

A Strategy for Re-Using Boxboard

Don Mercer
Associate Professor, Department of Food Science
University of Guelph

In a previous article, I wrote about re-using water bottles as protective guards on the ends of stakes in your garden. Doing so can help prevent eye injuries when bending over tall supported plants. This prompted me to consider sharing another somewhat food-related re-use situation with you.

For years now, every time we finish a box of cereal, or some other similarly packaged product, I cut out the front and back panels and place them on a shelf in the kitchen. These pieces of boxboard then become my coveted stationery for writing lists. To me, finding an added use for this otherwise waste material seems to be environmentally friendly in some miniscule way.

Members of our family find it amusing in a good-natured manner. One Christmas I even received a stack of carefully cut boxboard pieces from our son and daughter-in-law as a humorous gift. The pieces were so precisely cut that I haven't had the heart to use them. They are safely tucked away as a reminder of just how much thoughtfulness actually went into this unique gift.

Boxboard panels from different sources seem to lend themselves to a number of specific applications. The front and back panels from granola bar boxes can be left whole and folded down the middle with a book fold. These are ideal for putting in your shirt pocket when going on quick shopping trips for just a few items. They can also be cut down in size to give smaller flat sheets. I use these whenever I need to write down lengths of wood to cut. It's really easy to take the list out to the garage, cut the wood to size, and bring the boxboard back in for the next set of dimensions.

Large cereal boxes are a real prize. They provide two sheets of boxboard that are a great surface for making up my weekly "to-do" lists at work. The stiff material is always easy to find on my cluttered, avalanche-prone desk.

Cookie boxes are an ideal size for weekly shopping lists. The nice thing here is that the boxboard is sturdier than just a regular sheet of paper. This provides a firm surface on which to write or check things off as you move around the grocery store. You can also fold them down the middle to fit in your back pocket. Once I get home, the groceries get put away, and the completed list goes into the recycle bin.

You may find that some boxboard, especially that used for frozen food packages, has a waxy coating on it to prevent moisture uptake. Such surfaces are not suitable for writing on with ballpoint pen, so you might want to avoid using these.

My wife did concede on one occasion that perhaps my habit had some merit. This was after she saw someone else at the grocery store using a piece of boxboard for his shopping list – a wise man, indeed. That was a long time ago, but at least I know there are others out there who share my eccentricities.

In spite of the strange looks that may be directed my way, I still think that this is a great way to reduce, re-use, and then recycle. It makes sense to me, and that's what really counts.



Boxboard is ideal for list making, either folded or cut into flat sheets.