

Green Earth



Let's Talk Waste

Trash. Garbage. Rubbish. These are the names we give to items that we have little use or value for. Humans produce a lot of it. And, thanks to modern sanitation, we don't have to live with it.

However, this also makes it easy to ignore exactly how much waste we produce — and in turn, how we are harming our home: Earth. It's time to talk trash.

- The United States generates a little more than 250 million tons of municipal solid waste every year, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

- This averages out to be more than four pounds of trash per day, per person.

- More than 89 million tons of this waste is either recycled or composted. This is equivalent to a 34 percent recycling rate.

- That might seem like a good start, until you hear that the EPA estimates that at least 75 percent of our waste is recyclable. If this were school, we would be failing.

- We could do better, as more than 87 percent of Americans have access to curbside recycling programs or drop-off centers.

- According to dosomething.org — a global movement for positive environmental change — 21.5 mil-

lion tons of our yearly waste is food waste. If that food were to be composted instead, we would reduce the amount of greenhouse gas at an amount equivalent to taking 2 million cars off the road.

- Not all of our waste makes it to a landfill. According to National Geographic, there are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic debris in the ocean.

- This is not surprising, if you consider that 85 percent of the world's plastic is not recycled, according to the Ocean Recovery Alliance.

- The largest ocean garbage site in the world is known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch — located off the coast of California — where plastic pieces outnumber sea life six to one.

If you want to learn more, visit: www.saveonenergy.com/land-of-waste. The report breaks down waste production and landfill data by state, as well as the evolution of landfills in the United States over the past century.

Upcycle: What's Old Is New

Our waste problem has become so critical, that a small but growing number of companies are doing what they can to reduce the amount of waste produced by their products by thinking about their recycling potential before they are even made.

In fact, “upcycle” has become the new buzzword in sustainable living in the last few years.

RECYCLE VS. UPCYCLE

So what is the difference between recycling and upcycling? Recycling is all about taking an item of waste and transforming it into something that makes it suitable for reuse. This is not too different from upcycling, which in essence does the same thing.

The difference comes in the process. Recycling most often changes the physical makeup of the wasted material: Paper into cardboard shipping boxes, plastic bottles into toys or carpet. Upcycling repurposes an unwanted item into a new item without changing the composition of the material.

For example, companies like Sword and Plough repurpose military canvas into stylish bags. Upcycling is fantastic for the Earth because it means less expended energy.

PINTEREST

While a growing number of companies are doing their part to adopt more green business practices, it is consumers who have really embraced upcycling. Upcycling has found a unique partnership with DIY culture, and it is more popular than ever to reuse or repurpose something you already



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own.

One visit to the social media platform Pinterest and you will have more ideas than you could possibly execute in one

lifetime at your fingertips. If you're the type of person who hates to throw anything away, turn your unwanted items into beautiful, enjoyable pieces.

Let your imagination run free, or visit Pinterest for guided ideas. Turn old pillowcases into garment bags, make a wine bottle chandelier, or

make paper garlands out of book pages.

The possibilities are endless to reuse, repurpose and live sustainably.

Happy Birthday Parks

The National Park Service celebrated 100 years in 2016.

Signed into law in 1916 by president Woodrow Wilson, the goal and purpose of NPS is to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Our national parks remain a vital part of our natural preservation efforts. Visit a national park near you and enjoy what so many work effortlessly to protect.

- The entirety of the National Park System protects 84 million acres — comprised of 417 sites, including 129 historical sites, 87 national monuments, 59 national parks, 19 preserves, 18 recreational areas, 10 seashores, four parkways, four lakeshores and two reserves.

- The first park established and protected by Congress as a national park was Yellowstone National Park, in 1872.

- The largest park in the network is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in south-central Alaska, with 13.2 million protected acres.

- The National Park Service receives millions of visits to its protected sites every year. In fact, 307.2 million people



visited its 417 sites in 2015, representing exponential growth since visits started being recorded in 1920, at 1 million.

- While the Park Service employs thousands of full-time, part-time and seasonal employees, they also depend on 7.9 million hours of time donated annually by more than 440,000 volunteers.

- The National Park Service maintains that America’s lands and wildlife should be affordable to all, and thus keep their admission prices low. Entrance fees to all sites range from \$5-\$30, and children under 16 are admitted free. A lifetime senior pass is available to U.S. citizens 62 and older for just \$10, and citizens with permanent disabili-

ties are offered a lifetime access pass free of charge.

- Additionally, the America the Beautiful-National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass is an \$80 annual pass that provides access to lands and wildlife managed by the NPS, along with four other government agencies.

- By visiting a National Park, you are supporting a

network that protects 18,000 miles of trails, 75,000 archaeological sites, the world’s largest carnivore (Alaskan brown bear), the world’s largest living thing (sequoia trees), the world’s longest cave (Mammoth Cave), America’s deepest lake (Crater Lake) and the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere (Badwater Basin).

Plan an Earth Day Event

While you can give back to our environment any day of the year, Earth Day exists as a special reminder for us to pause from our busy lives and celebrate the very place in which we live.

Here are six ways to get involved, raise awareness and celebrate our planet.

PLANT A TREE

Planting a tree is a great way to both celebrate and give back to our planet. Not only will you be contributing to the beauty of an area, but trees help produce oxygen and filter out other pollutants in the air.

START A GARDEN

Flower or vegetable, in-ground, raised-bed, or pots on the porch — there are no rules to gardens (except water and sunlight, of course). If starting a garden where you live is not a possibility, look into community gardens in your area.

SPRING CLEANUP

While most people associate spring cleaning with inside chores, the outside of your home also needs some TLC after the winter has passed. Fallen leaves and broken branches can impede the growth of your grass and other vegetation.

And if left, leaves can soil and mold, festering certain types of disease. Also, don't forget your community. Organize a group to pick up trash along roads and neighborhoods to prevent environmental contamination.



There are many other ways you can celebrate Earth Day and raise awareness without getting your hands dirty.

HOST A BLOCK PARTY

Get all the neighbors together and throw a themed block party. Plan games for the children on the block centered around wildlife and serve organic foods sourced from sustainable, local farms. Take it a step further and invite everyone to bring all their recycling, and at the end of the day

take one large load to your local recycling center.

MOVIE NIGHT HAPPY HOUR

Take a cue from Seattle and host a movie night. In 2016, Seattle hosted a Wild and Scenic Film Festival, featuring environmental and adventure films — with all proceeds going to the Washington Water Trust. Work with your community and decide on a charitable admission charge, or just get together with your friends and family

to watch conservation documentaries or an adventurous feature film.

YOGA

Talk to a local studio and suggest yoga in the park. Most studios love to see interest from the community and are always looking for new and exciting ways to share their love for the activity. Plus, there is nothing like taking deep, focused breaths in the outdoors to better appreciate this home we call planet Earth.

Help Endangered Species

Protecting our planet also means protecting our animals. The Endangered Species Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1973. No other law has been more successful at preventing the extinction of wildlife, and it is because of this law that many species of plants, insects and animals are on the route to recovery.

The law itself works in many ways to protect wildlife — from defending against legislation that could undermine its values to holding those accountable who fail to protect our most threatened species.

There are many ways we can help, too. Here are just a few of the ways we can support the protection of our ecosystem and the animals that live in it.

LEARN ABOUT SPECIES IN YOUR AREA

Awareness is a great place to start. The first step to protecting anything is to learn how important it is. Visit your local wildlife protection agency to discover animals native to your area. Public libraries also are a great resource; many cultivate local history sections that provide this type of information.

GROW NATIVE PLANTS

Native plants help attract native insects, such as bees and butterflies, which are crucial to pollination. Non-native species of insects are typically considered invasive, because they corrode the natural local ecosystem. They can even prey on native species, which only drive these species further toward extinction.

RECYCLE

Recycling helps keep waste



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out of our oceans and forests. With more than 87 percent of Americans having easy access to recycling programs or recycling centers, there is no reason why we all aren't separating our paper, plastic, glass and metal.

Just be sure to rinse bottles

and cans, and remove any bits of food scrap.

Also, purchase sustainable products when you're able, such as buying recycled paper products and passing on any furniture or decor made of rainforest-sourced woods.

VISIT A NATIONAL PARK

National parks are home to many endangered species, and by visiting you are supporting their existence. Many scientists assert that the most effective way to protect endangered species is to preserve their natural habitats.

RESPECT WILDLIFE

Harassing wildlife is not only cruel but illegal. Teach the younger members of your family that every living thing deserves respect. Immediately report any abuse you see to your local state or federal wildlife enforcement office.

What's in a Tree?

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now." — Chinese Proverb

Earth Day is a great moment to give back to the environment by planting a tree. Trees play a crucial role in our environment — both by producing oxygen and absorbing hazardous carbon dioxide and supporting life through vegetation and shelter.

According to Time magazine, Earth is home to more than 3 trillion trees. This may seem like a lot, but when you consider how many trees humans cut down — 15 billion annually — it is quite alarming.

In fact, humans are the chief determining factor in trees' survival in any given area. Here are three of the most popular and versatile trees for your community.

RED MAPLE

This tree is native to the eastern half of the United States but has become one of the nation's favorite. It is a very

popular choice for lining streets because of its hardiness.

RED BUD

Known for its versatility, the redbud can be used in almost every type of landscape. It is one of the first flowering plants in the springtime. Quickly following the flowers come heart-shaped, green leaves.

WHITE OAK

There are many species of oak to choose from, and there is a naturally growing species in each state. Oaks are slow growers, which have given them a

bad reputation in a society that prioritizes speed and efficiency, but they don't disappoint for the patient.

Remember, trees thrive when they're planted in the right area, so be sure to check with a local nursery and research your area's "hardiness zone" — geographical zones determined by the average annual minimum temperature.

Trees need much attention early after planting and care as they mature. Not only will you be giving back to the environment, but Mother Nature will return the favor and produce a tree whose shade you can enjoy, and whose beauty you can admire.

Looking Out for our Planet

This is far from a comprehensive list, but each of these organizations pursues noble work and have had enormous success with their efforts.

National Wildlife Federation

Founded 1936

The National Wildlife Federation operates with the conviction that our landscapes and wildlife have helped define and shape our national character. The organization aims to protect ecosystems that are most critical to saving endangered animals, in order to preserve them and our natural landscapes for future generations.

Heal the Bay

Founded 1985

Heal the Bay is an environmental organization dedicated to making coastal waters and watersheds safe, healthy and clean. While the California coast is the organization's central focus, it has made a name for itself in marine sustainability.

Wildlife Conservation Society

Founded 1895

The Wildlife Conservation Society's mission is to "save wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education and inspiring people to value nature." The organization currently works to conserve more than 2 million square miles of "wild places" around the world, in order to



If you are looking to take a more active role in nurturing and protecting our planet but not sure where to begin, consider joining efforts with an environmental agency.

better protect the species that live in them.

Sierra Club

Founded 1892

The Sierra Club is one of the oldest conservation organizations. It is well known, respected and has had great

success in fighting for the preservation of land, clean air and water. The group works hard to help pass legislation that preserves our environment and legislation that works to destroy it. It has 64 local chapters nationwide, 2.4 million members and sup-

porters and host more than 20,000 local and international outings per year.

National Geographic Society

Founded 1888

The National Geographic Society is one of the largest

and most prominent environmental agencies. It focuses on science-based research — along with general interest in examining the world's geography, civilizations and cultures. It is not overtly environmental but does distinctly celebrate Earth's creatures.