

Green Your Back-to-School Supplies: Eco-friendly choices for back to school

By Beth Lovejoy, on behalf of the Summit Environmental Commission

Heading off with your child to stock up on shiny new school supplies is always a treat--new, perfect notebooks, folders, binders, pens ,pencils--a metaphor for a fresh start to the school year. It is also a perfect "teaching moment," a time for you and your child to think the environment, and how your purchases can be eco-friendly as well as child-friendly.

Now that the "green" movement has become a mainstream phenomenon, there are many eco-friendly choices available in stores and online. Here is just a sampling:



Paper

Notebooks, folders, loose-leaf paper, post-it notes--all paper products that take trees, water and chemicals to produce, and fossil fuel to transport. Try a two-prong approach to be gentler on the environment. First, use less paper. Reusable loose leaf binders might be better than spiral notebooks. At the end of a subject, take out the note pages, staple them to save, and reuse the binder with fresh paper. Tell the truth--how many half-used spiral notebooks do you throw out or have hanging around your house? [The Green Office](#) and [Naked Binder](#) offer non-vinyl binders.

Ask your teacher if you can submit printed work via email rather than handing in a hard copy.

Second, when you do need paper products, look for items using recycled paper or other post-consumer material. Choices are abundant--Staples now has [a green product line](#) as does [Office Depot](#). A pricier but very cute line is available online [at Ecojot](#).

Pens and Pencils

Try the refillable variety of mechanical pens and pencils to reduce waste, or check out pens and pencils made from recycled materials. Even pen giant [Pilot](#) has gotten into the act with its refillable pens and pencils made from recycled content. Looking for something a little funkier? Try The Green Office's [recycled jeans pencils](#).

Backpacks

Look for packs made from recycled or repurposed materials. Take a gander [at ebags](#) to see a selection. Do you have a "too cool" kid (who also has a job so he or she can afford an expensive pack)? How about a [recycled rubber backpack](#), or an organic [European hemp backpack](#)?

Pack a No-Waste Lunch

Start with a lunch box or reusable lunch bag. [Reuseit.com](#) and [Nubius Organics](#) have a wide array of safe and sustainable choices, but any sack or box that you reuse day in and day out is a good choice.

For inside the lunch box, members of Summit's Schools Green Teams recommend items from Chatham-based company [Back2Tap](#). Last year, Franklin School Green Team embarked on a waste-free lunch campaign during which they collected orders, then bought and delivered Back2Tap's stainless steel water bottles, snack taxis (fabric bags for food), and Wrap-n-mats (combination sandwich wrap and placemats with Velcro) to students at Franklin. Buying in bulk for a whole school, or even a group of friends, saves shipping costs and materials.

There are so many choices both in stores and online that you and your child can have a blast picking out earth-friendly back-to-school supplies. So start the year out right, have fun and teach your child about the planet's health all at once.

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