

Green Living

SPECIAL SECTION 2011

'GREEN' CHOCOLATES

Options abound in the world of organic chocolate

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Chocolate lovers wishing to live a green lifestyle are often a little anxious to embark on the exotic exploration into the world of cacao farming. What will they find? Will they have to give up their melt-in-your-mouth vice of choice? Fear not, intrepid green venturers. Those who dare to venture here receive their sweet reward, in the form of mood-boosting, antioxidant-packed, delicious organic chocolates.

Oh, chocolate, hallowed be thy name. Not only does chocolate act as a secret best friend to women around the world but also studies have shown that cocoa may enhance the circulatory system, reduce unhealthy cholesterol and provide anti-cancer benefits. For a long time, many have considered chocolate a mood booster, but some recent studies have actually pointed to chocolate's aphrodisiacal qualities. And according to research, eating limited amounts of dark chocolate appears to help prevent heart disease, which could lead one to conclude that women have been unfairly ridiculed for nursing Hershey's bars while mending broken hearts. If you're among those who count chocolate as a pleasure in life, you'll be pleased to fit organic chocolates into your healthy lifestyle.

***Why Organic?**

Like anything else that's farmed or created, cacao beans may be exposed to toxins while being harvested. During production, some chocolate types may absorb lead, but the organic chocolate manufacturing process seeks to avoid all such types of contamination and harmful leaching.

As green lifestyle consumers hunger for healthier foods and snacks, the chocolate market has delivered more organic chocolate bars, baking chocolate, chocolate truffles and even hot cocoa blends to provide a cleaner type of chocolate. These organic goods keep all of the benefits of chocolate, often with added antioxidants and other healthy benefits.

Fair trade certification is also important in green living. When a chocolate brand achieves fair trade certification, it meets the standards of environmentally friendly production and recycling, and it fairly compensates its workers, often providing education, lodging and health care to its labor force. Farmers are paid fair prices, and safe production facilities are monitored.

Look for organic and fair trade certification in any chocolates you're



considering. If the company meets the high standards of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program in keeping with regulations of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 and other regulations, it legally may call itself a provider of organic chocolates. Right now, there is concern that some products are labeled organic without actually being entirely organic. So invest some time in researching companies that proudly use the label "organic."

Non-organic chocolates, after all, may be filled with high-fructose corn syrup and may have been made from products grown with pesticides, perhaps even being contaminated with mercury. And when it's grown conventionally, cacao is sprayed with one of the highest amounts of pesticides of any crop. If you and your family enjoy chocolate, it's worth the effort to try new brands of organic chocolate until you

discover your new favorite bar or truffle.

***Organic Chocolates To Try**

A walk through Whole Foods or another organic market's chocolate section will reveal a world of chocolate bars in colorful wrappers with enticing names, which you may wish to add to your family's taste test. In addition to organic chocolate bars and treats found in a store, here are some online resources to explore for their creative flavor blends and earth-friendly practices.

--Newman's Own (<http://www.NewmansOwn.com>), not only for organic peanut butter cups and chocolate caramel cups but also for the company's commitment to donating profits to charity.

--Lake Champlain Chocolates (<http://www.LakeChamplainChocolates.com>), known for its sea salt and almond milk chocolates, providing a sweet and salty taste, as well as its blend of dark chocolate, cinnamon and cayenne pepper.

--Earth's Sweet Pleasures (<http://www.EarthsSweetPleasures.com>), known for its gourmet fudge bar.

--Divine Chocolate (<http://www.DivineChocolate.com>), which garners rave reviews for its organic white chocolate and mint dark chocolate.

--Sweet Earth Chocolates (<http://www.SweetEarthChocolates.com>), which provides a vegan ultimate turtle and a popular peppermint cup.

--Dagoba (<http://www.DagobaChocolate.com>), which blends exotic flavors of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and other fair trade partners to create such antioxidant-packed blends as its lavender and blueberry dark chocolate bar and its "superfruit" dark chocolate bar, containing acai and goji berries.

***Incorporating Organic Chocolate Into Your Life**

Organic chocolates take many forms, from the candy bars and truffles you enjoy to natural beauty products containing organic chocolate, such as lip balms and lotions. If chocolate is a part of your life, make the switch to organic chocolate and live a healthier life.

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BYOB: Go greener and bring your own bag

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Stashed in cupboards, crammed under car seats and collected in cozies on the backs of pantry doors, those plastic grocery bags seem to breed like roaches -- and like the cockroach, these ubiquitous byproducts of the modern age seem unlikely to vanish any time soon.

After all, they're a cheap and convenient way for stores to pack up your purchases, and compared with old-fashioned paper sacks, they are surprisingly eco-friendly. Plastic bags require 40 percent less energy to produce than paper grocery bags and generate 80 percent less solid waste, according to the Film and Bag Federation, an industry trade group, but they still require energy to produce and recycle. And if not recycled, they clog landfills and litter the landscape.

"The single most important thing shoppers can do to minimize their environmental impact is to use reusable bags instead of single-use plastic and paper bags. This applies to not only grocery bags but also bags from department stores and other retailers," says Rupa Wickrama, founder of Saky Sacks reusable totes.

"Plastic bags that get buried in landfills may take up to 1,000 years to break down and can contaminate soil and water," Wickrama says. "Furthermore, the production of single-use plastic bags consumes millions of gallons of oil that could be used for fuel and heating."

Those inexpensive totes from groceries and mass retailers are a great way to reduce the number of plastic bags you bring home -- but only if you use them. Let's face it; they're cumbersome and not that attractive. Plus the cheap totes have limited life spans, which means they, too, will end up in a landfill eventually.

Instead, invest in totes that go the distance -- and go for style. The more you like the bag the likelier you are to use it.

"Women don't have to give up style for the perfect reusable bag," Wickrama says. "If a reusable bag is as beautiful and stylish as a fashion accessory, more women will use them and make a point of carrying one at all times."

Saky Sacks, for example, blend sophisticated prints with designer details for a look that's more handbag than grocery bag. The Tyvek totes are crease-resistant, wash

able and strong enough to carry 25 pounds, plus they're recyclable. Features include padded handles, a key ring, inside pockets and portability; each bag folds up small enough to fit in a purse or a pocket. Prices start at \$20. Visit <http://www.SakySacks.com> for retail locations.

RuMe Bags Co. offers similar stylish totes. Available in 19 fashion-forward colors and nearly 30 modern prints, each bag features a patent-pending enclosure system that allows three bags to roll up together for compact carrying.

Made of thick recyclable polyester, the bags are water-resistant, machine washable and capable of toting 50 pounds each, the equivalent of three plastic grocery bags. They are available at specialty retailers, including The Container Store, or online at <http://www.rumebags.com>. Prices start at \$9.95.

Before you buy, be sure the totes are washable, or you may bring home more than groceries.

"Studies have shown that reusable grocery bags can serve as breeding grounds for dangerous food-borne bacteria --



EARTH-FRIENDLY GOODS

Getting your green (product) on

Anica Wong
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Everyone seems to be riding the green wave. Organic grocery chains are becoming the "it" spot to buy food. Being sustainable at home (recycling, changing bulbs and saving electricity) is all the rage. And now consumers are searching for the latest environmentally friendly products that would be safe for their families to use; it seems Styrofoam cups and one-use items are going by the wayside.

"We are trying to create a much more socially responsible company, as well as products that really feature earth-friendly materials (and are) truly useful to moms," says Amy Shumway, the founder of Dandelion, an earth-friendly goods company. Dandelion focuses mainly on children's clothing, toys and baby products.

Four years ago, Shumway had had enough with big companies and the mass market of plastics; she wanted to get away from toxin scares and focus on products that contained natural materials.

Dandelion was fashioned out of that vision, and Shumway says that it has been a great journey.

"Dandelion was created for the specialty market, not the mass market, because of the material and expense. We hope to keep going. We want our items to be available to everyone," Shumway says.

The corn baby teethingers and organic dolls that Shumway sells are priced higher than a \$3.99 plastic toy found at Walmart. She hopes, though, that the moms who make up her consumer base are willing to dig a little deeper into their pocketbooks for quality products and maybe skimp on other things that they don't place as much value on.

"Even with the economy being as bad as it is, people will give up for their child," she points out.

Susan Golicic begs to differ. Golicic is an assistant professor of supply chain management at Colorado State University, and she does research in sustainability in companies. Although there are a lot of green products coming into the market, they aren't necessarily taking away market share from existing products, she explains.

"They are feeding a kind of separate target group that isn't loyal to other products and isn't happy with those products," Golicic says. "So those are the true sustainability consumers, and they are really a minority still. But they are the ones who are willing to pay extra or go to a different place." She adds, though, that there is still a huge group of consumers who aren't willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products.

That doesn't discourage Peggy Farabaugh, the CEO and founder of Vermont Woods Studios, an eco-friendly



furniture company. When Farabaugh started the company five years ago, she was a forest conservation advocate who realized that Vermont had a long tradition of making furniture with local wood, providing a sustainable base for an industry that can be known for wiping out forests at a time to create chairs and tables. All of the wood for



Vermont Woods Studios' furniture comes from America, with most of it being supplied by forests in Pennsylvania and Vermont.

With a hard-core promise to be sustainable over profitable (although the company doubled its sales from 2009 to 2010), Vermont Woods Studios focuses on where its wood comes from and how the tree that was chopped down will be replaced. The company only buys from responsibly managed forests, which Farabaugh explains is a harvesting company that has a forester on staff who makes sure the harvesting of the trees maintains the character of the forest. This helps to ensure that there will be trees for future generations and that furniture companies aren't destroying forests.

Vermont Woods Studios also is involved in Plant a Billion Trees, a project backed by The Nature Conservancy. The project tries to replenish the deforestation that is happening around the world.

"I don't know how much people make the connection between global warming and forestry. Twenty percent of global warming is due to deforestation of the rain forest," Farabaugh says. "That is a greater contribution to global warming

ALTERNATIVE FUELS

Decrease your dependence on oil

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Do you dream of a world in which cars are powered by sunshine and sea plants, one in which you still can have your own personal vehicle but reduce your carbon footprint?

It's not so far-fetched as you might think.

With prices at the pump rising every day, it may be time to assess your fuel intake and start looking for alternatives. Now more than ever, there are options beyond the traditional gas-and-go method. Hybrid vehicles and converting your current vehicle to biodiesel are just two options. But figuring out what's available on the market now and what's the best option for you can be tricky.

If you're in the market for a new vehicle altogether, electric/gas hybrid vehicles should be where you begin your search. Hybrid vehicles have been around for more than a decade now, and you probably have seen a Prius or two running around town. Hybrids work by running on battery power with a backup gas tank to supplement it. They get far better gas mileage than traditional all-gas cars and have the added benefit of low greenhouse gas emissions. The Toyota Prius is just one of many electric/gas hybrid vehicles available. Hybrids also don't have the limitations that early incarnations of electric vehicles had, and generally they can go farther and faster than an all-electric vehicle can. The Chevrolet Volt is a new breed of hybrid; it is primarily electric but has a backup gas tank for long drives.

Early electric cars were hampered by the limitations of battery life and the ability to hold a charge, but continual advances in technology have fixed most of the flaws. All-electric cars still can't go so far or so fast as electric/gas hybrids, but the gap is closing. If you want all-electric, the Nissan Leaf is slowly rolling out across the country. With a speed cap of 87 mph, it never will win the Indy 500, but it will go about 100 miles on a single charge. It also features a solar panel installed on the rear spoiler to add a supplementary charge to the battery.

If you have a vehicle that runs on diesel -- a pickup truck or the like -- you easily could run it on biodiesel and start saving yourself some money. According

GREEN FITNESS GEAR

Think of the earth's health, too, when you exercise

Sharon Naylor
Creators.com

Does your workout help or hurt? The environment, that is. Those hand weights, your yoga mat, your treadmill, even the shoes on your feet -- they all can be eco-dangerous. These products not only can expose you to toxic plastics and chemicals but also can rev up your energy consumption and electric bills. If you want to live a greener lifestyle, it's time to green your workouts.

First, inspect the gear you already own to assess which items are certified organic or certified fair trade, such as an eco-friendly yoga mat made from plant-based raw materials. You may be surprised to learn you already have a good start on greening your workout gear.

As the weather gets nicer, you may be planning on shedding your old workout regimen to launch an outdoor exercise routine. Before you head to the store, consider making greener choices in fitness gear and footwear. Here are some of the eco-friendly innovations in fitness equipment and supplies, making your workouts healthier for you and for the planet.

*Yoga Gear

During yoga, you're in close physical contact with your mat, and you don't want to breathe and absorb harmful chemicals from the mat itself. Organic yoga mats have been on the market for quite some time, made from eco-safe materials, including raw plant-based materials. Look for phthalate-free mats. Phthalates are a particular danger, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, because they have been known to pose a cancer risk through repeated exposure. The new class of phthalate-free yoga mats is marked as such, often made from environmentally friendly PVC materials or jute. Gaiam's online store is just one source for green yoga gear and has a collection of all the yoga accessories you'll need. These green accessories include bolsters made of hemp, yoga blocks made of cork or recycled materials, hemp yoga straps, 100 percent organic fiber wool yoga blankets and more. Even bags used to carry yoga mats and equipment come in 100 percent organic cotton or bamboo.

*Weighted Gear

From hand weights to medicine balls, eco-technology has introduced safer coatings and materials, such as patented rubber coatings on medicine balls from Aeromat, which use latex- and phthalate-free Neuwu material. The idea is that during a sweaty workout session, toxic rubber chemicals won't seep into your skin.

*Football, Basketballs and Soccer Balls

Warm-weather sports may have you and your kids headed to the local field to enjoy your favorite sport. But you don't have to play with toxic rubber balls, some of which even smell of toxins; the balls you use in your games can be eco-friendly. Fair Trade Sports Inc. is the first sports equipment company in the U.S. to launch a full line of eco-certified fair trade sports balls. The eco-certification in these regulation-size footballs, soccer balls and basketballs ensures that they are made of green materials. Fair Trade Sports has pioneered the use of eco-certified rubber from a sustainably run forest rather than rubber from environmentally destructive rubber tree plantations. The fair trade certification adds an extra benefit, by ensuring that fair wages and healthy working conditions have been provided for the employees who make these balls. In addition, the company pays a 20 percent premium, which goes directly to a worker-run organization that grants loans to businesses run by women and provides health care for the workers' families.

"I started this company to bring market pressure to bear on Nike, adidas and the other multinational companies to improve the human rights and environmental aspects behind their sports balls -- and to have fun doing so," says Scott James, owner of Fair Trade Sports. Parents say their kids appreciate having greener sports equipment, because the younger generation tends to be very eco-minded and very passionate about fair trade practices and companies giving back.

*Greener Water Bottles

Eco-friendly water bottles are a must to keep you hydrated during your workouts. BPA-free water bottles are the leading style, and cut-

