



MAKE GOOD PLACES

SUSTAINABLE LIVING 101



Sustainable Living 101

Summary

Living sustainably within the unsustainable systems that shape our lives can be difficult. Yet, there is tremendous power in individual action. How and what we consume signals our values, priorities, and hopes for the future. The way we live sets examples for those around us and creates a roadmap for a healthier, more connected, and regenerative existence.

This guide shows you how to live your values. It's broken down into four categories: food, in your yard, in your home, and travel. While this is a long list, remember to do what you can, when you can do it. None of us are perfect.

Food



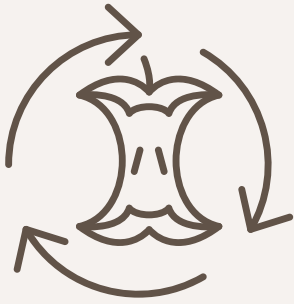
EAT ORGANIC, LOCAL FOOD

It's almost impossible to eat local, organic food 100% of the time, but make it happen as much as you can. Join a CSA and/or CSF (community-supported agriculture and community-supported fishery, respectively), and hit your local farmer's market.



EAT A PLANT-FORWARD DIET

Meat consumption is one of the most significant contributors to an individual's carbon footprint, and we have more control over the food we eat than, say, how much we drive (which is dependent mainly on where we live). Minimize meat as much as you can by embracing fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and certain seafood. While commercial fishing damages ocean health, regenerative ocean farming seaweed, mussels, clams, and oysters can help heal our waters. Plus, plant-heavy diets are healthier for you.



COMPOST

Diverting food from landfills is one of the highest-impact actions you can take when trying to live sustainably. And there are lots of ways to compost: composting services, aerobic composting, vermicomposting, countertop composters, or compost piles outside.

In Your Yard



ELIMINATE THE USE OF PESTICIDES, HERBICIDES, AND FERTILIZERS

Pesticides and herbicides do not discriminate when it comes to how or what they kill. When we apply them to our lawns, they wipe out everything they come into contact with, not just the mosquitos or mealy bugs we're trying to eliminate. And when those chemicals inevitably enter our waterways, fish will ingest them and, in turn, make the people who consume the fish sick. Similarly, fertilizers (even "organic" or "healthy" ones) result in excess nutrients entering waterways and causing algae blooms, which remove oxygen from water and suffocate aquatic life.



PLANT NATIVES

Suburban sprawl, with all of its manicured lawns, demands tremendous amounts of water and synthetic chemicals to maintain. Grass lawns have also made it exceedingly difficult for wildlife to survive because it's ecological dead space. Instead, rip up your grass lawn and plant natives. "Natives" refers to any plant that has historically grown in a certain climate and played a part in a productive ecosystem. These plants require no chemical inputs and very little water to thrive. They also provide critical year-round food and habitat for wildlife, both of which have dwindled in the face of urban and suburban development.



COLLECT RAINWATER

Regardless of climate, collecting rainwater helps manage stormwater and reduces water consumption during dry periods. Rainwater collection systems can be large and complex when trying to collect and clean water for a whole-home system, but even small-scale water collection for your yard helps the planet. One note of advice: you cannot drink the rainwater you collect, and you cannot use it to water plants you plan to eat.



PROVIDE HABITAT

In addition to a wide variety of native plants, creating opportunities for habitat can go a long way in regenerating local ecosystems. Consider bird baths, bug hotels, birdhouses, and bat houses for your yard.



GARDEN

Whether it's a window box, a single potted tomato plant, a vertical aquaponic system, several garden beds in your yard, or an entire food forest – plant a garden. Growing your own food connects you to your climate and the natural world, localizes even a fraction of the food you consume, and offers plenty of health benefits.

In Your Home



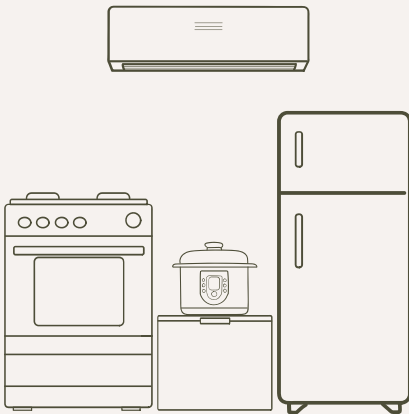
EMBRACE PLASTIC-FREE, NONTOXIC CLEANING AND PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

Consumer goods often contain toxic chemicals that harm both the planet and the people who consume them, causing severe health concerns from their point of manufacturing until they end up in landfills. Worse yet, most of them come packaged in plastic, which contributes to our growing microplastics crisis. Consider replacing your laundry detergent, dish soap, shampoos and conditioners, and household cleaners with healthier alternatives that come in plastic-free packaging.



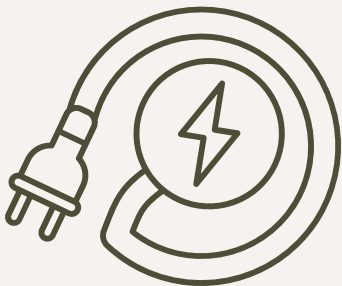
INSTALL LED BULBS

If you have any incandescent bulbs left in your home, it's time to switch them out for LED bulbs. They're more efficient, emit less heat, and last longer. I recommend investing in circadian light bulbs so that your light bulbs can mimic the colors of the sun as it rises and sets (warm in the mornings and evenings but bright and cool in the middle of the day). For bonus points, consider installing motion sensors in rooms like your mudroom or laundry room.



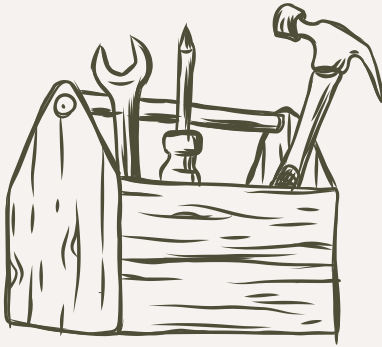
INSTALL ENERGY-EFFICIENT APPLIANCES

(When your existing appliances die): Our appliances claim a large portion of a home's total energy use, so buying Energy-Star Certified refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, washers and dryers, air conditioners, ceiling fans, and other appliances reduces your home's carbon footprint.



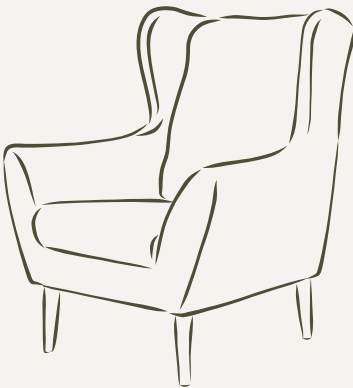
ELECTRIFY YOUR HOME:

While electrifying your home is a gradual process, you can see if renewable energy sources are available for your home at any time via on-site solar or renewable energy sources. There are plenty of tools available to walk you through both renewable energy sources and holistic electrification processes: [Rewiring America](#), [Wild Grid Home](#), [Energy Sage](#), and the [Office of Efficiency and Renewable Energy](#).



REPAIR AND REUSE WHAT YOU ALREADY OWN

Sometimes, the most radical acts are the simplest ones. In what is known as planned obsolescence, companies design their products to fail or break earlier than necessary and then make repair intentionally difficult. Choosing to spend the time and money required to repair goods is deeply sustainable. If something ever is beyond repair, consider repairability when choosing a replacement.



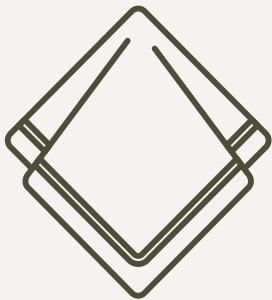
BUY SECONDHAND GOODS

We live in an age of mass-produced, disposable, fast furniture. None of it lasts very long, and too much of it ends up in landfills. Invest in secondhand and vintage furniture instead. These pieces are more unique and of higher quality. Even more critically, they don't require new materials to be extracted for manufacturing.



RENOVATE AND RE-DESIGN YOUR HOME RESPONSIBLY

Renovation projects often result in many materials and products with years of useful life ending up in landfills. Furthermore, the new materials people use to replace everything going to landfills are toxic. If you're taking projects on at home, opt for low-flow plumbing fixtures, avoid vinyl and plastic products, invest in efficient doors and windows, install a programmable thermostat, increase insulation throughout your home, seal doors and windows, use healthy paints and wallcoverings, and find deconstruction and resale services.



REDUCE DEPENDENCE ON SINGLE-USE AND DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS

The less we throw out, the better. While there are times when paper towels are necessary, consider investing in reusable products, including rags, cloth paper towels, and linen or cotton napkins.



INSTALL A CLOTHESLINE

Dryers take an enormous amount of energy to do what nature does for free. Installing a clothesline inside, outside, or both will help you reduce dryer use.



MAKE YOUR TECHNOLOGY LAST 7 YEARS

Apple seemingly introduces a new iPhone or Macbook every few months. Most of us cannot survive without our smartphones and computers, but we should use what we own until it breaks– or for at least seven years. When you do have to buy a new piece of technology, consider a refurbished model.

We can't buy our way out of the climate crisis. Ultimately, we must consume less and buy less. But we all use stuff every day. Our belongings determine the kinds and qualities of activities we enjoy each day. We live and work in designed environments that impact our well-being, for better or worse. Creating intentional spaces in which to spend our days is one of the greatest joys and opportunities in fostering better health and well-being.

DO YOU NEED IT?

If you are going to buy something, make it meaningful. Make it impactful. Make it good. Buy vintage, buy handmade, buy local.



Travel

DOES IT MATTER?

As you may know, air travel remains an enormous component of our oversized carbon footprints. Cars are not much better, but I'm not going to tell you to go crazy here. Do what you can. Walk or ride a bike whenever you can. In the long term, you can consider renting or buying your home in a place that offers public transit and is conducive to walking and/or biking. When your existing car dies, consider purchasing an electric vehicle. Minimize your air travel.

But many of us fly only a couple of times a year, if that. Yet we all eat three meals per day—and we consume all year round, too. When changes like transportation feel insurmountable, focus instead on the food you fill your plate with and the products you bring into your home.

Resources for Sustainable Living

The Make Good Places Library has vintage vendors and sustainable products for your home, but there are lots of resources out there to foster more sustainable living.

Websites:

- [Project Regeneration's Nexus](#)
- [Anatomy of Action](#)
- [Union of Concerned Scientists](#)



RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Books:

- [The Climate Book: The Facts and the Solutions](#) by Greta Thunberg
- [Living the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle: Why Individual Climate Action Matters More Than Ever](#) by Lloyd Alter
- [Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard](#) by Doug Tallamy
- [All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis](#) by Katharine K. Wilkinson (Editor) and Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (Editor)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A guiding question when embracing sustainable living is one that was posed by Matthew Desmond in *Poverty, By America*:

Who benefits?

In other words, does a purchase make you complicit in a system or an organization that exploits people or damages the environment? Or does your purchase keep your neighbor's business afloat? Does it support an organization that gives its employees healthcare, parental leave, safe working conditions, and other union protections? Does it divert materials from landfills or support marginalized and underserved communities?

Everything we buy is comprised of materials that must be extracted, manufactured, assembled, and sold. Ecological health, environmental stability, and human lives are shaped by how we consume and how we choose to live. Make one good choice at a time, as much as you can.



WELCOME TO **MAKE GOOD PLACES**



My name is DeeDee Birch, and I am the founder of Make Good Places. I created it as a resource to help everyone create happier homes that are healthier for people and planet. Make Good Places is grounded in a few simple ideas: that our homes shape our individual and collective wellbeing; that we can all make one good choice at a time; and that every person has the capacity to regenerate the world.

Find vintage and sustainable product recommendations, additional healthy design strategies, and articles about all things sustainability and interior design.