

Tax Topics

Five Tips To Save Time & Money This Tax Season

(NAPSA)—Taxes are inevitable, but there are many smart ways to save time and money throughout the process. Marsha Barnes, a certified financial social worker, financial educator and certified credit report reviewer, helps identify five important tips to consider:

1. Get organized. Gather all the documents you'll need ahead of time, including W-2s, 1099s, mortgage interest statements, charitable contributions, and paperwork relating to any stocks, funds or properties you bought or sold in 2017. Get out last year's returns, which can serve as a guide. Schedule an appointment with a tax professional or compare the do-it-yourself software you'll need to complete your tax returns on your own. You can also find checklists online, such as the one at GreenDot.com/taxfast.

2. Find out which tax breaks apply to you. Has your living or work situation changed? The number of people you support? Did you get married or have children? Even if nothing has changed in your life, you may have missed credits in the past that you're entitled to. For example, according to the IRS, one out of every five eligible workers fails to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit. If you find out you qualify for the EITC this year and didn't claim it in the past, you can even file amended returns for 2014, 2015 or 2016 taxes. Make sure you take advantage of the deductions that apply to you. The IRS provides a wealth of this type of information online at irs.gov.

3. Use direct deposit. For the fastest and most secure delivery of your tax refund, ditch the paper check. Opt to have your refund directly deposited into your bank account. Don't have a bank account or don't want to use your primary bank account?

"A smart choice is to get your tax refunds deposited onto a prepaid debit card, such as a Green Dot Prepaid Visa card or a Walmart MoneyCard," says Barnes. "These prepaid debit cards are convenient tools to manage everyday finances and direct deposit is free, secure, eliminates the need to pay for check cashing services, and the money arrives faster than a paper check. Green Dot prepaid cards are FDIC-insured bank account alternatives that you can



"You can get your tax refund even faster when you use direct deposit," advises financial expert.

use everywhere MasterCard or Visa debit are accepted and your money is protected if your card gets lost or stolen."

These cards can be ordered online at GreenDot.com/taxfast or found at a nearby retailer such as Walmart, Walgreens, CVS/pharmacy, Rite Aid, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar or Kmart.

4. File early and electronically. E-filing is the easiest and fastest way to file your taxes, and you'll get your refund faster than if you file a paper return, especially if combined with direct deposit. Tax Day 2018 is April 17th this year, two days later than normal, but don't try to take advantage of that. Filing early will not only help you get your refund faster, it may also help you avoid tax-related identity theft since you will already have filed using your own Social Security Number before someone else tried to.

5. Look for tax season sales and promotions. "Both the full-service tax prep companies and the DIY websites are competing for your business, so shop around to find the best deal for what you need," suggests Barnes. "You may even be able to win money when you file your taxes."

Enter to win the Green Dot Tax-Time Giveaway with 4,000 prizes totaling over \$75,000. You'll earn five entries when you direct deposit your federal tax refund to your Green Dot card. Just visit GreenDotTAXTIME.com to enter and for official rules.

"And since you were smart and filed early, you'll be able to take advantage of all the tax day freebies that companies promote while others rush to beat the April 17th deadline," adds Barnes.