

Easy Ways to Go Green

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There are many easy ways to be environmentally conscious or go green. This tip sheet will give you my easiest and best ways to be a good steward of the environment. As long as credit is given as listed above, the contents of this document may be freely shared on websites, blogs, and in publications. Credit constitutes the copyright symbol along with the author's name, title and website address as listed above.

1. Change the products that you purchase

By far one of the easiest ways to go green and be environmentally conscious is to simply change the products you currently use for less toxic and healthier alternatives. You may not realize it, but your personal care products including shampoos, conditioners, perfumes, after shaves, colognes, body lotions, creams and makeup are allowed to contain harmful and toxic chemicals. Legally, in the U.S., cancer-causing chemicals that also can cause birth defects like toluene, acetone, benzaldehyde, benzyl acetate, ethanol ethyl acetate, linalool, methylene chloride and a-terpineol can and are added to some personal care products like perfumes. Shocking, as it is to hear this for the first time, there are many consumer advocacy organizations, physicians and other professionals who have known for decades that this is a fact.

Switching your personal care, laundry and cleaning products to natural, unscented, non-toxic alternative products will not only help the environment, it offers significant health advantages. For more information on chemicals in our environment, food and products visit the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit consumer organization, at www.EWG.org. For a short brochure on "The Hidden Dangers of Fragrances", put out by the Environmental Health Coalition of Western Massachusetts, send a one dollar donation to cover the cost and a self-addressed and stamped envelope to: Environmental Health Coalition of Western Massachusetts, PO BOX 187, Northampton, MA 01061-0187.

We have been using baking soda and vinegar as two agents to clean and I can tell you that they work very well. My mom's vinegar tip was to place some vinegar in the toilet bowl and just let it sit for a few hours after which you simply brush around the bowl. We even use baking soda and vinegar for washing clothes!

2. Trade plastic bottled water for an earthy alternative

The quality and safety of plastic bottled water has been under scrutiny by various consumer advocacy groups for some time now. The Environmental Working Group (www.EWG.org) has a bottled water report you can download from their website addressing the issue of quality and safety, which in some cases show that plastic bottled water can be more contaminated than tap water. A green and healthy alternative to plastic bottled water is to purchase a filter system, either a pitcher

that filters water or a filter that fits onto your kitchen faucet, and filter your own water using a stainless steel container or recycled glass juice bottle to hold the water. The landfill savings on implementing this idea are enormous given how many plastic water bottles any given consumer can use in a month or over a year.

3. Rethink how you print and use paper – recycled printing

What happens to all the documents that you print from your computer? If you are like us, some of the documents get mailed, given to someone else or filed. Much of what is printed out, however, is used and then discarded. Thanks to the repeated suggestions of my friend, Diane Gregor, I have finally implemented a printed-paper recycling system. The papers that I print or otherwise come into contact that would go into the trash or recycling now get put back into my printer and printed on again – printed on the back side. There are some fine points to this recycling idea.

First of all, the paper that you save with the intent of printing on the backside must be smooth and free of wrinkles, tears and bent corners. Ratty or bent edges or corners will cause paper jams in your printer. Diane had been talking to me and setting the proverbial example for this for quite some time before I got taken with the idea. The second caveat is that you must be careful about any “sensitive” information. Some pages have content that should be guarded and therefore would be inappropriate for what I now refer to as “recycled printing”. The third tip for implementing this idea is the training required to think about what you are printing and does the document in question actually need to be printed at all. Much of what I used to print out I now read on line. In line with that training is also the training of thinking if I do need a hard copy, will scrap or “recycled” paper do, or do I need a fresh clean sheet of paper.

I am very excited about this idea and when I found many old, outdated papers when I cleaned out part of my office the other week, instead of going into the recycling bin they went into the “recycled printing” pile. I now have over three reams worth of paper ready to use – paper that would have gone in the trash or street recycling.

4. Find creative ways to reuse sturdy containers

In today’s market many foods are available in extremely sturdy containers with lids. These sturdy containers make excellent storage containers for photos, knick-knacks, sewing supplies, arts and crafts materials, nails, nuts and bolts, kid plastic building toys, and so much more. Look at each container before you throw it into the recycling bin. What practical use could that container provide?

5. Try cloth as an alternative to paper gift wrap

This is one idea that I am absolutely wild about because it saves me money, time, energy and it is environmentally sustainable! Some time ago I had this idea that it would be great to have pieces of fabric to wrap presents with instead of wrapping paper. I took some scraps of fabric in different sizes and hemmed the

raw edges. I then used them to wrap our family birthday presents with – and it was unbelievable how much wrapping time I saved! I picked bright fun fabrics and it is wonderfully convenient! I don't have to worry about purchasing gift-wrap when it comes to family occasions. We furthered the recycling theme by using recycled ribbons to tie up the packages. I made a separate video on this, which you can find with my other youtube videos.

I was so enthralled with this concept that last Christmas I made some Christmas themed fabric wrap! Since I am a time management guru, I love how much time it saves me. The fact that I also save money and it is environmentally sustainable is the double bonus. You would not need to sew the raw edges. You could leave them raw or using what is called pinking shears to finish the edges. The reason that I hemmed the raw edges had more to do with our allergies and the fact that I wanted to, if necessary, be able to throw them in the washer. I have only needed to wash one of the wrappers when it collided with some birthday cake frosting. If you try this idea, I'd love to hear how you think it works!!