

ECO-JOURNAL
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
OF QUÉBEC (ASEQ-EHAQ)
Fall (October) 2019 - Newsletter



After the sun, the colors...

DEAR FRIENDS,

Our issue came out a little bit late, but as they say: better late... than never! **We care for you very much**, our precious **ES heroes**, and we want you to know that you are always in our thoughts, and our hearts. So, we hope that this newsletter, sent with all **our love**, finds you well... In honor of the beautiful summer that Mother Earth has granted us, we wanted to share with you this poem, from romantic poet, John Clare (1841):

'I love to see the summer beaming forth'

*I love to see the summer beaming forth
And white wool sack clouds sailing to the north
I love to see the wild flowers come again
And mare blobs stain with gold the meadow drain
And water lilies whiten on the floods
Where reed clumps rustle like a wind shook wood
Where from her hiding place the Moor Hen pushes
And seeks her flag nest floating in bull rushes
I like the willow leaning half way o'er
The clear deep lake to stand upon its shore
I love the hay grass when the flower head swings
To summer winds and insects happy wings
That sport about the meadow the bright day
And see bright beetles in the clear lake play*

Did you like the poem?... **Do you like to write?** Since our last issue, we haven't heard from you: yet, we would very much like to hear your comments, your heroic stories (even anonymously, or over the phone if you prefer), or your tips on how to live better with the health challenges that we all share... We are also calling upon all of you to **send us your poems**, that we will proudly publish in our next newsletter!

Finally, we are proud to announce the launching of our project **"The Case for Making Health-Care in Québec Fragrance-Free"** (aseq-ehaq.ca/fragrance). We strongly encourage you to participate by disseminating to as many people as possible all our new documents, pamphlets and posters, and to send us your testimonies on this subject (your experience and scent-free requests feedback).

HAPPY READING!

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ACTIVITIES - call us to register!

Workshops: When the Environment Makes you Ill: Need to Understand, Need to Act!
October 6 and November 17

Potluck get together and exchange with Dr. Barry Breger: December 7

OUR PRESENCE AT ECOSPHERE

We were present at *Ecosphere* from September 13 to 15, under the theme of environmental health. Michel Gaudet from ASEQ-EHAQ gave a workshop on environmental sensitivities and Dr John Molot offered a conference. Thanks to all of you who helped or visited us!

SITE OF INTEREST:

‘Prevent Cancer Now’: preventcancernow.ca
Reference to ES/MCS (Dr Meg Sears)

WE HAVE NEW PAMPHLETS AND POSTERS!

Visit us at our events to collect your pamphlets, or ask for some via post to distribute in key areas (health stores, health professionals, clinics, etc.) We now have new group pamphlets, along with new “fragrance-free” brochures and posters about our “Case for Making Health-Care in Québec Fragrance-Free”, + up-to-date eco-tips & info on indoor air quality (IAQ)!

About us...

The **Environmental Health Association of Quebec (ASEQ-EHAQ)** is a non-profit charitable organization operated by dedicated volunteers who firmly believe in and work hard **towards a real change in regards to Environmental Sensitivities (ES)**. Since its creation in 2004, the ASEQ-EHAQ has achieved governmental, institutional and civilian recognition. Our mission has always been, and still is, first and foremost, to provide help for those who suffer from ES. ASEQ-EHAQ brings crucial support and useful information to people with ES or their loved ones.

ASEQ-EHAQ also aims at soon providing **healthy and affordable lodging** (eco-housing) for those who suffer from ES and its related conditions (for more details, please see the “Ecoasis” project on our Websites (aseq-ehaq.ca / ecoasisquebec.ca), or call us: 514-332-4320).

Finally, the ASEQ-EHAQ actively works to **protect the environment and human health** by participating in environmental research and by “creating awareness, support and education of the population” in regards to Environmental Sensitivities (ES), toxic products and pesticides’ hazards. As such, the Association “promotes **ecological solutions** and least toxic strategies”, in order to avoid or minimize exposures to known and suspected toxic substances, prevent environmental sensitivities from developing, and preserve our environment for future generations (for more information about our involvement, workshops and events, please visit our Website: aseq-ehaq.ca).

A little reminder about ES

ES are a range of reactions to environmental factors at levels of exposure tolerated by many people. These environmental factors mostly include chemicals, biological agents, and electromagnetic fields. It encompasses a range of chronic conditions, such as **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)**, **Electromagnetic Sensitivity (EMS)** and other sensitivities (such as food, light, or sound...), and they often occur with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME)/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and/or Fibromyalgia (FM).

ES can be triggered by:

- **pesticides;**
- **smoke** – from cigarette, or wood;
- **petrochemical products** – such as gasoline/diesel, or heavy machinery/car exhaust;
- **renovation material** – like paint, varnishes or solvents;
- **fragrances** – including perfumes, personal and cleaning products, air fresheners, perfumed laundry products and fabric softeners;
- **printed matter and new products** – like a newspaper, or new furniture;
- **mould** – especially the toxic ones found in flooded or unhealthy housing;
- **wireless technology** – electromagnetic fields emitted by wireless or cellular phones, computers, Wi-Fi appliances, etc.
- **foods** – intolerances (like gluten) or artificial additives (like MSG);
- even some **medication...**

After **decades of major evidence** (like the Bhopal disaster in 1984, the Gulf War in the 1990s, or even September 11th 2001) and a fair amount of courageous research (in the fields of genetic and epigenetic, toxicology, neurosciences, biology, etc.), the origin of ES is still “debated”. However, it is gradually becoming seen as a chronic complex and legitimate environmentally related condition, with dire physical and psycho-emotional consequences.

In the international medical literature, it has been shown that, often, ES develop after an acute and sometimes traumatic toxic injury (from pesticides, for example), and in other cases, it develops gradually, insidiously, overtime. In both scenarios (which are not exclusive), it creates a **toxic overload** in the body. In all cases, there is a loss of what is called “environmental tolerance”, as a “tipping point” is reached, and the whole body, overburdened and injured by toxins at a cellular and organ function level, starts to react strongly to “offensive substances”. **All systems of the body are affected** by the inflammation that this creates: the central nervous system, musculoskeletal, respiratory, immunological, endocrinal, cardiovascular, digestive and genitourinary systems, even eyes, ears and skin. Symptoms are numerous and varied, and range from spasms, to different types of disabling pains, fatigue, eating and breathing difficulties or distress, racing heart, and cognitive impairments – such as “brain fog”, semi or total seizures, and many more.

“The Case for Making Health-Care in Québec Fragrance-Free”

For many years, ASEQ-EHAQ has heard **distressing stories and complaints** from a high number of its members, who, when they accessed health care, got sicker, because of the chemical substances present in hospitals or clinics, especially fragrances. Many members also refrain from accessing health-care facilities, even when they direly need to, just in order to avoid becoming sicker! However, there is now firm scientific evidence that synthetic fragrances have many **detrimental health effects**, not only for people who have environmental sensitivities / multiple chemical sensitivity (ES/MCS), but also for those who suffer from asthma and other respiratory conditions, migraines, and even dermatitis. As such, fragrances constitute a **barrier to receive health care**, which is a universal right. Actually, a person’s right to breathe clean air is above any other right: such as to smoke or wear products that make others sick...

Fragranced chemicals are frequently used in very diverse types of consumer products, such as perfumes, deodorants, lotions, cleaning products, fabric softeners, air fresheners, etc. The fragrance industry relies on almost 4,000 chemical substances, and a single perfume may contain up to 500 different molecules, most of them synthetic. As such, **fragrances surround us in everyday life**, and are now known to have a significant negative impact on the environment, indoor air quality (IAQ), and our health. However, presently, there is a **lack a disclosure of hazardous ingredients** by fragranced products manufacturers in Canada, thereby hindering research and mitigating health protection. Also, since people are daily exposed to a ‘cocktail’ of fragrance substances, **sensitization** can occur and be the prelude to developing a **chronic health condition**, such as those mentioned above – which is why prevention of such exposures should be a priority. Furthermore, frequently identified **adverse effects of fragrances** or fragranced products among children and adults involve multiple systems, producing, for instance, respiratory, neurological, dermatological, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular or gastrointestinal problems.

Some could say: “well, fragrances only affect very few people, so why all the fuss?” They couldn’t be more wrong. In fact, some research has demonstrated that almost **one third of the general population can be affected** by fragrances, while close to 40% of asthma and 70% of chemically sensitive patients can get literally sick when exposed to these synthetic substances (Caress & Steinemann, 2009). So, as we can see, the scents worn for the pleasure of some can be the poison of one too many... Also, in the past decade, the prevalence of physician-diagnosed **ES/MCS has increased over 300%**, and self-reported chemical sensitivity over 200% (Steinemann, 2018). In **Canada**, the amount of people diagnosed with ES/MCS by a health professional in the year 2016 was 1,008,400, and in **Québec**, it was 230,500. Between 2015 and 2016, in Canada, ES/MCS has increased by 7% (Statistics Canada, 2016), which constitutes a major public health concern.

This is why making health-care in Québec fragrance-free is the right thing to do: it allows **safe access to medical care for the more vulnerable individuals of our society, while protecting the general population and the environment**. If other provinces have been up to the challenge (Ont., BC, NS), Québec is more than capable of making its health-care facilities fragrance-free, and by doing so, to legally accommodate people with ES/MCS, according to the **Canadian Human Rights Commission** (CHRC, 2014; Sears, 2007). Health-care facilities are places to

heal, not to get sicker. No health-care worker wants to make people sick, but this is what happens when fragrances are being used. This is why “*artificial scents have no place in our hospitals*” (Flegel & Martin, 2015).

On our website, you will find more information on fragrances and their effects (Q&A), a literature review on the subject, documents explaining how to establish a fragrance-free policy in health-care facilities, along with resources and tips on healthy fragrance-free products, new pamphlets and posters.

Please: read, share, and take action! We also need your testimonies: we can keep them confidential and even take them down over the phone. It is important for everyone to know that the lack of ‘fragrance’ accommodation denies medical care access to too many and involves great suffering.

This project is only as strong as your participation.

It is time for change.

This project is done in collaboration with...

The Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital – Toronto, Ontario.

Dr Lynn Marshall, President and Chair of the Board of the Environmental Health Institute of Canada, Member of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, and a Staff Physician at the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital, Toronto.

Dr Ken Flegel, Professor of Internal Medicine, McGill University, Montréal, Québec

Dr John Molot, Staff Physician, Ontario Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital, Toronto.

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Rohini Peris, President, ASEQ-EHAQ

Robert Morariu

Mélanie Bélanger, M.Sc

Green Health Care

ASEQ-EHAQ thanks everyone involved in this project.

Plastic: Environment and Health

“You must teach your children what we have taught ours: that the earth is our mother. Everything that affects the earth affects the sons of the earth (...) We know this: the earth does not belong to man. Man belongs to the earth. Man has not woven the net of life: he is just a thread in it. Everything he does to this net he does to himself. What befalls the earth will befall the sons of the earth (...)”

This thought is an extract from the beautiful and wise letter that the Native American Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Tribe sent to Franklin Pierce, President of the United States, in response to an offer to purchase the Duwamish lands in the North East of the US, currently Washington State, in 1855. His words still resonate today, more than ever...¹

Our planet’s fate and ours are, indeed, imbricated, interwoven and inseparable. As such, our health, and ultimately our survival, depend on the health and survival of the “ecosystems” of the world. “**Eco**” is derived from the ancient Greek word “Oikos”, meaning ‘home or household’. In this sense, ecology can be seen as the ‘science of the home’, and economy, as the collective management and caring of this same home. But, which home?... Our unique, splendid, generous, common, and now threatened home: **Earth**.

We ‘hear’ more about climate change these days, and with good reason: it is a huge environmental challenge, that must be drastically addressed now in order for humanity to have a future. However, **plastic pollution** is another major concern.

The first synthetic plastic, Bakelite, was produced from petrochemicals (phenol and formaldehyde) in 1907 and is said to mark the beginning of the global plastics industry. However, rapid growth in global plastic production was not realised until the 1950s. Over the next 65 years, annual production of plastics increased nearly 200-fold to 381 million tonnes in 2015. For context, this is roughly equivalent to the mass of two-thirds of the world population.

Plastic pollution is having a tremendous negative impact on the **oceans and wildlife health**. Impacts are three-fold:

- *Entanglement* – the entrapping, encircling or constricting of marine animals by plastic debris (more than 525 species heavily affected – turtles, seals, birds, fish, and invertebrates);
- *Ingestion* – the ‘absorption or eating’ of plastic debris by marine animals (more than 330 species heavily affected – turtles, seals, whales, birds, fish and invertebrates. Ingestion of microplastics (particles smaller than 4.75 millimeter in diameter) is a major concern;
- *Interaction* – the contact with plastic debris, including collisions, obstructions, abrasions or use as substrate (for instance: damage to coral reefs by fishing gear).

¹ Read the whole letter [here](#).

High-income countries tend to generate more plastic waste per person. However, how plastic waste is managed determines its risk of entering the ocean. This makes the improvement of **waste management** systems across the world critical to addressing plastic pollution. Overall, approximately 80 percent of ocean plastics come from land-based sources, and 20 percent from marine. 10 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans every year: 10,000 to 100,000 tonnes are found in the surface water. As such, it is (still) unknown where the majority of ocean plastic ends up; hypothesis include plastic ‘break down’ (ingestion + incorporation into sediments) or ‘sink’ (blending with shallow or deep-sea sediments).

Sending plastic waste to a **landfill** also has environmental impacts. In open landfills, pits or dumps, plastic directly pollutes the surrounding environment and is at risk of entering the ocean. Even well-managed landfill facilities - where waste is gathered, compacted, covered or buried with soil (or materials), and sometimes surrounded by a protective lining - can be a problem. On top of producing ‘greenhouse gases’ (methane and carbon dioxide, causing global climate change) from the decomposition of organic matter, the plastics that these landfills contain may ‘leach’ harmful chemicals (such as additives from PVC) into the nearby environment, including waterways and soils. As for **incineration** of plastic, it also produces harmful greenhouse gases, along with air pollution from several toxic gases, dangerous to both human and ecosystem health (with the exception of high-tech facilities in some countries).²

The main solution to plastic is simple: first, **drastic reduction of consumption**, then, recycling (understanding that plastic recycling is limited, in most cases, to one or two cycles). However, since plastic is everywhere, it is easier said than done. A step in the right direction: the Canadian government has recently declared that single-use plastics will be banned at the latest in 2021, following the model chosen by the European Union. Among the banned products, many are related to the food industry (wrappings, containers, plates, etc.). Fast-food containers and cups made of polystyrene (similar to Styrofoam), along with bags, will also be banned.

Pollution from bags is a major concern: according to Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadians throw away more than 34 million plastic bags every day. These bags end up in landfills (where they can take up to 1,000 years to decay) or in the oceans, harming marine ecosystems and wildlife (like whales, killed by pounds of plastic in their stomach). Oxo-degradable plastics, often *green-washed* as ‘eco-friendly’ and wrongly labelled as ‘biodegradable’, are a big culprit, since they include additives that don't completely biodegrade but fragment into small pieces and remain in the environment. Finally, there is a growing human health concern, since micro-particles of plastic end up in water and food supply ([CBC, 2019](#)).

The **toxic effect of plastic particles** (micro and nano) in humans has been suggested, that is, the ingestion or absorption of particles, organic pollutants or leached plastic additives (ex: Iñiguez et al., 2017). In the past decade, phthalates and BPA, as well as other additives in plastics (to name a few), have been identified as toxic, carcinogenic, and having endocrine, reproductive, immune, and other health effects (Thompson et al., 2009). For most recent advances on this subject, please consult the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) new webinars ([CHE, 2019](#)).

² Data and excerpts from *Our World In Data*, ‘Plastic Pollution’, [here](#).

In view of the effects of plastics on the environment and our health, both being inter-related, the idea is not to panic, nor to live in fear, be depressed or overwhelmed. **There is always hope!** ...and it begins with “one gesture at a time”. The answer is “INFORMATION” (please feel free to share this with as many people as you know) and “ACTION”! With all our efforts combined, WE can **make a difference**.

Here are some tips, from the *Green Education Foundation (GEF)*, on how to reduce our use of plastic:

- 1) Stop using plastic straws, even in restaurants. If a straw is a must, purchase a reusable stainless steel or glass straw;
- 2) Use a reusable produce bag. A single plastic bag can take 1,000 years to degrade;
- 3) Purchase or make your own reusable produce bag and be sure to wash them often!
- 4) Give up (commercial) gum. Gum is made of a synthetic rubber, aka plastic;
- 5) Buy boxes instead of bottles. Often, products like laundry detergent come in cardboard which is more easily recycled than plastic;
- 6) Purchase food, like cereal, pasta, and rice from bulk bins and fill a reusable bag or container. You save money and unnecessary packaging;
- 7) Reuse containers for storing leftovers or shopping in bulk;
- 8) Use a reusable bottle or mug for your beverages, even when ordering from a to-go shop;
- 9) Bring your own container for take-out or your restaurant doggy-bag since many restaurants use Styrofoam;
- 10) Use matches instead of disposable plastic lighters or invest in a refillable metal lighter;
- 11) Avoid buying frozen foods because their packaging is mostly plastic. Even those that appear to be cardboard are coated in a thin layer of plastic, plus you'll be eating fewer processed foods!
- 12) Don't use plasticware at home and be sure to request restaurants to not pack them in your take-out box;
- 13) If unavoidable, ask your local grocer to take your plastic containers (for berries, tomatoes, etc.) back. If you shop at a farmers' market, use your reusable bag;
- 14) The EPA estimates that 7.6 billion pounds of disposable diapers are discarded in the US each year. Use cloth diapers to reduce your baby's carbon footprint and save money;
- 15) Make fresh squeezed juice or eat fruit instead of buying juice in plastic bottles. It's healthier and better for the environment;
- 16) Make your own cleaning products that will be non-toxic and eliminate the need for multiple plastic bottles of (noxious) cleaner;
- 17) Pack your lunch in reusable containers and bags. Also, opt for fresh fruits and veggies and bulk items instead of products that come in single serving cups;
- 18) Use a razor with replaceable blades instead of a disposable razor.

For all the above suggested bags, containers, and bottles (or mugs), **avoid plastic as much as possible** (even “reusable” items, such as ‘Tupperware’ or Ziplocs). Instead, use fabric, glass, stainless steel, or even ceramic. Aluminium foil, though ‘less bad’ than plastic, should also be avoided, if possible: for environmental reasons – since bauxite ore, from which aluminium is produced, comes from destructive and contaminating open-pit mining (SCA, 2019); and because of health concerns – among them, respiratory conditions or diseases (CHE, 2019).

More tips for ecological and healthy food storage are provided in our next section (‘Keeping the Harvest’ 2019).

‘Keeping the Harvest’, 2019

The end of summer and beginning of the fall is the time of the year that offers the **greatest variety of fruits and vegetables**. You may remember that in our last spring issue, we conveyed a message from Equiterre, inviting you to be part of the 21st Century food ‘green’ revolution... Equiterre proposed 4 major actions, and among them, choosing local and organic foods, as much as possible, was proposed. We provided you then with some info (ex: where to buy + low-budget tips) that may come handy now that “harvest time” has arrived! (you may click [here](#) to access our spring (May 2019) eco-journal issue – please, see page 8).

This **time of harvest** is not only an occasion to enjoy plenty of **Quebec’s delicious, fresh and more affordable fruits and veggies** (hopefully organic), but also an opportunity to ‘keep the harvest’. Some of you may know a book – a real classic – by Nancy Choffi and Gretchen Mead, first published in 1976, called “*Keeping the Harvest: Discover the Homegrown Goodness of Putting Up Your Own Fruits, Vegetables & Herbs*”. Even though this book was written from a gardener’s perspective, it still offers, in a simple, clear, concise and organized fashion, very valuable information on **food preservation methods** (canning, freezing, jam & jellies, pickling, curing, drying and cold storage). Specific instructions and tips are given for a wide variety of veggies, fruits, berries, and more. If you can get your hands on this book, we strongly recommend it! (new about 20\$ and used as low as 2\$ on Amazon).

The easiest and most accessible way to preserve food is to **freeze it**. Canning, pickling and curing are really interesting, since they exclusively involve glass containers (mason jars), and for the last two, they allow year-round access to healthy fermented food (like sauerkraut). However, they require more time, equipment and precision. As for drying and cold storage, in most cases (except maybe for drying fine herbs), it requires a countryside setting (space and specifics), so it is not for everyone... In their book, Choffi and Mead mention how to freeze veggies and fruits (including berries). Here are some pieces of their wise **advice on freezing**:

- “Freeze realistically. Don’t freeze more of anything than you can use in one year” (Choffi & Mead, 2002 (4th edition): p. 14);
- “You should freeze only what freezes best” (p. 15). They recommend freezing:
 - **FRUITS:**
Direct freezing: all berries, cantaloupe/honeydew melon (peeled and diced before) and rhubarb (chopped before). Some people have had success with peaches and pears (sliced), but it is variable.
 - **VEGGIES:**
Direct freezing: corn kernels (raw) and cherry tomatoes (yes, it works!)
Blanching, chilling, drying, then freezing (BCDF technique): asparagus, beans (lima, snap, green and wax) and peas, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and peppers.
Greens, such as kale, spinach and swiss chard, can also be frozen (following the BCDF technique), but blanching has to be very short (just a few seconds), chilling quite quick, and you’ll have to (manually) squeeze out water out of them, to avoid freezer burn damage.
Purée or casserole, then freezing: all squashes and eggplant.

You can easily find tips on how to blanch vegetables in cooking books or on the web (or by clicking [here](#)).

Now that you've selected the fruits and vegetables that you want to freeze, you need to choose which container to use to store them. Many people use Ziploc bags and remove the air from them, for a tight and proper freezing. However, we saw in our previous section that plastic can be toxic to humans. This is why we are offering you here **other healthier options** to store fruits and veggies in your freezer:

- **Use glass storage.** This is an ideal solution. It's eco-friendly, safe, and, after the initial investment, cheaper! Be sure to purchase containers that are specifically labeled as freezer-safe and allow room for liquids to expand. Food must be defrosted before removing it from the containers. If you like to grab your dish straight from the freezer and pop it in the oven (like for a frozen veggies' casserole), invest in Pyrex, which can withstand severe temperature shifts safely!
- **Use Mason jars.** Yes, Mason jars can be used to freeze fruits and veggies! Size will depend on what you intend to freeze and how you want to portion it. Just make sure that the content is cool before freezing, and fill to the top to minimize air in the jars;
- **Wash food containers and re-use them.** Before you throw out that glass jelly jar, give it a good wash and, there you go: you now have a free and safe food container. Some can even make great drinking cups!

What about eco-friendly food storage in general?

Don't you feel that there's something good about a pantry filled with glass jars, burlap sacks, and cloth-wrapped goods? Doesn't it fuel a desire for wholesome eating?... Storing food this way also reduces our dependency on plastic, which is good, as we now know it, for our health and the environment.

Here are five eco-friendly food storage solutions:

1. Mason jars

Mason jars don't just make food look appealing, they're also safe, cheap, eco-friendly, and versatile. Use large jars for storing grains and flours, medium jars for taking salads to work, and small jars for single-serving desserts or make-ahead breakfast parfaits. They're also great for storing soups, on-the-go smoothies, dried herbs, and cut veggies.

2. Reusable snack and sandwich bags

These earth-friendly alternatives to plastic baggies are cost effective and fun. When made from *organic cotton*, cloth baggies are safe for storing and transporting food, as well as washable and biodegradable.

3. Glass and stainless-steel food storage containers

If you like the convenience of stackable containers and snap-on lids, these are for you. Glass and stainless-steel food storage containers are eco-friendly alternatives to plastic. Although they're typically more expensive than plastic varieties, they last longer and are dishwasher safe! The key is to choose tempered glass and food grade stainless steel.

4. Beeswax wraps

Sometimes you need to cover up food without transferring it to a storage container. A green alternative to plastic wrap and aluminium foil is beeswax wraps. Beeswax wraps are malleable enough to mould around the tops of bowls or fold into transportable snack pouches. Most importantly, they can be washed and used over and over again to wrap cheese, sandwiches, bread, and other room temperature or cold foods.

5. Burlap sacks

Forget about storing your potatoes, onions, garlic, and other root veggies in plastic bags. Burlap is a more eco-friendly and functional option. It provides a dark, dry environment to keep root veggies fresh and is made from woven plant fibres – you can even compost them when they wear out. Look for varieties that have removable cotton liners for easy cleaning.

You may want to have a look at *Sustain's Eco-Store* by clicking [here](#), to get your hand on some of these eco-items ☺...

Eco-friendly food storage is one more way to help reduce our ecological footprint and support our overall well-being!³

³ Excerpts from [Organic Authority](#) and [Natural Factors](#).

‘Magic Squash’: A Comfy Soup Recipe

Did you know that squashes were native to the Americas? They were domesticated 8,000 years ago and used to be grown by pre-Columbian societies and civilizations. They were part of what Native Americans called (and still call) the “Three Sisters”: winter squash, maize (corn), and climbing beans. These crops were planted together, in a cluster, on small flat-topped mounts. This agroecological “companion planting” is very ancient, and was very wise, because the three crops benefit from each other! The maize provides a structure for the beans to climb, the beans provide the nitrogen to the soil that the other plants use, and the squash spreads along the ground, blocking the sunlight, helping prevent weeds and creating a “living mulch” that keeps the soil moist, fertile and pest free.

Squash is not only delicious, but also highly digestible, full of good fiber, and loaded with vitamins A and C. It also contains a fair amount of vitamin E and thiamine (B1), and some good minerals, like magnesium.

This magic squash comfy soup is very easy to make, and it's healthy, dairy-free, and vegan too!

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Total time: 35 minutes

Servings: 8 servings

Ingredients *(if possible, use organic foods)*

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger (or 1 teaspoon powdered ginger)
- 1 teaspoon gray sea salt (or more, as per taste)
- ¼ teaspoon white pepper
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg (powder or grated)
- 1 medium butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 cups vegetable stock (or use chicken stock for a non-vegan soup)
- ¾ cup coconut milk (or use half-and-half cream for a non-vegan soup)
- coconut cream (or heavy cream) for garnish

Instructions

1. Heat a large pot over medium heat. Add the olive oil.
2. Add the onion, garlic, ginger, salt and pepper, and nutmeg, and sauté until the onion is soft and transparent.
3. Add the cubed butternut squash and toss in the onion mixture (a few minutes).
4. Add the vegetable (or chicken) stock and stir to combine (You might need to add a little more or less stock, depending on the size of your squash. The liquid level should be just slightly lower than the squash).
5. Add the lid to the pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

6. Once the soup reaches a boil, turn the heat down to medium-low and simmer for about 20 minutes or until the butternut squash is very tender when you pierce it with a fork.
7. Remove the soup from the heat and add the coconut milk.
8. Puree with a hand-held immersion blender, or puree in batches in a regular counter-top blender.
9. Serve immediately with a garnish of coconut cream (or heavy cream), or store in airtight containers in the fridge or freezer.⁴

BON APPÉTIT!

⁴ Recipe inspired by [The Busy Baker](#).

Happy autumn, dear friends!

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