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Smart Spending combines the best money-saving tips from MSN Money and the rest of the Web. Our team of experts on stretching dollars:

What's to love -- and not -- about dollar stores

Great deals can be found, but should you be concerned about possible health risks?

Posted by Karen Datko Friday, September 25, 2009 1:58:44 AM

If you track the blogosphere, it seems that the popularity of the humble dollar store is soaring, and that these stores aren't as humble as they used to be.

Imagine this: The extremely picky "Mrs. Badger" at [Lipstick is my Crack](#) has even switched from body wash to bar soap because she found soaps she loves at the dollar store.

"Yeah! It's not all Irish Spring and Lifebuoy up in there anymore, y'all! And it's not all no-name generic soaps made out of battery acid and bacon grease (I just made that up; don't e-mail me) anymore, either," she writes.

In fact, [The New York Times](#), which caters to a crowd that can hardly be called frugal, featured writer Henry Alford's experiment to incorporate items from 99-cent stores into his cooking, culminating with a dinner featuring only such fare. It sounded delicious.

But not everyone is thrilled with the food and other common dollar store products.

- Bing: [Find the best dollar store bargains](#)

[FIRE Finance recently qushed](#) about 10 top dollar store buys, but added, "We are suspicious about the quality of food, and the alloys as well as silicones of the kitchenware sold at these stores. So as a policy we never purchase edible stuff or anything that has to do with cooking or food from them." To this, we add, make sure you check the date on each food package.

Consumer Reports [warned against buying](#) certain products from dollar stores, some because of safety concerns: electrical items like extension cords and Christmas lights, vitamin supplements, brands that sound like known brands but aren't, vinyl lunch boxes, and toddlers' toys.

Questions about the quality and source of the products, as well as the pay of dollar store employees, has prompted lots of discussion on a [message board thread at MSN Money](#). A reader named "StillOnTheRoad" summed up many people's comments: "I'm guessing that if you're concerned with a store being 'socially responsible,' not many chain stores will meet your criteria."

Our partner blogger Donna Freedman wrote in a post here at Smart Spending: "Some people point out that a lot of dollar store merchandise is manufactured in countries paying criminally low wages. That's true. But that's a systemwide problem."

She added, "Right now, plenty of people can't afford to have ethics. They're increasingly squeezed by the rising costs of housing, food, child care and medical coverage" -- not to mention gas.

Published March 29, 2008

Tags: [groceries](#) [health](#) [Karen Datko](#) [retail](#) [savings](#) [shopping](#)



Karen Datko, lead blogger, is a veteran journalist in small-town Montana, where her mortgage is \$310 a month.



Teresa Mears is a veteran writer in Florida. She doesn't clip coupons, but she does shop at Goodwill.



Donna Freedman, our "Living With Less" columnist, is a student, freelance writer and handywoman in Washington.

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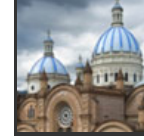
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