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## Do family dollar employees get discounts

### Family Dollar

RD.COM Money Saving DealsLearn why everything is usually cheaper, and what items are the best deals at your local or chain dollar or discount store. Seasontime/ShutterstockEveryone has their favorite places to shop and particular spending habits. Store employees tend to know what shoppers want—even before shoppers know themselves. Like knowing it might be less expensive to buy in bulk and to know to always check the expiration date, Dollar Store employees have a lot of useful information. Ever wondered how Dollar Stores make money. Song\_about\_ShutterstockWhether you shop at a chain dollar store such as Dollar Tree, Dollar General, Family Dollar, or your local 99 cents store, not everything that's on sale is necessarily worth purchasing. Bryan Waring, a former Dollar Tree employee, says that you're not alone in buying more than is necessary from these stores. "It seems basic, but everyone falls for this trap," he says. "You go into a store where everything is cheap, and you walk out with things you don't need." He suggests going into a store—yes, even the dollar store—with a checklist of things you truly need. Ondacaracola/Shutterstockin a Reddit AMA, an Assistant Manager at a Dollar Tree says most hand soaps for sale smell nice and work well—but there are probably better deals buying these products in bulk, rather than at the dollar store. Here are 9 things you should never buy in bulk. Earthly Anika/ShutterstockPatricia, a seasonal worker at a Dollar Tree who prefers not to share her last name, says that the post-Christmas season means even more deals on everything from decorations to sweets. "After Christmas, all the gift wrap paper went to 50 cents, and all Christmas items were half price," she says. "Even candy bars are 89 cents versus \$1." Hadrian/ShutterstockIn order for dollar stores to keep their prices low, product sizes are usually smaller than normal, according to Cheapism. Dollar stores aren't the only ones guilty of this hack. Cheapism also reports Walmart is guilty of doing the same thing to lure in customers. Seasontime/ShutterstockEarning more doesn't necessarily mean shopping at pricey stores instead of dollar stores. More than 22 percent of dollar store shoppers make more than \$70,000 per year, according to the New York Times. Another report found that 29 percent of millennial households earning more than \$100,000 per year shop at Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar. Forbes reports. The same report estimates that these shoppers represent 25 percent of total sales from the three combined chains. Here are 15 things you can buy on Amazon for less than a dollar. Simon Kadula/ShutterstockDollar store workers often take on multiple responsibilities and roles. A few of the chain dollar stores previously came under fire for giving managers too much responsibility to keep staffing costs low, per HuffPost. images72/ShutterstockDollar stores are a catch-all for everything from cards to balloons. The most popular and best things to buy, however, are household items, Waring says. This includes toilet paper, cleaning supplies, dish rags, and paper towels. "Regular stores sell these items for prices five times what it should be," he says. BATMANV/ShutterstockChain dollar store locations are growing, fast. A 2011 study found at the time that dollar store locations outnumber drug store locations in the United States, TIME reports. The two biggest dollar chains, Dollar Tree and Dollar General, have more stores combined than the six biggest U.S. retailers, according to Forbes. Plus, between 2010 and 2013, Family Dollar opened1,500 new stores—more than one a day, per the Guardian. Data from Statista predicts the increase in dollar store locations will continue to rise between 2018 and 2021. Benoit Daoust/ShutterstockChain dollar stores including Dollar General, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree, constantly have rotating items, so customers don't get bored. "The fun thing is that items are constantly changing, I think that's what excites the customer," Patricia says. Next, check out the 21 things to never buy at the dollar store. Originally Published: January 13, 2020 Family Dollar has been a national corporate partner since 2014 and is committed to supporting BGCA's mission and local Boys & Girls Clubs through its annual in-store cause campaign, corporate donations, and vendor partnerships. In addition, Family Dollar encourages relationships between its stores and local Boys & Girls Clubs in the community. Throughout the year, when a new store opens or there is a grand re-opening, Family Dollar partners with the Club closest to the store location to receive a \$5,000 donation. In 2020, we were thrilled to welcome Dollar Tree to the partnership as well. Dollar Tree and Family Dollar have partnered to provide to support Boys & Girls Clubs of America's signature leadership program, Youth of the Year. This year Dollar Tree and Family Dollar were recognized as a Diamond sponsor for Southeast, Military & National Youth of the Year program along with providing \$100,000 in scholarships for Southeast Youth of the Year participants. By investing in the program, Family Dollar and Dollar Tree will enable more opportunities for youth to develop their leadership skills. The Youth of the Year program helps youth gain the ability, confidence, and motivation to lead meaningful change within themselves and others. About Family Dollar/Dollar Tree Family Dollar Stores, Inc. is a discount shopping chain that currently operates stores throughout the United States. Headquartered in Chesapeake, VA, Family Dollar Stores provides consumers with various merchandise including apparel, food, cleaning products, home decor, beauty and health aids, toys, pet products, automotive products, domestics, seasonal goods and electronics. There are approximately 56,300 employees and 8,000 stores. Go to www.familydollar.com to find a store near you. Dollar Tree, a Fortune 200 Company, operated 15,479 stores across 48 states and five Canadian provinces as of August 1, 2020. Stores operate under the brands of Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree Canada. To learn more about the Company, visit www.DollarTree.com to find a store near you. ProPublica is a nonprofit newsroom that investigates abuses of power. Sign up to receive our biggest stories as soon as they're published. This story was co-published with The New Yorker and is not subject to our Creative Commons license. When Jolanda Woods was growing up in North St. Louis, in the 1970s and early '80s, she and her friends would take the bus to the stores downtown, on 14th Street, or on Cherokee Street, on the South Side, or out to the River Roads Mall, in the inner suburb of Jennings. "This was a very merchant city," Woods, who is 54, told me. There were plenty of places to shop in her neighborhood, too, even as North St. Louis, a mostly Black and working-class part of town, fell into economic decline. There was Perlmutter's department store, where women bought pantyhose in bulk, Payless shoes, True Value hardware and Schnucks grocery store. Almost all these stores have disappeared. As St. Louis' population has dropped from 850,000, in the 1950s, to a little more than 300,000, owing to suburban flight and deindustrialization, its downtown has withered. The River Roads Mall closed in 1995. North St. Louis is a devastated expanse of vacant lots and crumbling late-19th-century brick buildings, their despair all the more dramatic for the opulence of their design. "This neighborhood has gone down," Woods said. "Oh, my God, these houses." A new form of retail has moved into the void. The discount chains Family Dollar and Dollar General now have nearly 40 stores in St. Louis and its immediate suburbs, about 15 of them in North St. Louis. This is where the people who remain in the neighborhood can buy detergent and toys and pet food and underwear and motor oil and flashlights and strollers and mops and drain cleaner and glassware and wind chimes and rakes and shoes and balloons and bath towels and condoms and winter coats. The stores have some nonperishable and frozen foods, too, for people who can't travel to the few discount grocery stores left in the area. Rimentary provisions like these allowed the stores to remain open as "essential" businesses during the coronavirus shutdowns. "These stores are our little Walgreens, our little Targets," Darryl Gray, a local minister and civil rights activist, told me. "It's the stuff you won't get at a grocery store, that you get at a Walmart—but we don't have one." Three years ago, Woods' husband, Robert, who was 42, began working at a Dollar General on Grand Boulevard, across from an abandoned grocery store. He and Jolanda had separated, but they stayed in touch over the years as Robert overcame a crack-cocaine addiction, got a job at the Salvation Army, was ordained as a minister and became an informal counselor to other men battling addiction. Dollar General paid a bit more than the Salvation Army, but he expressed anxiety about security problems at the store. Shoplifting was common, and occasionally there were even armed robberies. The store lacked a security guard, and it typically had only a couple of clerks on hand. On Nov. 1, 2018, Woods went to work on his day off, to fill in for an absent co-worker. Footage from a security camera shows a man entering the store just after 1 p.m., wearing a blue sweatshirt with the hood pulled up over a red cap, and holding a silver gun. He fired down the center aisle, hitting Woods in the back of the head. Then he pointed the gun at the cash register, before seeming to panic. He ran out of the store empty-handed. An ambulance arrived, but Woods was no longer breathing. After his body was removed, Dollar General remained open for several hours, before closing amid protests from local residents. Woods' murder was one of three homicides in six months at the two discount chains in the St. Louis area. On June 13, a man and a woman started arguing in a car in the parking lot of a Family Dollar on West Florissant Avenue, just outside the city line; he shot her once in the head, killing her. Less than a month after Woods' death, a 65-year-old woman was shopping at the Family Dollar on St. Charles Rock Road when a seemingly mentally ill 34-year-old woman grabbed steak knives from a shelf in the store and stabbed her to death. The Gun Violence Archive, a website that uses local news reports and law enforcement sources to tally crimes involving firearms, lists more than 200 violent incidents involving guns at Family Dollar or Dollar General stores since the start of 2017, nearly 50 of which resulted in deaths. The incidents include carjackings in the parking lot, drug deals gone bad and altercations inside stores. But a large number involve armed robberies in which workers or customers have been shot. Since the beginning of 2017, employees have been wounded in shootings or pistol-whippings in at least 31 robberies; in at least seven other incidents, employees have been killed. The violence has not let up in recent months, when requirements for customers to wear masks have made it harder for clerks to detect shoppers who are bent on robbery. In early May, a worker at a Family Dollar in Flint, Michigan, was fatally shot after refusing entry to a customer without a mask. The number of incidents can be explained in part by the stores' ubiquity: There are now more than 16,000 Dollar Generals and nearly 8,000 Family Dollars in the United States, a 50% increase in the past decade. (By comparison, Walmart has about 4,700 stores in the U.S.) The stores are often in high-crime neighborhoods, where there simply aren't many other businesses for criminals to target. Routine gun violence has fallen sharply in prosperous cities around the country, but it has remained stubbornly high in many of the cities and towns where these stores predominate. The glowing signs of the discount chains have become indicators of neglect, markers of a geography of the places that the country has written off. Vacant lots surround a Family Dollar in North St. Louis. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) But these factors are not sufficient to explain the trend. The chains' owners have done little to maintain order in the stores, which tend to be thinly staffed and exist in a state of physical disarray. In the 1970s, criminologists such as Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson argued that rising crime could be partly explained by changes in the social environment that lowered the risk of getting caught. That theory gained increasing acceptance in the decades that followed. "The likelihood of a crime occurring depends on three elements: a motivated offender, a vulnerable victim, and the absence of a capable guardian," the sociologist Patrick Sharkey wrote, in "Uneasy Peace," from 2018. Another way of putting this is that crime is not inevitable. Robberies and killings that have taken place at dollar store chains would not have necessarily happened elsewhere. "The idea that crime is sort of a whack-a-mole game, that if you just press here it'll move over here," is wrong, Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, told me. Making it harder to commit a crime doesn't just push crime elsewhere; it reduces it. "Crime is opportunistic," he said. "If there's no opportunity, there's no crime." James Luther Turner left school in 1902, when he was 11. His father had died in a wrestling accident, and Turner had to run his family's farm, in Macon County, Tennessee. He was successful and entrepreneurial, and when he was 24 other farmers asked him to manage the local co-op; he started a bridge shop behind the store. Eventually, he took a job working for a Nashville drug goods wholesaler, hawking samples across southern Kentucky and middle Tennessee. In 1929, at the onset of the Depression, he opened a store in Scottsville, a small town in Kentucky. He bought up failed retailers' stock, which he either liquidated, sold to other store owners or took back to his own shop, Turner's Bargain Store. "He also knew that where there was failure, there was opportunity," his grandson Cal Turner Jr. wrote in a memoir, called "My Father's Business," published in 2018. In 1939, James Luther Turner's only child, Hurley Calister Turner, known as Cal Sr., bought a building in Scottsville to serve as the warehouse for a new wholesale business, J. L. Turner and Son. Soon, he was buying so much discount merchandise that he had trouble finding stores to take it, so he and his father started a chain of stores in partnership with local managers. At first, Cal Sr. later said, the plan was "selling the good stuff to the rich folks, but we were late getting into retailing." He concluded, "We had to sell the cheap stuff to the poor folks." Cal Sr. had high standards: He called all his store managers on Saturday nights and made frequent rounds in person. "He wanted a store to be clean and well displayed," Cal Jr. wrote. He started working for the company when he was about 13, sweeping the warehouse for 25 cents an hour. By 1955, the Turners had three dozen stores across Kentucky and Tennessee. Cal Sr. noticed that crowds of shoppers came to department stores in larger cities when they held "dollar days," selling off excess merchandise cheaply. On June 1 of that year, the company converted a store in Springfield, Kentucky, into one called Dollar General. The store was a sensation, as was a second one, in Memphis, which in 10 months did more than a million dollars in sales. Soon, all J. L. Turner and Son stores were renamed Dollar General, with a new slogan above the window: "Every Day Is Dollar Day." Signs outside read "Nothing Over \$1." Subscribe to the Big Story newsletter. At first, the Turners didn't have to radically change their business model. They bought inventory, including irregular items and closeouts, very cheap and sold it for a little more. When a friend's textile company had an excess of pink corduroy, Cal Sr. had the friend make men's pants, which he sold to a dollar a pair. He bought a truckload of wet socks in Nashville and had workers sort and hang them around the Scottsville warehouse. When bell-bottoms went out of fashion, he turned them into cutoff shorts. Once, at the end of the Christmas season, he bought 35,000 fruitcakes; he sold them all a year later. Cal Sr. sought out cheap real estate. "We don't have to have great locations," he said. "With our merchandise and our prices, we just need some kind of building around us." And he paid poorly: Wages were to be kept at a maximum of 5% of a store's gross sales, which, Cal Jr. acknowledged, "placed us at the bottom of a low-paying industry." A store typically had only two employees — and, if business was slow, it got by with just one at a time. When a bookkeeper invited two colleagues to lunch with a union organizer, Cal Sr. had her fired. After the Teamsters tried to organize the company's truck drivers, the company outsourced its transportation to a contractor and hired a slew of armed guards to escort the new drivers past picketers. Sales nearly doubled between 1963 and 1968, and the Turners took the chain public. By 1972, they had 500 stores, and, a few years later, around the time that Cal Sr. passed the reins to Cal Jr., they started buying up other chains, also in small towns, extending the company far from its upland-South base. A competing chain, Family Dollar, started by Leon Levine in Charlotte in 1959, focused mostly on low-income urban areas. By 1974, Levine had 200 stores; he took his company public five years later. As the two chains have grown, expanding to offer many goods for more than a dollar, the urban-rural distinction between them has diminished. Today, it is not uncommon to find both stores on the same small-town main street or a few blocks apart in a distressed urban neighborhood. (Dollar Tree, which bought Family Dollar in 2015 and has maintained both brands, keeps prices closer to a dollar with a more limited selection — wrapping paper, party supplies — sold to a more middle-class clientele. Unlike Dollar General and Family Dollar, Dollar Tree's stores tend to be in suburban locations.) As Amazon and its e-commerce rivals have devastated brick-and-mortar shopping, the two chains represent just about the only branch of physical retail that is still growing in America. Even Walmart, often viewed as the bane of small-town retailers, has been consolidating. Last year, it closed about 20 stores, leaving some communities even more dependent on the two chains. In 2019, discount chains accounted for about half of all new retail store openings. Dollar General alone opened nearly 1,000 stores. The chains' executives are candid about what is driving their growth: widening income inequality and the decline of many city neighborhoods and entire swaths of the country. Todd Vasos, the CEO of Dollar General, told The Wall Street Journal in 2017, "The economy is continuing to create more of our core customer." A Dollar General on the west side of Dayton where the reporter encountered Jimmy Donald shopping with his mom. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) Because dollar stores are heavily concentrated in poor towns and neighborhoods, many middle- and upper-middle-class consumers are unaware of their ubiquity — or of the frequency of armed robberies and shootings. In 2017, the manager of a Dollar General in Baltimore, where I live, was shot and killed as he was closing up. But I discovered the pervasiveness of the problem while reporting elsewhere. In Dayton, Ohio, I got to know Jimmy Donald, who was working for a heating and air conditioning contractor while trying to start an organization to help ex-felons and others with troubled backgrounds, a category that included himself. Donald, who is 38, served in the Marines in Iraq. He then spent four years in prison, after being involved in the beating death of a man outside a Michigan bar, in 2004. He lived on the west side of Dayton, which is predominantly Black; as the area has lost several grocery stores, the dollar store chains have proliferated. This correlation is not a coincidence, according to a 2018 research brief by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, which advocates for small businesses. The stores undercut traditional grocery stores by having few employees, often only three per store, and paying them little. "While dollar stores sometimes fill a need in cash-strapped communities, growing evidence suggests these stores are not merely a byproduct of economic distress," the brief reported. "They're a cause of it." There are now more than a dozen Family Dollars and Dollar Generals on Dayton's west side. "In a lot of these areas, they're the only stores around." B. J. Bethel, who has reported on the chains for WDTN, the local NBC affiliate, told me. For robbers, he added, "it's the only place to get cash." Donald did much of his shopping at the stores, and each week he drove his mother to them to do her shopping as well. One day in Dayton, needing a winter hat, I stopped by a Dollar General at West Third Street and James H. McGehee Boulevard, where Donald and his mother were making their way down an aisle. Goods spilled off the shelves, and carts were piled high with boxes waiting to be opened and stacked, giving the store an air of neglect. Shortly before Donald and I first met, he had been the victim of an armed robbery at another west side Dollar General. It was homecoming weekend at Central State University, the historically Black college near Dayton, and his mother needed some barbecue sauce. Donald was standing in line to pay when two young men, probably in their late teens, came in and pointed a gun at the cashier. Donald concluded that they were amateurs — they weren't wearing masks, and when the one with the gun pulled the slide back, not realizing that a round was already chambered, the bullet popped out. They ordered Donald and two women in line to get on the floor, then took the money that he had just cashed from his paycheck: \$700. Donald described this event in an undramatic and routine manner. And for good reason: armed robberies are a regular occurrence at the Dayton stores. In 2017, the year he was held up, there were 32 armed robberies at 18 Dollar Generals and Family Dollars in Dayton. (This count didn't include the store where he was robbed, which sits just beyond the city line.) Last year, there were two dozen. The violence has included more than robberies, too. Last July, a man and a woman were killed outside a west side Family Dollar in a murder-suicide; in September, a man was shot during a drug deal outside the Dollar General where I had run into Donald and his mother. Donald in Dayton, outside the store where he was robbed. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) All told, the Dayton police receive an average of nearly 1,000 calls for service to the stores each year. There have been more calls to just nine of the city's Family Dollars than there have been to one of Dayton's two major hospitals, Grandview Medical Center, where police are often summoned for interviews with victims of violent crimes, drug overdoses and other problems. The Dayton Police Department prides itself on being a modern, data-driven force, embracing such initiatives as "harm reduction" measures to combat the opioid epidemic. Several years ago, noticing the rise in calls to the dollar stores, the department provided training sessions for Family Dollar managers in how to practice what police call "crime prevention through environmental design." Officers showed them how less trash outside and less clutter inside and fewer big ads in the windows, which block the view of responding police officers, would make their stores safer. The store managers were told to instruct cashiers to make frequent transfers of cash from the register to the safe. (Until 2004, Dollar General did not accept credit cards, and the stores still deal heavily in cash.) But Jason Hall, the commander of the city's Violent Crime Bureau, told me that the effect of the training had dissipated, partly because the stores, which pay a starting wage of about \$9 or \$10 an hour in states without higher minimum-wage thresholds, have such high turnover. "It was supposed to be passed down to the rest of the employees, but it didn't trickle down," he said. "The rank and file did not reap the benefit of that training." Store managers have resisted pleas to reduce trash or loitering outside their stores, saying that their responsibility is limited to the stores themselves. And they are often slow about getting police the feed from their store cameras after robberies. Hall said. The cameras are typically of such low quality and so poorly placed that their records are of limited use anyway. Nan Whaley, the mayor of Dayton, told me that managers sometimes discourage employees from testifying in court against robbers, because they're needed to staff the stores. (A spokesperson for Dollar General said that she was unaware of this practice.) "What is that? They're not even respecting the justice system." Whaley said. "They don't even care if they're being held up at gunpoint." Recently, Dayton has cited the crime and violence that the stores attract as a reason to challenge their requests to sell alcohol. Several years ago, Dollar General obtained alcohol licenses for many of its Dayton-area stores. In 2017, the city's law department began seeking to block requests by Family Dollar to obtain licenses for seven of its stores, including three on the west side. The city had an easier time enlisting community testimony against alcohol license applications for stores on the north and east sides of town, which are less heavily African American. City officials attributed this imbalance in part to a general sense of resignation and powerlessness on the west side. When the state's Division of Liquor Control approved all but one Family Dollar request, Martin Gehres, the assistant city attorney, drove a 15-passenger van full of north and east side residents to appeals hearings in Columbus. The residents, who included the owner of a bakery across from a Family Dollar and the manager of an adjacent library branch, won reversals of the approval for that store and for another on the north side. But the alcohol sales went ahead on the west side, where crime is worse. "The stores they got them at were the ones I was most concerned about," Gehres said. When I met with Gehres and Hall, they told me they were aware that the stores filled a retail void for many residents of Dayton, which has lost nearly half its residents since 1960. But they also cited research suggesting that, in some places, the dollar stores have exacerbated the problem. "They are filling a food desert," Gehres said. "And they are helping cause a food desert." Even the most image-conscious public corporations tend to acknowledge, in their required disclosures to investors and in their quarterly calls with market analysts, the challenges facing them. So it was startling to find no mention of the prevalence of crime and violence in recent filings for either Dollar General or Family Dollar and Dollar Tree. Company executives make occasional reference to "shrink," the industry euphemism for stock lost mainly to shoplifting or employee theft. But the steady stream of violence at the stores, much of it directed against employees, was omitted. Dollar General emphasized its efforts to keep costs down. In its disclosures for the third quarter of 2019, Dollar General lamented the rise in nationwide hourly wages, and it said that it was aiming to shift to self-checkout in many stores. The company hopes not to have to increase security at stores, since its "financial condition could be affected adversely" by doing so. "Our ability to pass along labor costs to our customers is constrained by our everyday low price model," Dollar General continued, "and we may not be able to offset such increased costs elsewhere in our business." Similarly, Dollar Tree executives told analysts in a quarterly call in March that they were pushing "productivity initiatives" in stores, which would help get more from fewer workers. "We are well positioned in the most attractive sector of retail to deliver continued growth and increase value for our shareholders," Gary Philbin, the company's CEO, said. In the past five years, the share price of Dollar General has nearly tripled, outpacing the broader stock market by some 80% and vastly outperforming traditional grocery stores and retailers such as Kroger and Macy's. In 2018, Vasos, Dollar General's CEO, received more than \$10 million in total compensation, nearly 800 times the median pay for workers at the company. Philbin, as Dollar Tree, was paid about the same amount. A marquee lists a Family Dollar in a mostly empty shopping plaza in St. Louis. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) Asked about the hundreds of incidents of violent crime at their stores, the companies said that they took security concerns seriously, but they did not elaborate on preventive measures at the stores. Both companies declined to say how many had armed security. Randy Guiler, a Family Dollar spokesman, said, in written responses to questions, "To ensure the integrity of our security systems and procedures, we do not publicly share specific details." None of the 10 dollar stores that I visited in Dayton had a security guard present. In liquor board testimony, the Family Dollar manager for the region stretching across Interstate 70 from Dayton to St. Louis said that the company deployed security guards at only a couple of stores in his region, in St. Louis and Cincinnati. Guiler said that the stores cooperated fully with local police departments and had in some places opened tip lines with rewards for information leading to arrests. He told me that the company recently hired the security firm ADT to upgrade the stores' camera systems. Asked about the stores' low staffing levels, Guiler said, "We are a small-box retailer. Staffing levels can, and do, vary by day, by hour and based on store sales volumes." A spokesperson for Dollar General said, "In keeping with our mission of serving others, we are proud to provide a convenient, affordable retail option to customers and communities that other retailers choose not to serve." When Jolanda Woods heard about Robert's murder, she returned to St. Louis from Philadelphia, where she had been working at a nonprofit, to organize his funeral. In an interview with KMOV, the local CBS affiliate, she faulted Dollar General for leaving stores understaffed and for allowing stock to pile up near the door, making it harder for workers and customers to escape robberies. "That's not enough staff to secure your store with no security," she said. "You can't expect them to watch the aisles, work the cash registers, watch the thieves and stop the thieves." In February, I went to St. Louis and visited the Dollar General where Robert was killed. Inside the entrance was just the sort of barrier that Jolanda had described: a double-wide column of several dozen "totes," or large plastic crates, holding a jumble of goods on clearance. There were cable protectors and scented oils and chicken jerky cruts and baby pacifiers and "Frozen"-themed Ziploc bags and party napkins and elastic wrist supports and charcoal foot scrub and romance novels. In the shampoo aisle, a manager was telling an employee to mark down certain goods with a price gun. "I want to sell this because this is what creates toes in the back room, and I hate toes in the back room," he said. "So get your gun." The next morning, I went to see Jolanda at her new house, in an inner suburb just north of the city. She called up her friend Winter and put her on speakerphone. Winter knew a lot about crime that had occurred at that Dollar General in the years when Jolanda had been living in Philadelphia. There was the time some man loaded up a large trash can with stolen goods at the store's back door and then just hauled it out. There was the time a manager she knew became so frustrated by the crime that he asked a friend from East St. Louis to serve as de facto security. After the friend got in an altercation with a suspected thief, the company reprimanded them, which led both to quit. "When they quit, it was all on again," Winter said. The police say that Robert Woods' killing remains unsolved. Jolanda had received a workers-compensation payment on Robert's behalf, but she was contemplating organizing a class-action lawsuit on behalf of family members of other victims of violence at Dollar Generals. "You have a service and a product that's needed in a community," she said. "Well, you have to be part of the community to make that work." "And being part of it means 'I'm going to secure you while you're here. I'm going to have somebody on my lot to make sure you get to your cars. I'm going to secure it.' These stores are throughout our community, but they have no interest in the community. They're not giving nothing back. They give nothing back." Last October, Jimmy Donald was in line with a friend at a Dollar General on the west side of Dayton, at 2228 North Gettysburg, a short drive from the one where he took his mother to shop and the one where he had been robbed. He was startled to see that the cashier was carrying a pistol on his hip. The cashier, Dave Dukes, said that he had been held up recently and wanted to be ready in case it happened again. Frustration was rising at City Hall, too. When Whaley, the mayor, entered city government, in 2005, she viewed the dollar chains as serving a useful purpose, but over time she saw how the chains' stores in urban neighborhoods contrasted with the ones in rural areas. Residents often sent her photos of dangerously cluttered aisles, and she asked fire marshals to issue warnings. "The more and more ubiquitous they've gotten, they've gotten less and less caring," she said. "I came to see them as glorified check-cashing and payday lenders for the way they prey off the poor but don't really care about the poor." Outside the Dollar General in Dayton, where cashier Dave Dukes, after being held up, began carrying a pistol on his hip. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) In January 2019, John Cranley, the mayor of Cincinnati, wrote a letter about his city's struggles with the stores to the CEO of Dollar Tree, which led to a meeting at Cincinnati's City Hall with Cranley, Whaley, the cities' police chiefs and some company executives. The executives started giving a PowerPoint presentation about Dollar Tree, but the mayors cut them off and threatened to file lawsuits against the company. The executives promised to work on "good neighbor" agreements with the cities instead, laying out terms for better cooperation. (Asked for an update this spring, Gehres, Dayton's assistant city attorney, wrote in an email: "Family Dollar and the City are ironing out the terms. Some language concerns a litter abatement program and environmental improvements to mitigate some of our concerns.") Some cities have started to take more dramatic measures. In 2018 and 2019, Tulsa, Oklahoma; New Orleans; and Birmingham, Alabama, believing that the stores' concentration dissuaded traditional grocers from moving in, were among the cities that passed legislation requiring new chain dollar stores to be at least a mile apart, unless they held a minimum square footage of fresh food. Whaley and Gehres told me that Dayton had considered taking this step but decided that it would be of little more than symbolic value, since the city's immediate challenge was contending with problems at the stores it already had. Eventually, I made it to the Dollar General on North Gettysburg, where Jimmy Donald had seen Dave Dukes, the cashier with the gun on his hip. But he was no longer there. On Oct. 9, 2019, Roosevelt Rappley, a 23-year-old man who police said had been involved in several dollar store robberies, came into the store carrying a gun. Dukes, who is 28, had been employed at the store for a year and a half, after years of working in construction. He had been promoted to assistant manager and, he said, had repeatedly asked his supervisors for a security guard at the store, to no avail. He had a concealed-carry permit for the gun, and, in any case, Ohio allowed open carry without a permit. The store manager knew about the gun and had not prevented him from carrying it. When Rappley drew his gun and threatened him, Dukes shot him dead. Dukes then called 911. "I just had somebody try to attempt and rob me over here at Dollar General on Gettysburg," he said. "Came in with a firearm, threatened to take money out the drawer, pointed a gun at me and my staff members. ... He pointed a gun at me. I had a firearm on me. I pulled my firearm, and I shot him in self-defense." (Dukes was not charged.) The next day, Dollar General told Dukes not to return to work, according to Dukes' lawyer, Erik Blaine. "This is a company that decided to place their stores in certain areas and absolutely fought requests for security, and then, when someone does defend themselves and their co-workers, they're thrown out the next day," Blaine told me. "For a company that puts profits so far over people to put their store employees at risk of life and death, it's just unconscionable." Dollar General declined to answer questions about the case. "When employee actions are part of police investigations, we thoroughly review matters and take appropriate action, as necessary," the company said. In November, just a few weeks after Rappley's death, someone robbed the Dollar General on nearby Salem Avenue, where Jimmy Donald had been robbed in 2017. The robber wore a surgical mask and fired a gun before leaving. Soon afterward, Edwin Goldsmith, who is 32, took a job there. The only security training he received was a 12-minute video. Cashiers were instructed to give up the cash in the drawer if threatened, to include a dye pack to make it easier to trace the money and to use a red phone behind the register to call a security company that Dollar General uses. Goldsmith's supervisors ignored his request for security guards. On St. Patrick's Day, as Ohio started to shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic, a man walked into the store while pulling on a mask and took out a gun. There was only \$80 in the register; the cashiers had just transferred cash to the drop box. There was no dye pack in the register to add to the money — it still hadn't been replaced after the November robbery. Goldsmith had only recently removed a part of the counter that the gunman had damaged with a bullet. Goldsmith, the most senior of the three employees on shift, worried that the robber would come back for more money. So Goldsmith got his own gun from his car and slipped it under his waistband. The police arrived, as did the Dollar General district manager. When they played back the camera footage to see the robbery, they also saw Goldsmith getting his gun. The following day, the store manager told Goldsmith that the company had told her to fire him for having violated the company handbook's rule against bringing a gun to work. Dollar General declined to comment on the firing. Goldsmith had never seen the handbook. "It's not right for me to lose my job all because I didn't want to die in the store," he told me the next day. About six months after Robert Woods' murder, Jason Pearson took a job at the Family Dollar on Dr. Martin Luther King Drive in St. Louis, a mile and a half from the Dollar General where Woods was killed. Pearson, who was 31, had worked at Wendy's for seven years, but his prospects for promotion conflicted with his child-care schedule; he had three children, ages 10, 6 and 3, whose custody he shared. So he switched to Family Dollar, while working a second job at Save A Lot, one of the few grocery stores left in North St. Louis. He worked midnight to 6 a.m., stocking shelves at Save A Lot, then 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Family Dollar, getting home in time to see his kids, often with some treats from Family Dollar in hand, and to rest for a few hours before returning to Save A Lot. "We don't sleep," his mother, Carolyn Noble, said. She cared for Pearson's children when she wasn't working as a medical assistant at a mental health facility. "We work." On Oct. 3, Pearson was working at the Family Dollar when, according to an account that co-workers later gave to his family, he had a dispute with a man whose girlfriend he had caught shoplifting. He left the store at 3 p.m. with another employee, who was going to give him a ride home. As they were crossing the parking lot, two young men approached and shot him. Pearson's aunt, Shari Ealy, had lost a 17-year-old daughter to gun violence in 2006. When she heard about the shooting at Family Dollar, she rushed to the store. Even from a distance, Ealy recognized him by his sneakers. Carolyn Noble got to the store moments later. "That's not my baby, is it?" she asked, before collapsing to the pavement. I went to see Noble and Ealy at Ealy's house, a small bungalow in University City, an inner suburb just west of St. Louis. The blinds were drawn, a large TV was on, and children and teenagers were coming and going from the house. It had been four months since Pearson's murder — the police had not made any arrests — and Noble said that she had been too grief-stricken to go back to work. "I'm just starting to come out," she said. She began by talking about the air conditioners and kept coming back to them in the hour that followed. Why did the stores go to such lengths to lock down the air conditioning units that cool their buildings but do so little to secure the workers and shoppers inside? Distressed by authorities' poor treatment of rape victims and destruction of evidence, one doctor became a DNA archivist long before we had the technology to test it. For potentially hundreds of survivors, his faith in science is paying off. The disregard had continued after her son's death, she said. Save A Lot had sent food and sodas to the family, with condolences. Even Wendy's, where he no longer worked, had offered to help, and several area managers had come to the funeral. But Family Dollar management had not contacted her and had discouraged employees from attending the funeral, she said. (Family Dollar declined to comment.) After the funeral, she said, several other family members had asked why her son had worked at the Family Dollar, given the level of crime there. This bothered Noble. The store was close to their home, which made it convenient, considering all the rushing between jobs and child care. "Why can't I work in my neighborhood?" she said. "Why can't you work in your neighborhood?" She used to shop at Family Dollar sometimes, to buy toiletries or household items or little gifts for her mental health clients — jogging suits or the occasional \$5 perfume. She had stopped going since the murder, but one day she had been driving past a Family Dollar a little farther west and had gone in and asked the cashier how she felt working there. "For real? It's scary," the cashier said, and mentioned the fatal shooting at the store down the road. Carolyn Noble said nothing.

RD.COM Money Saving DealsLearn why everything is usually cheaper, and what items are the best deals at your local or chain dollar or discount store. Seasontime/ShutterstockEveryone has their favorite places to shop and particular spending habits. Store employees tend to know what shoppers want—even before shoppers know themselves. Like knowing it might be less expensive to buy in bulk and to know to always check the expiration date, Dollar Store employees have a lot of useful information. Ever wondered how Dollar Stores make money. Song\_about\_ShutterstockWhether you shop at a chain dollar store such as Dollar Tree, Dollar General, Family Dollar, or your local 99 cents store, not everything that's on sale is necessarily worth purchasing. Bryan Waring, a former Dollar Tree employee, says that you're not alone in buying more than is necessary from these stores. "It seems basic, but everyone falls for this trap," he says. "You go into a store where everything is cheap, and you walk out with things you don't need." He suggests going into a store—yes, even the dollar store—with a checklist of things you truly need. Ondacaracola/Shutterstockin a Reddit AMA, an Assistant Manager at a Dollar Tree says most hand soaps for sale smell nice and work well—but there are probably better deals buying these products in bulk, rather than at the dollar store. Here are 9 things you should never buy in bulk. Earthly Anika/ShutterstockPatricia, a seasonal worker at a Dollar Tree who prefers not to share her last name, says that the post-Christmas season means even more deals on everything from decorations to sweets. "After Christmas, all the gift wrap paper went to 50 cents, and all Christmas items were half price," she says. "Even candy bars are 89 cents versus \$1." Hadrian/ShutterstockIn order for dollar stores to keep their prices low, product sizes are usually smaller than normal, according to Cheapism. Dollar stores aren't the only ones guilty of this hack. Cheapism also reports Walmart is guilty of doing the same thing to lure in customers. Seasontime/ShutterstockEarning more doesn't necessarily mean shopping at pricey stores instead of dollar stores. More than 22 percent of dollar store shoppers make more than \$70,000 per year, according to the New York Times. Another report found that 29 percent of millennial households earning more than \$100,000 per year shop at Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar. Forbes reports. The same report estimates that these shoppers represent 25 percent of total sales from the three combined chains. Here are 15 things you can buy on Amazon for less than a dollar. Simon Kadula/ShutterstockDollar store workers often take on multiple responsibilities and roles. A few of the chain dollar stores previously came under fire for giving managers too much responsibility to keep staffing costs low, per HuffPost. images72/ShutterstockDollar stores are a catch-all for everything from cards to balloons. The most popular and best things to buy, however, are household items, Waring says. This includes toilet paper, cleaning supplies, dish rags, and paper towels. "Regular stores sell these items for prices five times what it should be," he says. BATMANV/ShutterstockChain dollar store locations are growing, fast. A 2011 study found at the time that dollar store locations outnumber drug store locations in the United States, TIME reports. The two biggest dollar chains, Dollar Tree and Dollar General, have more stores combined than the six biggest U.S. retailers, according to Forbes. Plus, between 2010 and 2013, Family Dollar opened1,500 new stores—more than one a day, per the Guardian. Data from Statista predicts the increase in dollar store locations will continue to rise between 2018 and 2021. Benoit Daoust/ShutterstockChain dollar stores including Dollar General, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree, constantly have rotating items, so customers don't get bored. "The fun thing is that items are constantly changing, I think that's what excites the customer," Patricia says. Next, check out the 21 things to never buy at the dollar store. Originally Published: January 13, 2020 Family Dollar has been a national corporate partner since 2014 and is committed to supporting BGCA's mission and local Boys & Girls Clubs through its annual in-store cause campaign, corporate donations, and vendor partnerships. In addition, Family Dollar encourages relationships between its stores and local Boys & Girls Clubs in the community. Throughout the year, when a new store opens or there is a grand re-opening, Family Dollar partners with the Club closest to the store location to receive a \$5,000 donation. In 2020, we were thrilled to welcome Dollar Tree to the partnership as well. Dollar Tree and Family Dollar have partnered to provide to support Boys & Girls Clubs of America's signature leadership program, Youth of the Year. This year Dollar Tree and Family Dollar were recognized as a Diamond sponsor for Southeast, Military & National Youth of the Year program along with providing \$100,000 in scholarships for Southeast Youth of the Year participants. By investing in the program, Family Dollar and Dollar Tree will enable more opportunities for youth to develop their leadership skills. The Youth of the Year program helps youth gain the ability, confidence, and motivation to lead meaningful change within themselves and others. About Family Dollar/Dollar Tree Family Dollar Stores, Inc. is a discount shopping chain that currently operates stores throughout the United States. Headquartered in Chesapeake, VA, Family Dollar Stores provides consumers with various merchandise including apparel, food, cleaning products, home decor, beauty and health aids, toys, pet products, automotive products, domestics, seasonal goods and electronics. There are approximately 56,300 employees and 8,000 stores. Go to www.familydollar.com to find a store near you. Dollar Tree, a Fortune 200 Company, operated 15,479 stores across 48 states and five Canadian provinces as of August 1, 2020. Stores operate under the brands of Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, and Dollar Tree Canada. To learn more about the Company, visit www.DollarTree.com to find a store near you. ProPublica is a nonprofit newsroom that investigates abuses of power. Sign up to receive our biggest stories as soon as they're published. This story was co-published with The New Yorker and is not subject to our Creative Commons license. When Jolanda Woods was growing up in North St. Louis, in the 1970s and early '80s, she and her friends would take the bus to the stores downtown, on 14th Street, or on Cherokee Street, on the South Side, or out to the River Roads Mall, in the inner suburb of Jennings. "This was a very merchant city," Woods, who is 54, told me. There were plenty of places to shop in her neighborhood, too, even as North St. Louis, a mostly Black and working-class part of town, fell into economic decline. There was Perlmutter's department store, where women bought pantyhose in bulk, Payless shoes, True Value hardware and Schnucks grocery store. Almost all these stores have disappeared. As St. Louis' population has dropped from 850,000, in the 1950s, to a little more than 300,000, owing to suburban flight and deindustrialization, its downtown has withered. The River Roads Mall closed in 1995. North St. Louis is a devastated expanse of vacant lots and crumbling late-19th-century brick buildings, their despair all the more dramatic for the opulence of their design. "This neighborhood has gone down," Woods said. "Oh, my God, these houses." A new form of retail has moved into the void. The discount chains Family Dollar and Dollar General now have nearly 40 stores in St. Louis and its immediate suburbs, about 15 of them in North St. Louis. This is where the people who remain in the neighborhood can buy detergent and toys and pet food and underwear and motor oil and flashlights and strollers and mops and drain cleaner and glassware and wind chimes and rakes and shoes and balloons and bath towels and condoms and winter coats. The stores have some nonperishable and frozen foods, too, for people who can't travel to the few discount grocery stores left in the area. Rimentary provisions like these allowed the stores to remain open as "essential" businesses during the coronavirus shutdowns. "These stores are our little Walgreens, our little Targets," Darryl Gray, a local minister and civil rights activist, told me. "It's the stuff you won't get at a grocery store, that you get at a Walmart—but we don't have one." Three years ago, Woods' husband, Robert, who was 42, began working at a Dollar General on Grand Boulevard, across from an abandoned grocery store. He and Jolanda had separated, but they stayed in touch over the years as Robert overcame a crack-cocaine addiction, got a job at the Salvation Army, was ordained as a minister and became an informal counselor to other men battling addiction. Dollar General paid a bit more than the Salvation Army, but he expressed anxiety about security problems at the store. Shoplifting was common, and occasionally there were even armed robberies. The store lacked a security guard, and it typically had only a couple of clerks on hand. On Nov. 1, 2018, Woods went to work on his day off, to fill in for an absent co-worker. Footage from a security camera shows a man entering the store just after 1 p.m., wearing a blue sweatshirt with the hood pulled up over a red cap, and holding a silver gun. He fired down the center aisle, hitting Woods in the back of the head. Then he pointed the gun at the cash register, before seeming to panic. He ran out of the store empty-handed. An ambulance arrived, but Woods was no longer breathing. After his body was removed, Dollar General remained open for several hours, before closing amid protests from local residents. Woods' murder was one of three homicides in six months at the two discount chains in the St. Louis area. On June 13, a man and a woman started arguing in a car in the parking lot of a Family Dollar on West Florissant Avenue, just outside the city line; he shot her once in the head, killing her. Less than a month after Woods' death, a 65-year-old woman was shopping at the Family Dollar on St. Charles Rock Road when a seemingly mentally ill 34-year-old woman grabbed steak knives from a shelf in the store and stabbed her to death. The Gun Violence Archive, a website that uses local news reports and law enforcement sources to tally crimes involving firearms, lists more than 200 violent incidents involving guns at Family Dollar or Dollar General stores since the start of 2017, nearly 50 of which resulted in deaths. The incidents include carjackings in the parking lot, drug deals gone bad and altercations inside stores. But a large number involve armed robberies in which workers or customers have been shot. Since the beginning of 2017, employees have been wounded in shootings or pistol-whippings in at least 31 robberies; in at least seven other incidents, employees have been killed. The violence has not let up in recent months, when requirements for customers to wear masks have made it harder for clerks to detect shoppers who are bent on robbery. In early May, a worker at a Family Dollar in Flint, Michigan, was fatally shot after refusing entry to a customer without a mask. The number of incidents can be explained in part by the stores' ubiquity: There are now more than 16,000 Dollar Generals and nearly 8,000 Family Dollars in the United States, a 50% increase in the past decade. (By comparison, Walmart has about 4,700 stores in the U.S.) The stores are often in high-crime neighborhoods, where there simply aren't many other businesses for criminals to target. Routine gun violence has fallen sharply in prosperous cities around the country, but it has remained stubbornly high in many of the cities and towns where these stores predominate. The glowing signs of the discount chains have become indicators of neglect, markers of a geography of the places that the country has written off. Vacant lots surround a Family Dollar in North St. Louis. (Andres Gonzalez for The New Yorker) But these factors are not sufficient to explain the trend. The chains' owners have done little to maintain order in the stores, which tend to be thinly staffed and exist in a state of physical disarray. In the 1970s, criminologists such as Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson argued that rising crime could be partly explained by changes in the social environment that lowered the risk of getting caught. That theory gained increasing acceptance in the decades that followed. "The likelihood of a crime occurring depends on three elements: a motivated offender, a vulnerable victim, and the absence of a capable guardian," the sociologist Patrick Sharkey wrote, in "Uneasy Peace