

How Can You Live Greener?

Using Less is the Secret to Sustainable Living

By Brad Schmett

Use less. It's really that simple. You don't have to spend thousands of dollars installing rooftop solar panels or buying the most energy-efficient electric car. You don't have to chuck your lifestyle to go live in the woods or relocate your family to a working farm with no electricity or running water. And you don't have to offset everything you do or buy with carbon credits, plant a tree every time you take a long drive or upgrade your house with all the latest Energy Star appliances. Just use less.

Of course, all those other things do make a difference for the better. But the lowest-hanging fruit in sustainable living -- and, unfortunately, the one that typically gets the least attention -- is plain and simple conservation.

Just use less.

Use less electricity. Even the most energy-efficient washer, dryer or microwave relies on electricity, and most of our electricity comes from a truly dirty, polluting source: coal-fired power. So turn off lights when you're not using them. Power down your computer before you leave work. And unplug whenever possible to avoid phantom power drain.

Use less water. While we all know life is impossible without water, most of us in the developed world have no idea how little water most of the rest of the planet uses. For example, the average U.S. citizen uses around 100 gallons a day. By contrast, the average person in sub-Saharan Africa uses just three to five gallons a day. You can cut your own daily water consumption dramatically with simple steps: Don't keep the water running while you brush your teeth. Fix leaky faucets. Take quick showers instead of long baths. And recycle water where you can (for example, let cooking water cool off and use it to water plants).

Use less meat. It takes a lot more energy to produce a pound of beef than to produce a pound of wheat. Besides, study after study show that a diet with less (or no) meat is a lot more healthful than the typical burger-and-fries or meat-and-potatoes diet. By cutting back on your meat consumption, you're benefiting both the planet and yourself.

Use less paper. Just as people in the developed world use a lot more water than those in developing countries, we use a lot more paper too. For instance, while the average Canadian uses nearly 242 kilograms of paper per year, the average Indian uses just over 4.5 kilograms annually. Even if you recycle all the paper you use (and practically no one does), you can make your paper footprint smaller by making the most of every sheet you use by printing documents on both sides, maximizing margins and making sure type isn't any larger than it needs to be.

Use less new. Whatever you buy, when you buy it new -- even if it's the most eco-responsible product you can find -- you're having *some* impact on the environment. Instead, buy used whenever you can, whether you prefer shopping at garage sales, flea markets or upscale consignment stores. It's the ultimate form of recycling.

Use less stuff. All the new electronic gadgets coming on to the market every day might, individually, be energy efficient and better than the older models. But, put together, the sheer volume of gadgetry we're acquiring is having an increasingly large impact on energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, a new study by the International Energy Agency finds that, if current trends continue, energy use by information, communication and entertainment gadgets will *double* over the next 13 years and *triple* by 2030.

Bottom line? There's just no way to believe we're going to consume -- however responsibly -- our way to a cleaner, greener future. Whatever other steps we take, the quickest, easiest way to start making a difference now can be summed up in two words: **USE LESS**