

40 Things that you can do to Green the Planet!

1. CHANGE YOUR LIGHT: If every household in the United States replaced one regular light bulb with a compact fluorescent bulb, the pollution reduction would be equivalent to removing one million cars from the road. Don't like the color of light? Use these bulbs for closets, laundry rooms and other places where it won't irk you as much.

2. TURN OFF COMPUTERS AT NIGHT: By turning off your computer instead of leaving it in sleep mode, you can save 40 watt-hours per day. That adds up to 4 cents a day, or \$14 per year. If you don't want to wait for your computer to start up, set it to turn on automatically a few minutes before you get to work, or boot up while you're pouring your morning cup 'o joe.

3. DON'T RINSE: Skip rinsing dishes before using your dishwasher and save up to 20 gallons of water each load. Plus, you're saving time and the energy used to heat the additional water.

4. DO NOT PRE-HEAT THE OVEN: Unless you are making bread or pastries of some sort, don't pre-heat the oven. Just turn it on when you put the dish in. Also, when checking on your food, look through the oven window instead of opening the door.

5. RECYCLE: Recycled glass reduces air pollution by 20% and water pollution by 50%. There are 63 million newspapers printed each day and 69%, will be thrown away. Recycling just the Sunday papers would save more than half a million trees every week. Close to 130 million cell phones will be retired each year. If they go into landfills, the phones and their batteries introduce toxic substances into our environment. Twenty recycled aluminum cans are made with the energy it takes to manufacture one brand new one. Every ton of glass recycled saves the equivalent of nine gallons of fuel oil needed to make glass from virgin materials.

6. HANG DRY: Get a clothesline or rack to dry your clothes by air. Your wardrobe will maintain color and fit, and you'll save money. Your favorite T-shirt will last longer too.

7. GO VEGETARIAN ONCE A WEEK: One less meat-based meal a week helps the planet and your diet. For example: It requires 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. You will also save some trees. For each hamburger that originated from animals raised on rainforest land, approximately 55 square feet of forest have been destroyed.

8. WASH IN COLD OR WARM: If all the households in the U.S. switched from hot-hot cycle to warm-cold, we could save the energy comparable to 100,000 barrels of oil a day. Only launder when you have a full load.

9. USE ONE LESS PAPER NAPKIN: During an average year, an American uses approximately 2,200 napkins – around six each day. If everyone in the U.S. used one less napkin a day, more than a billion pounds of napkins could be saved from landfills each year.

10. USE BOTH SIDES OF PAPER: American businesses throw away 21 million tons of paper every year, equal to 175 pounds per office worker. For a quick and easy way to halve this, set your printer's default option to print double-sided (duplex printing). And when you're finished with your documents, don't forget to take them to the recycling bin.

11. RETHINK BOTTLED WATER: Nearly 90% of plastic water bottles are not recycled, instead taking thousands of years to decompose. Buy a reusable container and fill it with tap water, a great choice for the environment, your wallet, and possibly your health. The EPA's standards for tap water are more stringent than the FDA's standards for bottled water.

12. BAN BATHTIME: Have a no-bath week, and take showers instead. Baths require almost twice as much water. Not only will you reduce water consumption, but the energy costs associated with heating the water.

13. BRUSH WITHOUT RUNNING: You've heard this one before, but maybe you still do it. You'll conserve up to five gallons of water per day if you stop. Daily savings in the U.S. alone could add up to 1.5 billion gallons – more water than folks use in the Big Apple.

14. TAKE A SHORTER SHOWER: Every two minutes you save on your shower can conserve more than 10 gallons of water. If everyone in the country saved just one gallon from their daily shower, over the course of the year it would equal twice the amount of freshwater withdrawn from the Great Lakes every day.

15. PLANT A TREE: It's good for the air, the land, can shade your house and save on cooling (plant on the west side of your home), and it can also improve the value of your property. Make it meaningful for the whole family and plant a tree every year for each member.

16. USE YOUR CRUISE CONTROL: You paid for those extra buttons in your car, so put them to work! When using cruise control your vehicle could get up to 15% better mileage. Considering today's gasoline prices, this is a boon not only for the environment but your budget as well.

17. SECOND-HAND DOESN'T MEAN SECOND-BEST: Consider buying items from a second-hand store. Toys, bicycles, roller blades, and other age and size-specific items are quickly outgrown. Second hand stores often sell these items in excellent condition since they are used for such a short period of time, and will generally buy them back when you no longer need them.

18. BUY LOCAL: Consider the amount of pollution created to get your food from the farm to your table. Whenever possible, buy from local farmers or farmers' markets, supporting your local economy and reducing the amount of greenhouse gas created when products are flown or trucked in.

19. ADJUST YOUR THERMOSTAT: Adjust your thermostat one degree higher in the summer and one degree cooler in the winter. Each degree Celsius less will save about 10% on your energy use! In addition, invest in a programmable thermostat which allows you to regulate temperature based on the times you are at home or away.

20. INVEST IN YOUR OWN COFFEE CUP: If you start every morning with a steamy cup, a quick tabulation can show you that the waste is piling up. Invest in a reusable cup, which not only cuts down on waste, but keeps your beverage hot for a much longer time. Most coffee shops will happily fill your own cup, and many even offer you a discount in exchange!

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21. BATCH ERRANDS: Feel like you spend your whole week trying to catch up with the errands? Take a few moments once a week to make a list of all the errands that need to get done, and see if you can batch them into one trip. Not only will you be saving gasoline, but you might find yourself with much better time-management skills.

22. TURN OFF LIGHTS: Always turn off incandescent bulbs when you leave a room. Fluorescent bulbs are more affected by the number of times it they are switched on and off, so turn them off when you leave a room for 15 minutes or more. You'll save energy on the bulb itself, but also on cooling costs, as lights contribute heat to a room.

23. GREENER LAWN CARE: If you must water your lawn, do it early in the morning before any moisture is lost to evaporation. Have a few weeds? Spot treat them with vinegar. Not sure if you should rake? Normal clippings act as a natural fertilizer, let them be. If you've waited too long, rake by hand – it's excellent exercise.

24. PICNIC WITH A MARKER: Some time in between the artichoke dip and the coleslaw, you lost track of your cup, and now there are a sea of matching cups on the table, one of which might be yours. The next time you picnic, set out permanent marker next to disposable dinnerware so guests can mark their cup and everyone will only use one.

25. MAINTAIN YOUR VEHICLE: Not only are you extending the life of your vehicle, but you are creating less pollution and saving gas. A properly maintained vehicle, clean air filters, and inflated tires can greatly improve your vehicle's performance. And it might not hurt to clean out the trunk – all that extra weight could be costing you at the pump.

26. TELECOMMUTE: See if you can work out an arrangement with your employer to work from home for some portion of the week. Not only will you save money and gasoline, you get to work in your pajamas!

27. KEEP YOUR FIREPLACE DAMPER CLOSED: Keeping the damper open (when you're not using your fireplace) is like keeping a 48-inch window wide open during the winter; it allows warm air to go right up the chimney. This can add up to hundreds of dollars each winter in energy loss.

28. CUT DOWN ON JUNK MAIL: Feel like you need to lose a few pounds? It might be your junk mail that's weighing you down. The average American receives 40 pounds of junk mail each year, destroying 100 million trees. There are many services that can help reduce the clutter in your mailbox, saving trees and the precious space on your countertops.

29. CHOOSE MATCHES OVER LIGHTERS: Most lighters are made out of plastic and filled with butane fuel, both petroleum products. Since most lighters are considered “disposable,” over 1.5 billion end up in landfills each year. When choosing matches, pick cardboard over wood, and wood matches come from trees, whereas most cardboard matches are made from recycled paper.

30. LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING – ONLINE: Consider if you really need a paper phone book. If not, call to stop phone book delivery and use an online directory instead. Some estimate that telephone books make up almost 10% of waste at dump sites. And if you still receive the book, don't forget to recycle your old volumes.

31. GIVE IT AWAY: Before you throw something away, think about if someone else might need it. Either donate to a charitable organization or post it on a web site designed to connect people and things, such as Freecycle.org.

32. GO TO A CAR WASH: Professional car washes are often more efficient with water consumption. If everyone in the U.S. who washes their car themselves took just one visit to the car wash we could save nearly 8.7 billion gallons of water.

33. PLASTIC BAGS SUCK: Each year the U.S. uses 84 billion plastic bags, a significant portion of the 500 billion used worldwide. They are not biodegradable, and are making their way into our oceans, and subsequently, the food chain. Stronger, reusable bags are an inexpensive and readily available option.

34. DOWNLOAD YOUR SOFTWARE: Most software comes on a compact disc, and more than 30 billion compact discs of all types are sold annually. That's a huge amount of waste, not to mention the associated packaging. Another bonus to downloading your software is that it's often available for download at a later date when you upgrade to a new computer or are attempting to recover from a crash.

35. SKIP THE COFFEE STIRRER: Each year, Americans throw away 138 billion straws and stirrers. But skipping the stirrer doesn't mean drinking your coffee black. Simply put your sugar and cream in first, and then pour in the coffee, and it should be well mixed. Determined to stir? Break off a piece of pasta from the cupboard. You can nibble after using it, compost, or throw away with less guilt.

36. FIND A BETTER WAY TO BREAK THE ICE: When a big winter storm heads our way, most of us use some sort of ice-melt to treat steps and sidewalks. While this makes the sidewalks safer for people, it may pose a hazard for pets that might ingest these products. Rock salt and salt-based ice-melting products can cause health problems, as well as contaminate wells and drinking water. Look for a pet-safe deicer, readily available in many stores.

37. PAY BILLS ONLINE: By some estimates, if all households in the U.S. paid their bills online and received electronic statements instead of paper, we'd save 18.5 million trees every year, 2.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and 1.7 billion pounds of solid waste.

38. STOP PAPER BANK STATEMENTS: Some banks will pay you a dollar or donate money on your behalf when you cancel the monthly paper statements you get in the mail. If every household took advantage of online bank statements, the money saved could send more than 17,000 recent high school graduates to a public university for a year.

39. USE RECHARGABLE BATTERIES: Each year 15 billion batteries are produced and sold and most of them are disposable alkaline batteries. Only a fraction of those are recycled. Buy a charger and a few sets of rechargeable batteries. Although it requires an upfront investment, it is one that should pay off in no time. And on Christmas morning when all the stores are closed? You'll be fully stocked.

40. SHARE: Take what you've learned, and pass the knowledge on to others. If every person you know could take one small step toward being greener, the collective effort could be phenomenal.