

# For Immediate Release



**EAT RIGHT MONTANA**

*A coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles*

[www.eatrightmontana.org](http://www.eatrightmontana.org)

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## Helping Children Learn to Care About Their Environment

We all know that it can be difficult, although not impossible, to teach an old dog new ways. It is much easier to start out with healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle than it is to transform a confirmed couch potato into a picture of fitness. Healthy habits begin very early in life. Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have many opportunities to help young children get a head start by learning to make healthy choices for themselves and healthy choices for the planet too.

"In our own family and our child care facility, we incorporate personal and environmental health into the rhythm of every day," says Sonnie Atwood, mother of two and co-owner of Organic Sprouts Home Day Care in Missoula. "We use children's natural curiosity and innate creativity to build a foundation for a lifetime of healthy choices. The vocabulary of smart environmental choices, like reuse, recycle, and compost, can become everyday words for young children."

Ms. Atwood shared her creative approach to reusing items (previously considered trash) with child care providers in a *Making Something Out of Nothing* workshop, offered this winter by Child Care Resources in Missoula. Perfect for today's tight economy, the class showed providers and parents how to reuse ordinary household materials for preschool games, sensory activities, crafts projects, and individual artistic expression - all building a foundation for success in school.

According to Sonnie Atwood, almost anything can be reused for arts and crafts projects. "We often send wish lists home with the children. Some of our perennial favorites are magazines, maps, paper towel rolls, juice cans, and paint sample cards. Egg cartons are incredible. With a child's imagination, some paint, and a little glue, they can become all kinds of critters (spiders and bugs are always popular), boats, helicopters, or trucks. With scissors and adult assistance, a plastic apple juice jug can be transformed into a hat, a horn to play, or a fun way to catch a ball, much like the game of jai alai."

Here are some simple steps to start going green with any young children in your family or circle of friends:

- **Be a role model for smart environmental choices:** Kids always pay attention to what adults are doing, especially the important adults in their lives. Carry water - for them and for yourself - in a reusable metal or safe plastic water bottle.
- **Introduce a green vocabulary:** Reduce, reuse, and recycle are words that kids can learn and learn to do. The new series of Little Green Books™ (visit your local library for reusable books) is a fun way to read about environmental adventures.
- **Think outside the box about boxes:** Let children be your green guides when thinking about how to reuse boxes before recycling them. Maybe the box can become a building block, a train car, a robot head, an animal mask, or even a guitar?

"In addition to our daily routines, like composting kitchen and table waste, we make environmental choices into games for children," notes Ms. Atwood. "When we are done with some packaging material, we let the children help us decide how to reuse or recycle it. Sorting items for recycling into the proper bin is actually one of their favorite activities! And, as the days get longer and the soil warms, we are all looking forward to lots of gardening fun in the yard."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

[www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm)

**Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families 2009**