the use of salt on streets and walkways. If you wear leather boots, you have to deal with those white salt stains. How do you get rid of them? Mix up a solution of one part vinegar to three parts water, apply to the stains. When the stains disappear, dry off with a soft, clean cloth, and then polish as usual.