

Going green for a healthier life means a cleaner world

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

Green buildings. Green energy. Green cleaning. Once upon a time, green was just another color in your crayon box, or a word the neighbor used to describe your gardening thumb.

In recent years, "green" has become the universal lingo for all things environmentally friendly. As a resident of an increasingly fragile planet, you naturally want to do your part to help the environment, so you recycle, you use public transportation whenever you can and you never let the water run while you're brushing your teeth. But as you do your part to protect the environment, it's important to keep in mind that living green can also improve your health.

For example, reducing carbon dioxide emissions can be achieved in many ways, and can benefit your health and the local environment, says Jill Litt, assistant professor of environmen-

tal health at the University of Colorado.

"By deciding to use your bike or walk to get to work or do errands, you will not only reduce your fossil fuel consumption, but also increase leisure-time physical activity and possibly the opportunity to connect with others," Litt says.

Greening your home

Conventional household cleaning products can contain chemicals that may pollute the environment and leave residues on your sinks, countertops and floors. So borrow some ingredients from your great-grandmother's shopping list. Decades ago, folks relied on a handful of simple, inexpensive items to keep their homes clean, fresh and free of unwanted pests. To clean tubs and tile the natural way, the Environmental Protection Agency suggests rubbing some ordinary baking soda over surfaces with a damp sponge and then rinsing with water.

Greening your work

The average American generates tons of carbon dioxide each year commuting to work through rush hour traffic. You can ease some of that strain by sharing rides, using public transportation, biking, walking or working from home. You can go green at work by packing a healthy lunch in a reusable container and eating from reusable plates and utensils. And using a ceramic mug for your coffee, instead of paper or styrofoam, will reduce waste and probably make it taste a whole lot better!

Powering down

The happy hum of a washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher and refrigerator are some of the soothing sounds of home, and like many Americans, there are probably times when these appliances are running all at once at your place, especially on Sunday evening when everyone's gearing up for another busy week. But as your electricity usage goes up, so does the air pollution generated by fossil-fueled power plants — not to mention your electric bills. According to the U.S. Department of



Energy, the appliances and electronics in your home make up about 20 percent of your energy bills. The more energy your home consumes, the harder power plants have to work, and the more pollution enters the environment.

To save energy and costs, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends that homeowners:

- ◆ Wash clothes in cold or warm water whenever possible. Cold water, in fact, is always sufficient for the rinse cycle.
- ◆ Properly seal cracks and openings in your home that can serve as air escape routes.

Checking your home's insulation is one of the fastest ways to reduce energy waste and make your wallet greener as well.

- ◆ Shop for energy-efficient appliances and home electronics by looking for the "EnergyGuide" and "Energy Star" labels.
- ◆ Lower the thermostat setting on your water heater. For every 10-degree reduction in water temperature, you can save between 3 percent and 5 percent in energy costs. Also, some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, but 120 degrees or even 115 degrees is sufficient for most households, and lower temperatures can prevent scalding hazards.

EPA's Web-based Power Profiler can calculate how much air pollution your household's electricity use pumps into the environment, and how your usage stacks up nationally. To access the profiler, visit www.epa.gov/solar/powerprofiler.htm.

>> For more tips, visit www.epa.gov/newsroom/gogreen or www.energy.gov/forconsumers.htm



Digging into health

You don't have to have a green thumb, or even a yard, to grow your own herbs and vegetables. In many communities, people are discovering the joy of sharing shovels in community gardens. Organic gardening is also gaining in popularity.

"Organic gardening methods are better for the environment," says Susan B. Foerster, MPH, RD, chief of the California Department of Public Health's Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section. "Some evidence shows a higher nutrient content, and many people think the flavor is better."

If you don't feel like playing in the dirt, farmers' markets are the next best thing.

Buying "local" is good for environmental health because it reduces the amount of fuels needed to prepare, package and transport your fruits and vegetables thousands of miles on boats, trains and trucks.



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