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Fun Food Shopping - Is It Possible?

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Bring only willing assistants.

Have a family member or friend watch the kids and avoid having to save them from falling out of the cart, whining over the loudspeaker, or filling a diaper. Grocery shopping can feel like a mini-vacation without those occurrences. If your child likes to shop and would love nothing more than to cram a basket with Lunchables and the display candy near the checkstand, it may help to issue a couple of guidelines in a lighthearted way. For example, "We're going in for broccoli and tofu; whoever doesn't ask for anything else gets ice cream later!"

Go seasonal.

Even with the abundant availability of produce from all over the world, it seems more irresistible during our local season. Tomatoes, corn and cherries practically glow in summer, sweet potatoes seduce in autumn, carrots and fennel beckon in winter - you've got the idea. Seasonal ripeness influences nutrient content, and just seems better on an intuitive level. It's also usually less expensive.

Go local.

Put on a hat, grab a bag and visit a farmer's market. Neighbors, musicians, kids and dogs can make food shopping a pleasurable social experience. Use the imagination to capture a sense of ancient marketplaces where humans exchanged wares since the beginning of time. Aromas wafting through the market tempt the tasting of new foods.

Having honed the skills of tearing through a store, slipping between customers (miraculously not knocking them over) while crossing items off a list, answering the cell phone and calculating the shortest line in which to tap my feet, I decided it was time to find at least an occasional alternative to harried food shopping. Sometimes it's necessary, but - enough already. Where's the enjoyment of selecting food to nourish the body? Many food choices are made from stress and lack of time these days. After reflecting on the issue, I have a few suggestions.

Interview your culinary audience beforehand, while making a shopping list.

It's tempting to quote Fran Lebowitz, "Ask your child what he wants for dinner only when he's buying." However, the development of good attitudes towards food is naturally related to enjoying it, and kids appreciate having some input about likes and dislikes. I ask my kids for dinner and snack ideas, and then shop without them. Sometimes it's the closest thing to R&R for the day.

Designate at least 1 fixed shopping day.

Select a day when, to the nth degree possible, food can be purchased for the next few days' meals. This gives the opportunity to think ahead, reflect on what's in season, and plan for some treats. Food cravings can be satisfied with regular shopping excursions when planning a rational approach.

Eat before you go.

Grocery stores that offer samples know that sales of the demo items increase dramatically. By eating a snack before shopping, one can cut down on impulse buys and junk food "gotta haves". That little snack can save a lot of money and excess calories over the course of 52 weekly shopping trips in the year.

Mounds of fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables inspire better eating and delightful recipes. In addition, farmers and entrepreneurs from the region are kept solidly in business. Everyone wins at a good farmers market. I guess the overall theme is to enjoy the moment, including everyday tasks. Perhaps we are what we eat, but what if we are also how we shop. . . see you in the aisles.

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