"It's Not Easy Being Green"

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Back in the day, when green was still just a primary color, the only image that came to mind was a traffic light. Sometimes we used the word "green" to make a point about being envious or to describe how someone looks after a ride on a rollercoaster, with a belly full of popcorn, cotton candy, and soda pop.

As a kid, I grew up hearing Johnny Carson say his guests were waiting in the green room, a mysterious sort of place I envisioned as having ivy-colored walls and smelling like fresh-cut grass. Today, the term "green" is synonymous with energy efficiency. The concept of going green, and green marketing is nothing new-- its been around since the 70s -- but recently, I've noticed a surge in products labeled as being *green*. So much so, that green appears to have become the spokescolor of our time.

In a single word, the color conveys growth, good health, prosperity, and tranquility. Everything we want in our lives. Still, like its friends red, yellow, and blue, there are many variations in hue, and green can get murky especially for the consumer faced with volumes of products to choose from, all promising to be greener than the next.

These days, a trip to the grocery store requires more than just money, it requires multiple degrees in science and linguistics. But even then, you might not come home with what you think you did.

Last week, everything I touched at the supermarket seemed to have either literally turned green or was packaged to look green, sometimes with subtle images added such as trees or light bulbs or with words like eco-friendly, all natural, pesticide-free or free and clear on the label, and I found myself asking, exactly how green is green? I also noticed that my conscience impacted the bulk of my decision making, and no longer because of the nutrition label, and the amount of fat and calories involved.

But sometimes it's not just the labels that are confusing, it's the store that sells them –how they walk the walk, as they say, not just talk the talk.

Just recently, at a local market where advertising encouraged me to buy local produce – to do the right thing and reduce my carbon footprint -- I bought a healthy lunch of brown rice and fresh veggies to eat in their cafe. Since the food needed to be heated, I was pointed in the direction of self-serve microwaves, but cautioned before I heated it to transfer the food from the clear plastic containers it was packed in to the plates stacked nearby. When the plates turned out to be plastic as well, and there was no place to recycle either of them – only a single regular trash can stuffed to the brim with discarded plastic -- I was admittedly puzzled, on a number of levels.

Why not eliminate a step for those dining in and use plates that are microwaveable to begin with? Or washable plates? And what about the nagging sense that if they are not recycling in the café where the customer notices it most, what are they doing to be "green" behind the scenes where the customer can't see? Green is as green does, after all. Why not take a holistic view for the end use of the product either on the part of the manufacturer or retailer?

Perhaps Kermit the Muppet was way ahead of his time when he said, "It's not easy being green." Until it gets easier, and it will, I'll keep reading, scrutinizing labels, listening to Andrea and Dan on energizeGreen, and when faced with more choices than eenie, meanie, minie, moe, will draw strength from a line I heard years ago when I was about to give birth to my first child: *Nothing worthwhile is ever easy*.