

green earth



# Cutting Down on Usage

One of the best ways to keep trash out of landfills, gutters, rivers and the ocean is to cut back on the amount we throw away.

The Environmental Protection Agency offers ways for us to apply the mantra of “reduce, reuse, recycle” to keep down the amount of stuff we buy, which trickles down to throwing away less and eventually requiring less stuff to be produced in the first place.

## REDUCING

This is the first and arguably best step — use less! Producing new items uses energy, usually produced by fossil fuels, and a variety of materials that have to be produced or mined. All of these materials and the finished products are transported throughout the country. The more we buy, the more of these resources get used.

Of course, going without isn't always an option, so be a smart consumer. Buy products with less packaging, and go for higher-quality clothing, household items, toys and appliances that will last longer. These typically cost more at the outset, but you'll save money in not having to replace them as often. Read e-books or check books out from the library instead of buying them.



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## REUSING

Whether it's a big purchase like a car or furniture or smaller items like toys, clothes and books, buy used whenever possible. Shop thrift stores, flea markets and garage sales or check online ads. While you're at it, sell your no-longer-needed items; kids grow out of clothes so quickly they may be reusable, or look at

formal attire that you only wore once.

You can also organize a clothing swap among friends, neighbors or social groups; everyone can bring the items they don't want anymore and take items from others.

Also look for ways to reuse recyclable materials like cardboard boxes, egg cartons and other containers. Although

they should eventually be recycled, getting a few moves out of boxes saves trees.

## RECYCLING

So many items come to us in cardboard boxes, tin cans and plastic containers. These can all be recycled, keeping them out of landfills; that's particularly good for plastics, which take so long to decom-

pose. Recycling these items also reduces the amount of raw materials needed to manufacture new products.

Not everything is recyclable everywhere, though cardboard, paper, tin cans and most types of plastic are ubiquitous. Many cities do not allow glass recycling, so know the rules before tossing glass into the bin.



# Smart Food Choices

With 7 billion people on the planet, food production requires significant resources in terms of land, water and pollutants in the atmosphere. There are ways to adjust your eating and shopping habits to be more environmentally conscious.

In *The Conversation*, Deakin University research fellow Michalis Hadjikakou discusses lots of small behavioral changes you can make to reduce your foodprint.

## REDUCE ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Foods that come from animals — meat, dairy, eggs — need more energy and resources to cultivate and release more emissions than most plant-based foods. This is especially true for red meat. You don't have to eliminate these foods from your diet, but look for ways to reduce your consumption. If you eat meat every day, cut back to every other day and work your way to once a week, or switch out steak for piece of fish. Look for alternatives to milk, butter and cheese (try coconut oil and coconut milk, for example) and try out reci-



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pes that avoid these products entirely and make those a couple of times a week. Find alternative proteins like nuts and beans.

## REDUCE CALORIES

This is pretty basic; if you eat less, you buy less food. That may also contribute to a reduction in spoiled foods that have to be thrown away, and you might lose some

weight in the process. But it's not always that easy to do. Look at what you're eating — is it a lot of packaged and processed foods, single-serving items or fast food? Increase your fresh fruits and vegetables, which require no processing or packaging, and whenever possible buy produce that's in season. That typically means it had a shorter trip to get to you.

## PLAN MEALS AND MAKE A LIST

If you do this before grocery shopping, you'll know exactly what you need to buy and won't come home with extra food that you may or may not use. With perishable items, include the amounts you need to buy, again to reduce food waste. Check labels, even on canned goods. Bring reusable bags to the

grocery store.

## SHOP LOCAL, ORGANIC

Buying from local sources reduces the resources needed to transport products and helps the local producers and economy. Organic foods aren't cultivated with fertilizers or antibiotics, cage-free animals tend to be healthier, which all lead to better production techniques.



# Composting Basics

**A**lmost a third of garbage that Americans throw away is food scraps and yard waste, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. We can reduce that. Organic waste can be composted and used to fertilize your yard or garden, keeping it out of landfills and stopping it from decomposing and producing methane, a greenhouse gas.

You also see benefits. Compost helps soil retain moisture and reduce plant pests, reduces or replaces chemical fertilizers and promotes the production of good bacteria and fungi in the soil, which helps create humus, a dark, rich soil that's great for plants.

The EPA breaks down composting ingredients into three categories:

- **Browns:** Dead leaves, branches and twigs (provides carbon).
- **Greens:** Grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps and coffee grounds (provides nitrogen).
- **Water:** Provides moisture to break down the materials.

You need equal parts of brown and green materials; alternate layers of materials so different-sized particles get mixed in. A surprising number of household items are compostable, including eggshells, paper, houseplants, sawdust, cotton rags, dryer lint, dog hair, ashes, nut shells and more. Do not compost coal or charcoal ash, dairy products, diseased plants, fats, meat scraps, pet waste or yard trimming that were treated with chemicals.

To set up a compost pile, find a dry, shady spot near a water source. Add the materials, shredding the larger pieces, and get the material wet.



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Once the pile is established, mix in grass clippings and green waste, then bury fruit and vegetable waste under about a foot of compost material. As you continue to add to the pile, keep it wet and use a

pitchfork or shovel to move the material around. If you live somewhere particularly dry, you can cover the compost pile with a tarp to keep water in.

Your compost is ready to use when the bottom layer is dark

and rich in color. Be patient; this can take anywhere from two months to two years.

The EPA also recommended indoor composting, which, when properly managed, won't attract bugs or rodents and

won't have an odor. You can buy a composting bin at the local hardware store and go through basically the same process, keeping track of what you include. It should be ready to use in two to five weeks.

# Easy Ways to Do More

There's a lot of discussion around catastrophic climate change and everything that's coming if we don't make major changes, and it can be overwhelming. However, while small changes won't fix all the problems, there is plenty we can do individually to reduce the amount of resources we consume.

Carbon Offsets to Alleviate Poverty and the Center for EcoTechnology suggest several steps we can all take to reduce usage and often reduce our expenses at the same time.

## BE WATER-WISE

On hot days, water in the early morning or evening when the sun is down and it's not hot enough that water is evaporating before it gets to your grass. If you have automatic sprinklers, make sure they're turned off if it starts to rain. If you're redoing your yard, look at xeriscaping, rocks, wood chips and other features that require little or no water.

## REDUCE WATER USAGE

Wait to run the dishwasher, washing machine and dryer when you have full loads. During the summer, run those appliances in the cooler hours of the early morning and night; they'll produce heat that your air conditioner will have to work even harder to combat if you're washing a load of clothes in the heat of the day. Turn off lights when you leave the room and the water off when you're brushing your teeth or washing dishes.

## DRIVE LESS

Does your city have public



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transit? Get a schedule and take a bus or train if possible. If you live near coworkers, consider carpooling; even if you can't do it every day, cutting down on trips a couple of times a week will help. Buy a

bike and commute or run errands on two wheels.

When you're running errands, try to do them in one trip and map it out so you reduce the amount of backtracking.

## DON'T IDLE

Whether you're sitting in a traffic jam, the drive-thru line for coffee and getting ready to leave on a particularly cold day, don't leave your engine idling. If you know you'll be

waiting several minutes, turn your car off. And, as pleasant as it is to get into a comfortably warm car, letting it warm up for several minutes isn't good for the environment. Put on a coat and gloves and go.





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# Earth-Friendly Recreation

Nothing feels more Earth-friendly than spending time in nature — hiking, rock-climbing, bird-watching, kayaking and more. However, as more people explore the great outdoors, we face more trash, more human-wildlife interactions and greater risks to natural ecosystems.

The National Recreation and Park Association, the Environmental News Network and Backpackers Pantry lays out ways for outdoor lovers to enjoy nature and keep their carbon footprint low and nature natural.

## **USE BIODEGRADABLE PERSONAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS**

Items like toothpaste and soap can negatively affect the environment; in addition to just not being part of that ecosystem, many products contain chemicals that may take a long time to degrade. Find biodegradable products for when you're backpacking or camping in the wilderness and away from

managed facilities and stay at least 200 feet from natural water sources when you use these products. Even water-soluble products like lotions, oils and makeup can pollute water sources. Also avoid chemical insect repellents.

## **LEAVE NO TRACE**

Trails and campsites should look as unused when you leave them as when you found them. In addition to picking up trash, other ways to ensure you're doing this includes leaving anything you find (though you can pack other people's trash out if you find it); minimizing the impact of campfires if fires

are allowed where you're camping; packing out any trash you bring in (including items like toilet paper and food waste); and keeping a good distance from wildlife.

## **STAY ON THE TRAIL**

Often, the areas surrounding trails are delicate ecosystems that are home to thousands of plants, animals and microorganisms. Hikers tramping through them can harm those ecosystems, speed up soil erosion, contaminate water and put hikers into closer proximity with wildlife. Even one person going off trail can cause damage, so stay on the trail and, whenever fea-

sible, use existing campgrounds.

## **USE PARK-PROVIDED ECOFRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION**

Many national and state parks have shuttles to move people around. These often run on natural gas or cleaner energy and move more people than individual cars, so whenever possible, use these transit options instead of driving your own car. If that's not an option, look for bikes or horses as other possible transit option. Also consider carpooling. Fewer cars also means less time spent idling in line to get into parks.

# Tips for Living Greener

The creator of the Zero Waste Home says she and her family produce a pint of trash each year. For most of us, that's a drastic and overwhelming lifestyle change to consider, but all of us can embrace some of these habits to live greener every day.

Some of these are ideas you've already considered, including the three Rs and composting, but there may be ways you haven't thought of yet. Think about which of her ideas you can implement in your home this week.

## **In the kitchen and laundry room:**

Use cloth rags instead of paper towels, containers instead of sandwich bags and aluminum foil and avoid plastic dishes altogether. Rags can be old T-shirts and other clothes that are too worn to wear anymore.

Buy in bulk and freeze meat, produce and even flour until you're ready to use it. Also look for dish soap, laundry and dishwasher detergent in bulk.

Drink tap water or buy a water filter. Bottled water requires significant resources to create, filter and move and



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take up tons of space in landfills.

Get a pressure cooker, which can cut cooking time in half and reduce the amount of energy needed to make dinner. When you're bored of leftovers, find a way to use them in a different dish instead of throwing them away.

Hang clothes quickly after they finish drying to reduce

the amount of ironing needed. A side bonus: no one really likes to iron, so this saves you from one of the least pleasant chores.

## **In the bathroom:**

Use 100 percent recycled, unbleached toilet paper that is wrapped in paper instead of plastic.

Buy shampoo, conditioner and body wash in bulk and

refill containers.

Use baking soda and vinegar instead of harsh chemicals to scrub the bathtub, sink and toilet.

## **In the living areas:**

Instead of air fresheners, get a plant and open a window (if the weather outside is nice).

Use cloth napkins, both for meals and parties.

Use rechargeable batteries in your TV remote, use a whiteboard to write notes to family members instead of paper, sweep instead of vacuuming whenever possible.

Use a power strip on your office equipment; refill your printer cartridges instead of buying new; avoid printing whenever possible; and when you need to print, print double-sided copies.



# Create a Backyard Oasis

One benefit of having a yard is the ability to create your own ecofriendly oasis right at home. Through smart gardening and irrigation, you can contribute a piece of green to the Earth, providing cleaner air and a good environment that encourages healthy ecosystems. Global Stewards has ways to create a backyard habitat that invites nature in.

## ATTRACTING ANIMALS

You don't have to turn your yard into a menagerie to encourage wildlife. In addition to a hummingbird feeder, you can attract these creatures with different types of flowers and by avoiding chemical pesticides.

To attract other types of birds, plant a variety — seeds, berries, nuts and other food sources will keep birds coming and staying, as will both deciduous and evergreen trees. In addition to food, these provide places to rest and hide as well.

While they're less fun-sounding than birds, getting a bat or two into your garden is good for you and the bat. They eat thousands of mosquitoes a night. Bird baths provide water, and a "night garden" that includes after-noon-blooming or night-scented flowers like evening primrose, phlox, flea-bane, goldenrod and moon-flower will help attract bats.

## ECOFRIENDLY GARDENING

Growing your own food is a great way to reduce your footprint; throw in smart irrigation and compost you made yourself and you're a sustainability hero. When looking for what to plant, choose plants that are native to your area and thus better able to thrive in



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the natural conditions without lots of extra watering or pesticides.

Beyond what you plant, make your gardening processes more Earth-friendly. Instead of raking and throwing away leaves, use them as fertilizer or

just leave them on the ground; dead leaves provide critical habitats for butterflies, lizards, toads, chipmunks and earthworms. Put away the gas-powered equipment and pull out a rake, a push mower and a hoe to work the dirt.

## NO BACKYARD? GREEN UP YOUR PATIO

You can cultivate potted plants or plants in window-sills, even grow your own vegetables in containers. Find a big container, good soil and a spot in or out of the house

that gets at least six hours of direct sunlight a day. Fertilize the plants regularly and water frequently enough that the soil is never completely dry. Talk to employees at your local gardening store to get ideas on what grows well in a pot.