

TIP BANK

Smart Ways to Save 'George'

SAVING & SPENDING

Wal-Mart . . . Dollar Store . . . Supermarket? MAKING BREAD's Grocery Comparison Shopper Finds the Bargains in Six Can't-Live-Without Categories

Garbage bags, cereal, shampoo: every week or two, we replenish our stock of several can't-live-without items—the staples of our daily domestic routine. Most of us automatically include them on our shopping lists and toss them into our shopping carts as we cruise the aisles of our local supermarket, stocking up on our groceries for the week. Granted, there's a lot to be said for the convenience of one-stop shopping. But how much is that convenience costing us?

MAKING BREAD sent its intrepid comparison shopper—*moi*—off with a short list of items to see what kind of deals I could find. How much would buying no-name brands save? Do you have to buy in bulk to trim your costs? To answer those questions, I ventured to three locations to price shop for the items listed above. My stops were a local supermarket, a dollar store, and a local Wal-Mart. Here's what I found:

Making a List . . .

Cereal: First stop, the cereal aisle. To satisfy my sweet tooth, I wanted Frosted Flakes and Cocoa Puffs. But, since the name of the game was savings, I was willing to accept the cheapest brand, even a no-name, or generic, supermarket brand. I mean, are you

paying for the name or the cereal?

A 12 oz. box—roughly a week's worth of cereal—cost \$3.69 at the supermarket. At Wal-Mart, a larger, family-sized box of the same cereal only cost \$2.33—a savings of \$1.36. As I walked through the dollar store, I saw two boxes of generic frosted flakes and chocolate puffs, each priced at \$1.00—\$2.69 less than the supermarket, and I could have gotten two boxes for less than the price of one family-sized box at Wal-Mart.

Bottom line: The dollar store won this round, hands down.

Toothpaste: I found several varieties of Colgate at the dollar store for a buck. In the grocery store, the same Colgate product was priced at nearly three times as much, costing \$2.99. Wal-Mart gave the dollar store a run for its money, pricing the same

It cost me \$28.27 at the supermarket, \$16.78 at Wal-Mart and \$10.00 at the dollar store to buy all of the items on my list. That means that if you normally buy everything at the supermarket, you're spending \$18.27 more than you need to every week or two.

product at \$1.58.

Bottom line: The supermarket takes the biggest bite out of your budget here; pass Wal-Mart and head for the dollar store.

Shampoo: The shampoo aisle of any store is always filled with a dizzying array of choices. In the dollar store, the selection wasn't as broad. I did find two name-brand prod-



Photo by Stockbyte.

ucts, Alberto VO5 and Suave, at \$1.00 a piece. At Wal-Mart, I was surprised to find the same two products, each costing only 88 cents. At the grocery store, smaller-sized bottles of the same products cost \$1.39.

Bottom line: Lock in good prices for your tresses at Wal-Mart.

Paper Products: At the dollar store, generic brands of paper products were all available in multipacks. A buck apiece bought four rolls of toilet paper, a 250-count package of napkins, and a roll of paper towels. At the supermarket, a six-roll package of toilet paper cost \$4.29, the same brand of 250-count napkins cost \$1.99, and a roll of paper towels cost \$1.99. That's a difference of \$5.27—and all you get is two more rolls of toilet paper. At Wal-Mart, a six-roll package of toilet paper only cost \$1.99, a 400-count package of napkins cost \$1.86, and four rolls of paper towels cost \$1.44.

Bottom line: The bulk packaging and pricing at Wal-Mart wins the day.

Garbage Bags: Basic-black, heavy-duty bags were sold in a 30-pack for \$1.00 at the dollar store, a 40-pack at the supermarket for \$5.00, and a 60-pack at Wal-Mart for \$2.00.

Bottom line: Take your pick—Wal-Mart or dollar store—but buying trash bags at the supermarket is a waste of money.

Detergents: The dollar store sold two brand-name dishwashing liquids—Ajax and Joy—for, you guessed it, a dollar apiece. The local supermarket sold the same bottles for \$3.19, while Wal-Mart sold them for \$1.58 each. Laundry detergent was sold at the dollar store in bottles and boxes. One quart of a generic bottle and a one-pound box of detergent each sold for \$1.00. The supermarket sold the same products for \$1.29 and \$3.49, respectively. Wal-Mart had the best prices, selling a three-quart bottle for \$1.29 and a four-pound box for \$2.43. Bottles of 409 and Touch of Glass were available for \$1.00 at the dollar store, \$2.45 at the supermarket, and \$1.83 at Wal-Mart.

Bottom line: Buy these products in bulk at Wal-Mart and save.

Adding It All Up . . .

Not surprisingly, given its name, overall, the dollar store won the price war, but Wal-Mart wasn't far behind—winning three categories (shampoo, paper products and detergents) and tied with the dollar store in one (garbage bags). Setting aside some minor differences in unit pricing or quantity, it cost me \$28.27 at the supermarket, \$16.78 at Wal-Mart and \$10.00 at the dollar store to buy all of the items on my list. That means that if you normally buy everything at the supermarket, you're spending \$18.27 more than you need to every week or two.

You're more likely to find a broader assortment of brand names at Wal-Mart (or Target or Kmart or any of the other discount chains) than at a dollar store, though you may end up lugging home bulk packaging. You'll still save \$11.49 over the supermarket each time you purchase these items at a discount store.

Sure, it's easier to do all of your shopping at the supermarket. But our advice is: save the grocery store for groceries, and make the effort to buy household goods like the ones I purchased at a discount or dollar store near you. There's a good reason these stores are always packed with people. Shopping there is worth the effort!

—Jennifer Vishnevsky →