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How green are you? For Earth Day, check your habits against this list of planet-friendly choices

A beginner's guide to climate responsibility.

By **Karen Campbell** Globe Correspondent, Updated April 21, 2021, 7:40 p.m.



The Babson College World Globe on the Wellesley campus commissioned by Rodger Babson in 1947 to "impress upon students and other viewers an appreciation of the world as a whole." DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

With the climate crisis back on the nation's governmental agenda, Earth Day (April 22) looks a bit brighter this year. Individually, we may not be able to save the polar bears or stop the fires and hurricanes, but there are some simple ways we can step up our personal responsibility toward environmental sustainability. Here's a list of habits to reduce, reuse, and recycle in seven key areas. How many are you practicing?

FOOD

- ◇ Cook less, eat more raw foods, and reduce meat and dairy — according to a [University of Oxford study](#), a basically vegetarian diet can help reduce pollution caused by fossil fuel usage, animal methane, effluent waste, and water and land consumption. If you're not ready to commit 24/7, try going meatless for a few days, or a few meals, a week.
- ◇ Plan meals before shopping so less food goes to waste. (The USDA estimates US food waste at 30-40 percent.) Buy local — look at labels to see where produce originates and seek out local options. [LocalHarvest](#) aggregates CSAs, farmers' markets, local farms, etc. (<https://www.localharvest.org/boston-ma>)
- ◇ Consider composting, even if you use just a small indoor bin. Composting starter kits and organizations offering local curbside pick-up, like [Black Earth Compost](#) (<https://blackearthcompost.com/>), make it easy, processing scraps and food waste into nutrient-rich compost that goes back into the growth cycle of your community — or your garden.

ENERGY

- ◇ Take advantage of [free energy assessments](#) (www.MassSave.com) for lighting and electricity upgrades, like smart power strips to turn off lights and appliances when not in use.
- ◇ Upgrade windows, increase insulation, and keep temperatures moderate — programmable thermostats can help.
- ◇ Consider solar panels — [incentive programs](#) (<https://www.mass.gov/solar-information-programs>) often offer rebates and/or tax credits.

WATER

- ◇ Be mindful about running water when hand washing, cleaning, brushing your teeth (wet the brush, then turn off the water until rinsing).
- ◇ Use the dishwasher, if you have one. According to the [EPA's WaterSense](#) program (<https://www.epa.gov/watersense>), unless you can wash eight full place settings running the faucet for less than two minutes, it's more efficient to run a full load in a dishwasher — and don't pre-rinse.
- ◇ Run only full loads in the washing machine, preferably in cold water, and line dry as often as you can.

- ◇ Take shorter, fewer showers.
- ◇ Consider rain barrels to water your garden.

GOODS AND BUYING

- ◇ Ask yourself, “Do I really need this?” and buy responsibly, like energy-efficient appliances, cars, etc.
- ◇ If you can afford it, aim for high-quality domestic clothing that’s ethically sourced and [sustainably made](#) (find a list of stores and brands at [apparelcoalition.org](#)). Programs like [Patagonia’s Worn Wear](#) ([wornwear.patagonia.com/](#)) offer trade-in opportunities to “repair, share, and recycle” gear and clothing.
- ◇ Fix before tossing, and donate items you no longer use so someone else can. Consider buying (and selling) consignment and secondhand. Groups such as [Freecycle](#) (<https://www.freecycle.org/>) and the [Buy Nothing](#) project (<https://buynothingproject.org/>) put you in touch with people nearby gifting usable goods, building a sense of generosity and community in the process.
- ◇ Reduce egregious over-packaging. Buy in bulk and avoid single-use items, especially drink bottles. (Reusable bottles and travel mugs can be used not just for water but for coffee or tea on the go.)
- ◇ Use those cloth grocery bags for non-grocery shopping as well.
- ◇ Choose washable cloth napkins instead of paper, and invest in alternatives to snack, sandwich, and produce bags — a wide range of cloth, silicone, and PEVA reusable bags are available.
- ◇ Look for products with biodegradable packaging, and urge favorite businesses, especially restaurants, toward common eco-friendly practices — sorting and recycling waste, biodegradable utensils and takeaway containers.
- ◇ Opt for electronic receipts and paperless billing options. And unsubscribe from all those printed catalogs.

TRANSPORTATION

- ◇ Consider if you really need a car, and if so, go electric. If you’re stuck with a gas guzzler, avoid idling when you can.

◇ Walk or bike when possible. [Bluebikes](https://www.bluebikes.com/) (<https://www.bluebikes.com/>) offers a bike share system in numerous local communities. Consider public transportation or carpooling, when you feel safe to do so again.

◇ Group your errands so you can accomplish them without extra back and forth trips.

UPCYCLING AND REPURPOSING

◇ Reuse what can't be recycled, such as styrofoam (good for shipping/storing breakables, lining boxes to preserve temperatures). Neighborhood listservs, like [Nextdoor](#), can put you in touch with folks needing or offering moving boxes, peanuts, etc.

◇ Consider reusing even materials that *can* be recycled, given the state of the recycling industry. Use those old plastic bags.

◇ Repurpose stuff that might normally get tossed — get creative and make something fun or useful (YouTube videos can get your juices flowing). Local scout troops and after-school programs are often looking for offbeat materials.

ADVOCATING

◇ Speak up when you notice waste and be ready to suggest alternatives.

◇ Be open to new ideas and spread the word. Organizations like [Mothers Out Front](#) (<https://www.mothersoutfront.org/>) make it relatively easy to contribute your voice and energy at a local level.

◇ Foster nature appreciation. Organizations like [All Trails](#) (<https://www.alltrails.com/>) can get you started on local nature hikes ranging from casual strolls to rigorous treks. Take every opportunity to appreciate the natural world around us and advocate for it before it's actually gone.

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