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Dollars & Sense: Ideas for a stingy dad on his special day

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Growing up without a father and no brothers, I'll be the first to admit I don't know a lot about men.

I don't understand how they've memorized who's won the World Series or the Super Bowl for the past 20 years, but can't remember that the garbage man comes on Wednesdays. Or why I'm the only one in the house who knows where every sock, toy, tool, etc., is located.

When my older son was born, I wrote a column on how my husband showed me what fatherhood was supposed to be. I don't know if it's by instinct or inclination, but he manages to balance the fine line of keeping our two boys curious, courteous and somewhat careful.

So showing him how much we love and appreciate him isn't going to be easy.

I polled a few dozen fathers: co-workers, church members and neighbors. After they joked about race cars and huge plasma TVs, the majority said they didn't really need anything.

Again, I don't understand why it's so hard for many men to admit they'd like to be treated special.

At every gift-giving occasion, my husband does the same thing. "Your love and support is all I need," he'll say.

I usually end up getting him something like a wallet or a T-shirt with a cutesy saying on it. But now the boys, 11 and 5, are old enough to do some of the decision-making. Unfortunately, they have no means of employment. And like most men I know, they hate to go shopping.

Caslin, the 11-year-old, found a website that offered gift ideas for stingy dads.

I failed to mention that my husband is notoriously tight with a buck. More than once he's had old George Washington screaming for mercy. And I swear I've seen moths fly out of his wallet.

So we've decided to give the site, thedailygreen.com, a chance. Here are some of my favorites:

Clean your plate

Dads carry the banner for the Depression-era mantra about eating every speck of food, even in this gluttonous food-clogged era. Some food for thought:

-- It takes about 1,250 gallons of water to raise enough beef for a half-pound burger, so bite off only as much as you can chew. Choosing a quarter pounder and eating the whole thing saves 625 gallons.

-- Americans waste as much as $75 billion in food every year.

-- The average family wastes 14 percent of its food, costing about $600 per year.

Don’t spend so much time in the bathroom

A full tub holds about 70 gallons of water, while a five-minute shower will use 10-25 gallons. With 2 to 5 gallons disappearing down the drain every minute, every second counts.

If you really want to make the Old Man happy, invest in a low-flow shower fixture and dial down the temperature, too, so your hot water heater isn’t spending so much energy to warm you up.

Turn off lights when you’re not using them

By now you’ve probably heard that lighting is responsible for about 11 percent of a home’s energy bills. And you’ve probably heard that a compact fluorescent light bulb uses about 75 percent less electricity than an incandescent bulb.

No bulb saves energy like one that’s turned off. So flip the switch. And tell Dad he was right.

Put on a sweater if you’re cold

What is it about fathers and thermostats? The anger-to-temperature ratio seems to suggest the two communicate via some kind of wireless connection.

But you really can save about 1 percent on heating bills for every one degree cooler you dial down the thermostat, which is why he wanted you to pull on a sweater - to please Dad, choose the ugliest sweater available - and pile another blanket on the bed. The same savings rate applies to summer air-conditioning.

If those don't pan out, we can always give him the gift I've wanted to see for the past three or four years - cleaning out the "man cave." If we find Amelia Earhart or the Holy Grail, we'll let you know.

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