

99 things you can do to help the environment

04/16/2008
Oxford Press
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Small changes make a big difference. For instance, if 200 million Americans simply changed the way they brushed their teeth, it would save 1.6 billion gallons of water a day! Here are some ways to save our most precious resource

Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth. Dentists recommend that you brush for two minutes at least twice a day. Faucets spit out at least 2 gallons of water a minute. So each person who runs the faucet while brushing twice a day wastes about 8 gallons of water.

Switch your shower head. A traditional shower head uses about 6 gallons of water a minute. New ultra-low volume shower heads cut it to 2.5 gallons. By spending \$10 to \$20 for a new shower head, you'll save 35 gallons per day per person.

Go Navy. If you already have a new shower head, take a Navy shower. There are two ways to take a shower. Run the water the whole time, or do what sailors do: turn it off while soaping up. The average person showers for 10 minutes. A Navy shower could save 7 minutes of water flow. Even with an ultra-low volume shower head, that's 17.5 gallons of water saved each day, or almost 6,400 gallons a year.

Upgrade your toilet. Old toilets use 5 to 7 gallons of water per flush. New ones use 1.6 gallons. Figuring that each person flushes five times a day, that's a savings of 27 gallons per day, per person.

Buy a new dishwasher. Old dishwashers use about 16 to 20 gallons of water per cycle. New ones use 11 gallons. Even using the low figure of 16 gallons, that's a savings of 5 gallons per run. With one run a day, that's a savings of 35 gallons a week, and 1,820 gallons a year. (Just don't run it until it's full.)

Buy a new washing machine. Old washing machines use 50 gallons per cycle. New ones cut it almost in half, to 27 gallons. (And are those clothes really dirty? We're in the habit of washing everything after one use: not good for clothes, or the planet.)

Spend a little, save a lot. It costs a few dollars to buy a sink aerator, but it is the easiest and single most effective way to conserve water in the home. Some aerators cut the flow to as little as a half-gallon a minute. Compare that to a conservative estimate of 2 gallons per minute per sink, and the saving is 1.5 gallons every minute the faucet runs.

FOOD

Grow your own. Even if you've only got a little space, you can grow tomatoes or green beans. One tomato plant or bean vine will produce enough for a family. Of course, use only natural pesticides (plant a marigold nearby; use cayenne pepper around the roots, wash with Safer Soap to kill little aphids).

Compost your kitchen vegetable leftovers (no meats) and use them as fertilizer, too.

Preserve. If you do have more than you need, learn the old art of preserving foods.

Buy in bulk; portion your own. This saves you cost, and cuts down on packing materials and waste. Use washable containers to portion out small amounts for daily use. Buy big bags of frozen vegetables and take out what you need. Invest in a package resealing machine. You can reseal bags of chips or frozen foods or bulk products easily and save freshness as well as money.

Give up the bottle. Once upon a time, 'bottled water' sounded like a punch line. Refill a clean, reusable bottle instead. (Same goes for coffee cups. Bring a mug to work and get a good feeling from both the caffeine and your conscience.)

Redo the kitchen smartly. New kitchen cabinetry, floors and utensils are being made out of sustainable products like cork and bamboo, or recycled old wood or scrap wood. Concrete counters are chic and take the polymers out of play; recycled stone chips also are being used for durable counter tops.

Replace your energy-draining appliances with modern ones that save water and power. A bottom-freezer refrigerator, for instance, is not only cheaper to operate (a refrigerator is a major power eater for houses) but provides more interior room in a better configuration than a side-by-side. Convection ovens produce a perfect baked chicken, and do it with 25 percent less energy and faster, and they cool down quickly as well. Put in a hood fan and vent to avoid heating up the kitchen and making your AC work harder.

Think small. Crock-Pots, toaster ovens, the microwave, small broilers, small grills and counter-top ovens use far less energy than the conventional stove or oven. The new ones have larger capacities, are energy efficient, and are multi-functional, so you're not wasting counter space, either. New cookbooks focused on these appliances are modern and produce foods we eat today not your mom's. Check them out.

Go unplugged. Use granny's tools, too. Pull out a hand-beater or old-fashioned potato masher instead of plugging in an electric tool. Learn to use a carving knife. A hand-grater works even better than the food processor for most foods.

Think big. If you have to heat up the oven, do it for more than one dinner and freeze meal-sized portions. Saves energy and frees up your time, too. Get your neighbors involved, and trade meals so you're not bored silly with baked chicken.

Eat locally. Buying locally grown or produced foods, whether organic or not, is a boost to local farmers and it saves on gallons of transport fuel. You're eating fresher foods, usually, and farmers don't have to use preservatives to give them a 'shelf life.' If they're supported, local farmers will grow more for the area, and many will use heirloom production techniques if there's a demand so ask for them.

Eat seasonally. That's the second part of that equation eat the foods grown locally, in season, and they'll be fresher. Oranges in summer? Don't go there!

Eat lower on the food chain. According to charityguide.org, 'by replacing just one meat-based meal with a vegetarian dish, you can save 2,500 gallons of water required to produce a single pound of meat.' Not to mention the land that's cleared to graze cattle, the methane that's emitted, the livestock waste that's washed into our waterways, etc.

KIDS

Turn off instead of tuning in. Have your family establish one day each week as Energy Savers Day. Turn off TVs, computers, video games and any other electronic gadgets. Use the time to read or play games. Have a family picnic to avoid using the stove or microwave. Bike to the park for that picnic instead of driving.

Consider cloth. The 30-year debate over the environmental impact of diapers continues to rage. It can take up to 500 years for a disposable diaper to break down in a landfill, but cloth diapering puts four times the burden on water supplies, not to mention the energy consumed when diapers are washed and dried. Still, most experts now give a slight edge to cloth, especially if parents are willing to line-dry them.

Cut up to cut down. Skip pre-packaged items for school lunches and cut up your own cheese, meats and veggies to cut down on wasteful packaging. Put food in reusable containers instead of plastic baggies and pack in a cloth bag or lunch box.

Learn to love hand-me-downs. Donate clothes and toys to charities, swap with friends, hold a yard sale, shop at consignment stores, or join an online organization such as freecycle.com, which matches people who have stuff to give away with people who need those items.

Use it 'til it's used up. The start of every school year doesn't have to mean a brand new box of crayons, pack of pencils or bottle of glue. Encourage your children to use last year's items as long as possible.

Breast-feed. Medical research shows that breast-feeding produces healthier babies and stimulates a closer bond between mom and child. It also saves money and is vastly easier on the earth. (Plus, you always have exactly the right amount, it's always ready and at the right temperature.)

Drop out of the drop-off line. If possible, send children to school on the bus. If that's not an option, organize a carpool with other families. This saves gas, cuts down on auto emissions, saves time and is more fun!

Get the kids excited. ... Have them research ways to reduce, reuse and recycle. Many organizations feature Kids Pages on their Web sites. Some to check out www.epa.gov; www.eia.doe.gov/kids/; www.planetpals.com. (Bonus This is a great way to come up with a winning project for the science fair!)

... and then put the kids in charge. Children may resist your rules, but they love to turn the tables and police each other (and parents). Have each child create a family plan to put their research ideas into practice. Make one kid Ruler of Recycling, another the Queen of Compost, still another the Emperor of Energy. Have them track the ways in which their plan is saving the earth.

VACATION

Support 'green' hotels.

Be a conservation-savvy guest even if the hotel doesn't have an eco-program. Use lights, water and towels only when you need to. Turn off the air conditioning if you leave your room for the day. Tell housekeeping not to change the sheets every day to conserve water.

Go eco. Use Internet travel booking engines that can steer you to eco-vacations, such as www.eco.orbitz.com that provides information on eco-friendly hotels that use solar power or wind power, natural soaps and energy-efficient lighting.

Fish clean. Don't leave fishing line and hooks in the water. Sea birds and turtles die from swallowing fish hooks, and getting flippers and wings tangled in fishing line. Dispose of fishing line at a marina. The same goes for oil, gas and trash.

Consider a volunteer vacation such as clearing trails in national parks, or join a tour with groups such as the Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org). Visit volunteer.cheaptickets.com, a booking engine that joined with United Way, to search for volunteer opportunities at travel destinations.

Give manatees a chance. Observe speed limits on Florida's waterways to give wildlife such as manatees and turtles time to get to safe depths.

Never go over fishing limits. If there's a six-lobster limit, don't get seven.

Put B&B bucks to a good cause. BedandBreakfast.com is a comprehensive resource for planning B&B eco-escapes and green getaways. Click on the links to Eco-Friendly B&Bs and Green Getaways/Eco Escapes in the lower left corner. Heavenly View Farm Inn in Mount Sterling, Ky., for example, gives 10 percent of the cost of your stay to the development of agri-tourism in Kentucky (rates, \$100-225).

Use public transportation when possible, such as trains and buses instead of driving. And, of course, taking off on foot or a bike is the best thing you can do for the planet and for your own health.

FUN

Enjoy music courtesy of the sun! Can't live without your iPod, but bemoan its frequent need for recharging? Invest in a product like the Solio Universal Hybrid Charger (\$99.95, www.solio.com). Sit it in the sun and it will charge your iPod, laptop, cellphone, Sidekick basically any portable electronic device.

Don't toss your computer. A 1999 New Jersey Institute of Technology study reports that consumer electronics make up about 1 percent of landfill volume, but up to 70 percent of landfills' toxic content. Donate your old computer to an organization that will reuse or recycle it. Consult the National Recycling Coalition (www.nrc-recycle.org).

Send an eVite! Forgo paper and send invites via e-mail (www.evite.com). According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Americans generated about 83 million tons of paper products in the municipal solid waste stream in 2003, nearly a three-fold increase from 1960.

Take a walk. It's good for you. Plus, not driving your car two days per week will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an about of 1,590 pounds a year, according to the EPA.

Unplug before you unwind. Before you leave for vacation, unplug all unnecessary appliances televisions, DVD players, stereos, microwaves. They can still consume energy even when they're off, says the EPA.

Have a kiddie craft party. Turn that plastic ice cream tub into a flower pot (poke drainage holes in the bottom, fill it with dirt and plant some seeds). Transform the enormous cardboard box the refrigerator came in into a fort. Wash that old tire and hang it in the tree for a swing.

STYLE

Bag the extra packaging. Do you really need a plastic bag to carry that new mascara to your car? Are your expensive new undergarments any less exciting if not wrapped in layers of wasteful tissue paper? Can you buy the family-sized bottle of shampoo instead of the smaller one? Ask yourself these types of questions while you're at the store, and you'll cut down on what you toss out at home.

Get hip to hemp. Ecostyle guru Danny Seo, author of the Simply Green series, swears by Converse's slip-on hemp sneakers. What makes hemp earth-friendly? 'It can be grown without pesticides, herbicides or insecticides and it's 1w times stronger than cotton,' Seo writes. 'It also resists bacterial growth (e.g. odor) and lasts a long time.' Converse's Chuck Taylor All Star Slip Hemp comes in black, barley or olive and costs \$62 a pair at Zappos.com.

Bamboo you. Its 100 percent biodegradable, super-soft and antibacterial. One stylish line available locally is Sworn Virgins its tops, tunics and dresses range from \$80 to \$220. (Another bamboo bonus no dry-cleaning necessary.)

And if you must dry clean... Find a green cleaner near you at www.greenearthcleaning.com.

Tree-t yourself. In June, Lancome will launch Primordiale Cell Defense, a skin-care treatment that helps reverse pollutant-caused damage, and the company will plant one tree for each of the first 10,000 products sold.

Go green with your jeans. Insects adore cotton, which makes it one of the most likely crops to be soaked in pesticides. More jeansmakers than ever, though, are producing blue jeans that are green. Levi's affordably priced Eco line is made with organic denim (see levis.com for stores), while sales of Del Forte Denim's Juniper jeans help support the Sustainable Cotton Project (see delforte.com).

Take a step in the right direction. Simple makes shoes from sustainable materials such as recycled car tires, crepe rubber, jute and organic cotton. Proceeds from sales of the company's new Toepeeka flip-flop will benefit StopGlobalWarming.org. Find 'em at simpleshoes.com.

HOME

Cut chlorine. Use distilled white vinegar in place of chlorine-based cleaners. (Distilled white vinegar contains about 5 percent acetic acid, which makes it a great stain remover.) Deidre Imus, wife of shock jock Don Imus (don't hold it against her), has written Green This!, which suggests using essential oils oregano, tea tree, sage and eucalyptus for disinfecting surfaces. (You can find these oils at most holistic and health food stores.) Non-chlorine bleach and oxygen additives, such as OxyClean, are alternatives.

Turn your pool 'green.' Another chlorine source, obviously, is your swimming pool. Rain Forest Blue is an EPA-registered product that kills algae and bacteria without using chlorine or bromine. And ecoONE Pool Conditioner is a combination of nontoxic food-grade additives, such as enzymes and mineral softeners, that helps stabilize pH and alkalinity by reducing overall chemical use. See www.pacificsandsinc.com.

For more than baking ... Buff up shower tiles by applying baking soda with a damp sponge, or wipe with vinegar first and follow with baking soda or salt as a scouring powder. Add a squirt of lemon for good measure.

Breathe easier. Instead of an aerosol air freshener, douse cotton balls with oils, such as lavender, citrus and rosemary, and tuck them around the house. Another idea Put a few drops of oil on a damp cloth and place it near the air conditioner intake vent.

Control clutter. Space of Mind, a Boca Raton, Fla., company formed in 2004, helps clients think green as they organize their homes and decide whether to recycle, donate or reuse items. (See findspaceofmind.com.)

Rethink renovation. Use reclaimed flooring, vintage light fixtures and products from recyclers. Hit yard sales, thrift stores, consignment shops and salvage companies. Find floor planks (that were once something else) at restorationtimber.com and trestlewood.com. The Green Building Resource Guide lists materials that are nontoxic, have recycled content are resource efficient or are otherwise Earth friendly. Order at www.greenguide.com.

Paint before you pitch. A simple coat of paint can make thrift store and yard sale finds work with any style and keep them from filling up landfills. 'I've even repainted lamp shades with a fresh coat of silver paint on the inside and white paint on the outside,' says interior decorator Katy Kern of Fresh Perspective Inc. in West Palm Beach (www.freshperspectiveinc.com). 'I once painted a hideous ceiling fan it was mostly horrible because of the finish, but I used the same silver and white paint as my lamp shades and voila a new fan for free!'

Junk the mail. We each receive about 70 pounds of junk mail each year. Visit www.greendimes.com to learn how you can be removed permanently from junk mail lists for about \$4 a month. Once you sign up, Green Dimes will even plant a tree on your behalf.

Reuse with pride. 'Yogurt containers, large and small, make for great nail, screw or thumbtack organizers in a tool kit,' says West Palm Beach environmentalist Diane Buhler, active in several conservation charities. 'I place a lot of things in these containers for storage just in case of flooding, etc. I even have a small tool kit under my bathroom sink, in a Clorox wipes container.' She also uses canvas bags for grocery shopping, and shhhh, she even reuses her plastic sandwich bags!

Don't supersize the house. Do you really need 4,200 air-conditioned square feet for you and your cocker spaniel? Visit www.resourcesforlife.com for information on the Small House Society, which tells us less is

more.

Use fabric or upholstery remnants as gift wrap. If the recipient likes to sew or quilt, 'more fabric for them,' says Kern. 'I do try to choose fabric that I know will go with their decor so if they would like to make a pillow or a make a few napkins it is already coordinated with their style.'

Throw a green party. When legendary sports agent Leigh Steinberg (the real Jerry McGuire) threw his annual Super Bowl bash in Hollywood, he teamed up with Climate Clean (www.climateclean.com) to offset the party's carbon emissions. The green carpet was recycled after the event, and there was a ban on plastic and paper tableware. Even the table centerpieces were planted after the party.

Get creative with cans. 'Rinsed out and label removed, glass food jars make a great tea light holder and can be placed all around inside and outside to create a nice ambiance,' says Buhler. 'It saves money and recycles.' Buhler also has used cleaned cat food cans, sans label, to float candles in her pool for parties.

It's curtains for rods. Old pipes make great curtain rods, says Kern, who says 1-inch or 1w-inch piping can be cut down to fit any size window. 'I spray painted mine black. It is easy to find drapery rings to fit.'

Has the light bulb gone off yet? Switch old incandescent bulbs for high-efficiency bulbs. Call on elected officials to support a mandatory 2016 phaseout of low-efficiency incandescent lighting. Over 158 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions and 5,700 pounds of airborne mercury emissions would be eliminated.

YARD

Hose with care. Use a hose with an on/off nozzle, required under our current water restrictions. One unattended hose can pour out 600 gallons of water an hour. Twenty unattended hoses can spew out enough water in an hour to fill a small swimming pool.

Don't fertilize your grass until the rainy season begins. A fertilized lawn grows more vigorously, which requires more water. When you do fertilize, use a slow-release, water insoluble fertilizer that isn't washed away in rain or irrigation.

Get rid of or shrink your lawn. The typical lawn requires 3,000 gallons of water per month.

Mulch it. Mulch that's two-to-three inches thick greatly reduces plants' water requirements. (But don't use cypress mulch, often harvested from wetlands.)

Plant native plants. After they're established, many require no supplemental irrigation. Replacing one water-hogging plant with a drought-tolerant one can save 550 gallons of water a year.

Don't assume that wilting plants always need water. Many plants undergo natural wilting in the middle of a hot, sunny day (much like us), but perk up in the late afternoon (also like us.)

If it ever rains again ... Install a rain switch on your sprinkler system, which shuts off the system after a certain amount of rain. All new irrigation systems in the state are required to have these switches.

Make a clean sweep. It takes about 80 gallons to clean a patio with a hose. Instead, use a broom and get some exercise at the same time.

Redirect rain water from gutters into a rain barrel, typically a 55 gallon plastic container which looks like a garbage can with a spigot for a hose. Even simpler, redirect gutters to spill water away from paved areas to where its needed, on flower beds, trees and shrubs.

Dig a rain 'sink' or swale area. Use earth berms to redirect rainwater runoff from driveways and patios to this low area where it can collect and seep into the ground instead of being sent to storm water drains in the street

Encourage soaking. The rain that falls onto your yard should soak into your yard, not run off into the street. Use bricks, pavers, gravel or grass for patios and driveways, which allow rainwater to seep into the ground.

Avoid fertilizers that contain weed killer or insecticide. Instead, diagnose the problem and apply a targeted product, or simply pull weeds by hand.

Learn to tolerate some chewed leaves. Spraying for every bug means you kill the beneficial natural controls as well, such as ladybugs.

Ditch the heavy-duty killing sprays in favor of insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils and products containing Bt, a bacterium that deflects chewing insects.

For a green lawn, try applying iron sulfate or chelated iron before using a full-spectrum fertilizer. Iron may be all that is required to green-up your grass.

Get free fertilizer by leaving grass clippings on the lawn. Each bag of grass clippings, throws away quarter pound of organic nitrogen, a necessary nutrient for healthy plants.

Try using half your usual amount of fertilizer. Many plants will respond fine and you'll be reducing the amount that runs off into streams and the ocean.

Compost it. Improve your soil with compost by making your own compost bin. Construct a 3-foot bin out of untreated wood or concrete blocks. Add layers of grass, leaves, shredded branches, wood chips and vegetative kitchen waste (no meat.) Keep pile moist. After 3 to 4 weeks, mix pile thoroughly and every week afterward. Compost will be ready to use when plants are decomposed, in two to 12 months.

Create shade. Plant trees that will grow to less than 30 feet tall to cool outdoor patios and driveways. Rooms with shaded windows require less air-conditioning.

CARS

Use cruise control. Average savings in fuel costs, 7 percent, with up to 14 percent return.

Check tire pressure. Proper inflation can save 3 percent in fuel costs, plus the tires last longer and are safer. Low pressure causes heat buildup that can cause a tire to disintegrate.

No American idles. Don't let your car idle. That means avoiding drive-thrus at McDonald's or Washington Mutual, even turning off the ignition at what you know is a long traffic light, and especially if you stay in the car while Harry goes into Home Depot to buy a gallon of paint. Ten seconds of idling uses more gas than stopping and restarting the engine. The Canadian government estimates its citizens could save more than \$650 million a year if each driver cut idling by five minutes a day. Think what the savings would be south of the border.

No warm-ups necessary. It might have worked in pre-1980s cars, but today's cars are designed to be started and driven immediately, so that they reach optimum operating temperature as quickly as possible. The warm-up can actually harm your car's engine and transmission.

Keep your engine tuned. Fouled spark plugs, failed oxygen sensors or bad catalytic converters can affect mileage by 4 percent.

Check and replace filters regularly. A clogged air filter can affect mileage by 10 percent. A clean air filter also keeps out impurities that can damage internal engine parts. Dirty or clogged fuel filters also can have a negative effect.

Use the proper grade of oil. If you put 10W-30 weight oil in an engine designed for 5W-30, mileage will be reduced 1 to 2 percent.

Extra weight equals more gas. If you're not playing golf that day, take the clubs out of the trunk. Or that heavy toolbox.

Combine trips. Trip planning ensures that traveling is done when the engine is warmed-up and efficient. With a little planning, too, you save even more by covering less distance.

Drive slower. At 55 miles per hour you'll get 21 percent better mileage than at 70 mph. On a 100-mile trip, the difference is 24 minutes.

Drive moderately, not aggressively. Jackrabbit starts and hard braking can sap mileage by 37 percent.

Ride a bike. Enough said.

Sources University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, www.wateruseitwisely.com, American Water Works Association; Bruce Adams, water conservation officer, South Florida Water Management District; Earth Day Network (www.earthday.net); ecopsych.com; Metropolitan Home May 2007 'Design 100' issue; Domino magazine; edmunds.com; Mounts Botanical Garden