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Real World Sustainability

Simple Steps to a Better Life

by Andy MacDonald

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About the Author

Andy MacDonald always enjoyed weekend trips to the beach or camping with his parents, but he was seriously concerned when he started to take his young family to the favourite spots he remembered.

The beaches and the water were fouled to the point that some places were closed because of health risks. Some of the old camping spots were barren or covered in trash that had accumulated over years.

The streets of the town they lived in were almost treeless and there were few birds or other wild life in the parks.

Much of the fruit and vegetables they bought either started to rot very quickly or seemed to last forever on the shelf, (if only those had had some real taste!)

When he tried to grow his own vegetables he found many plants could not get to maturity. He was told there might be stuff in the soil and the atmosphere which was causing those problems.

Andy felt that there had to be ways to improve his environment without making it a crusade or a full-time job. He already had one and so did his wife!

Andy realized that he was not an expert in any of the sciences but felt there must be ways that he and ordinary people like him could improve their world starting with the area around their home.

He found much to admire and also many traps for the unwary.

He believes his book will save you money and help protect your health while making the world we leave to our children much better.

Introduction

"We Have Met The Enemy And He Is Us"

..... **Walt Kelly - Creator of "Pogo"** ([August 25 1913](#) – [October 18 1973](#))

That statement, delivered by Mr. Kelly's iconic swamp-dwelling possum character, Pogo, contains the essence of the problem and the solution to sustainable living.



Many people have a throw-away mindset – if they don't need it now, they'll trash it and buy a new item when the need arises.

But, the replacement cost is likely to be higher and the discarded item could have been used.

Over time, that process costs us big-time because we have to expend energy producing more disposable items, pay more for the replacements and then pay the extra costs to dispose of them.

Each of us adds to the problem through the way we live and interact with each other and our environment.

And, each of us has the ability to help improve the situation to a greater or lesser degree.

But, most of us don't have the time or other resources to become a crusader.

In the last couple of years I found many things that will increase the sustainability of your environment and which you can fit into your current lifestyle.

They won't interfere with what you do now; your regular job and enjoying time with your friends and family. They'll probably help you to enjoy it more!

I don't expect anyone will take up every one of my suggestions. I haven't done everything that I've listed but every suggestion is based on successful implementation by people just like us.

Some of the ideas and products which I looked into were not, to me, worth the cost or effort involved.

But, we all have different backgrounds, desires and goals, so they may be of more interest to you.

I have tried to give you more than food for thought from my book.

You’ll find ways to improve your surroundings, protect your health, your kids and your wallet or purse, as well as many suggestions and opportunities which you might use to make a positive difference to the planet – all without leaving your own area.

A Simple Question

**"What are the costs and benefits to me
and the environment of this action?"**

This is an easy question to ask but not always so comfortable to answer.

I believe that it can help each of us can make decisions about what we buy,



what we discard and how we do both those things.

No-one can always put the interests of the community or the environment above their own needs to provide for themselves and their family's future.

But, if we ask the question regularly, we are on track to making more sustainable decisions over time.

This book is focused on helping you and your family:

- ✓ reduce your impact on our planet's limited and dwindling natural resources
- ✓ help to repair the effects we are already experiencing from past mistakes
- ✓ prepare for a future where we will have to accept responsibility for their management and
- ✓ enjoy every step of the journey.

We can see that our natural environment and everything that lives within it is struggling.

The options are to continue to do what we are used to doing or to act to reduce our impact on our environment.

My book is not intended as a master plan for saving the world by tomorrow or next week.

It explains what I believe from my experience and research ordinary people like you and I can reasonably do to help set things right.

The advantages are many.

And, the sooner we start, the easier it will be to make significant progress.

Although there can be added costs in adopting some of the measures that I explain in this book, instead of continuing to use the low-cost and mass-produced but less sustainable alternatives, you can expect to see this gap narrow as more people adopt them and more companies develop and improve the necessary technology and products.

Adopting strategies which help sustain our planet will also reduce the amount of pollutants in our environment and our bodies.

That will give us the chance to be healthier, live longer and enjoy every day more.

The most important benefit is that our efforts will help to ensure a better, cleaner world for our kids.



Your War on Waste

Our war on waste starts when we start consistently practising the three R's of Sustainability.

The Three R's of Sustainability

You've probably heard these three terms many times: **Reduce**, **Re-use** and **Recycle**.

They are three of the most important things which you and your family can do to improve your environment and help to reduce the negative impact of human activity on the world which sustains us.

Reduce

"The customer can have any color they like so long as it's black." ...

Henry Ford

Henry Ford gave his customers the best car that he could but he kept his costs and the amount of waste generated down by limiting the number of choices which they had.

One of the reasons for the rapidly expanding mountains of waste that developed societies discard each year is that we demand, and businesses try to supply, every possible variation of every product.

Please don't just blame it the manufacturers and marketers for this. Many customers demand the widest possible choice of products and accessories and even packaging!



A common complaint from environmentally aware people is that products are over-packaged.

For some items of course, special packaging to protect the contents is required.

And, there are many instances where

companies that have reduced the amount of packaging around their products have lost sales to rivals that continued to use glossy and bulky boxes and wrapping.

You can start making a difference by reducing the amount of useless material you bring into your home or office.

Another way to help is by collecting your purchases in your own re-usable bags and making a conscious choice to support suppliers that provide sufficient rather than excessive packaging.

Your personal reduction campaign can start today and, yes, it really will make a difference over time.

Most people hold on too many things after they no longer use or need them.

These may be:

Clothes that don't fit or are unfashionable. Pass them on to someone that can and will wear them and can't afford them. If you get to where you could get into them, celebrate by buying yourself something new and currently in fashion!

Books, newspapers and magazines. You probably have difficulty keeping up with what you need to read now for your work or other current interests. Will you really get time to read the light material which you put aside two or three years ago and haven't touched since?

How many newspapers have you got littering your bookshelves or your garage? Are they a resource or just a fire hazard?

Why not scan the relevant sections, store the information on a DVD or similar device, then recycle the hard copies.

Documents and other paperwork. Unless there are legal or statutory reasons for keeping the original documents, get rid of them.

If you have been making a paper copy of almost every email you get, please change the habit. You will save yourself time, paper and storage space.

If you are concerned about confidentiality, shred them yourself. I bought a small hand-operated shredder which will easily handle the few sheets I'll have every week.

You can probably use the paper strips in your pet's litter tray.

Newspapers are great but they must not be used in your pet's litter tray. The ink can leach out and get on your pet's fur. They could become seriously ill when they lick it off.

Hobby items. You may have stuff which you gathered when you were interested in a hobby that you no longer have the time or interest for?

Are there any broken furniture or appliances that you never got around to getting fixed?

Have you got spare parts for appliances or tools but you no longer have the actual items? Some tools and appliances (especially computers) may be valuable to collectors but most that are even just a few years old could probably be replaced by more powerful and versatile equipment for less than the old ones could be repaired.

You might be able to sell some of this stuff with a yard sale or online auction and buy something that you or your family will actually use.

Or you could give them to a welfare organization.

Toys. Avoid the temptation to give your children cheap, disposable toys on their trips to the supermarket in favor of buying less toys that have better quality components and which will last longer.

Before you buy products, check if they are repairable. Many items are produced cheaply and in bulk which must be replaced and cannot be repaired. They are joined together with pop-rivets or by gluing or melting seams together.

Try to find items which can be taken apart and fixed. When you do, they will probably also prove to be more durable and reliable as well.

Re-use

We can save money, time and other scarce resources by thinking about:

- ? What should be discarded
- ? What is worth storing until it can be re-used (perhaps for a different purpose) and
- ? What might be useful for another person if we no longer need it.

One world-wide organization with more than 4,500 groups and six million members is the Freecycle Network <http://www.freecycle.org/> or <http://www.freecycling.org/> (both web addresses take you to the same web site).

The groups are each run by a volunteer moderator. Though they are part of the global network, each group focuses on their own community. Members give items which they no longer need to other members of the group who have a need for them.

I'm impressed that the system they developed works so well.

Re-use CDs, DVDs etc.

Operation Gratitude <http://www.opgratitude.com/> sends "care" packages to U.S. troops. All contents are donated. One item which they have recently publicized on their web site was for music and other CDs and DVDs.

Donating your excess CDs etc., to libraries sounds like another great idea!

<http://andyhifi.50webs.com/library.htm>

If you're outside the areas listed on that web page, contact your local public library to see if they would like them.

Another possibility is to give them to organizations which care for the elderly or people who need ongoing care in your area.

You can donate "child-appropriate" CDs to children's hospitals!

The Salvation Army, Goodwill and other organizations working directly to help the neediest in our communities also welcome CDs etc., for distribution or they may sell them through their shops to raise funds.

Some of these organizations can give donors who supply quantities of unused merchandise a tax receipt.

Recycle

Some people believe this is the answer to almost all our concerns about sustainability.

If only that was true!

We need to recycle where there is a benefit but you must understand there are also some costs with recycling.

The benefits of thoughtful recycling include:

- ✓ Producing new materials by recycling may save from 50% to 90% of the energy needed to produce equivalent products from our depleted supplies of raw materials.
- ✓ Recycling processes are becoming more efficient so that the energy debit we incur by producing new materials this way is being reduced. But, it will never be zero.

Some of the costs associated with recycling processes are:

- × Recycling requires energy and other resources which would otherwise be available for handling other problems. Local authorities have to accept much higher short-term costs when they recycle rather than just dump our waste in a landfill or elsewhere.

This money is then not available to help meet other demands we make on them.

- × Some recycling processes involve the use of substances that are potentially dangerous and which also require careful use and disposal.
- × As well as the useful products, recycling may produce its own quota of greenhouse gases and other by-products.
- × Recycling some products, such as plastic, reduces but does not eliminate the task of safe disposal of the plastic products.

Over time, these concerns may be reduced by advances in technology and as a more aware society reduces the amount of waste which needs to be recycled.

Recycle CDs and Similar Items

CD Recycling Center of America offers a free recycling service for CDs and similar items that are not to be played again:

http://cdrecyclingcenter.org/pages/suggested_programs

Back Thru The Future Technology Disposal offers a free recycling service for CDs and similar items as well as computer hard drives:

<http://www.cdrecyclingforfree.com/>

Your Sustainable Home

The best place to start your campaign for a more sustainable future is within your own home.

There are many simple things which you and other members of your family can do to help.

Audit Your Home

If your home is several years old, you might want to check for furniture and other items, including wall panelling or carpets that contain residue of formaldehyde. Short-term exposure to this material can cause severe eye irritation and dermatitis.

There were news reports that some of the trailers supplied for use of victims of Hurricane Katrina were found to have significant levels of formaldehyde contamination so the problem may not just be one for owners and occupants of older homes.

Many older homes have wall and roofing panels and insulation for roofs which contain asbestos or fiber glass. These hazardous materials were previously widely used in their production.

These materials release Volatile Organic Compounds (V.O.C's) which can cause symptoms including dizziness and nausea. Even low exposure to some of these products can result in serious, long-term harm.

Lights – Good and Bad

Every form of light, even sunlight, has benefits but also some drawbacks and even risks for us.

There are good reasons for the push to switch from traditional incandescent light globes to alternatives. Some governments have already announced dates when they recommend people switch to Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFL’s) or other alternatives and from which the incandescent light globes may no longer be sold in those countries.

Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy helping us all save money and protect the environment through energy efficient products and practices.

Energy Star has a page explaining the claimed advantages of CFL’s at http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

The bulbs contain metals, including tungsten, and gases.

Some people get burns when they try to remove a bulb which suddenly stops working because they get hot when being used.

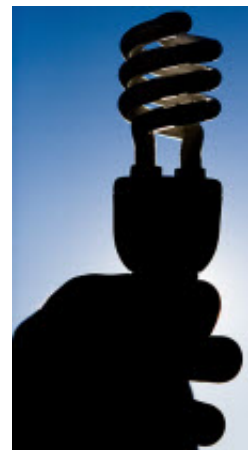
That is a pointer to the biggest drawback with these globes; the incandescent bulb dissipates about 75% of the energy it consumes as useless heat instead of light – completely wasted. And, the useful life of most of these globes is much less than the Compact Fluorescent Light which also uses about 70% less total energy.



The advantages of the new bulbs are generally accepted but, as always, there are also some potential drawbacks.

Two health related concerns which have been widely discussed are the level of ultraviolet (UV) light emitted by compact fluorescent lamps and their mercury content.

The level of ultraviolet (UV) light which they release is slightly higher than that from the old round globes,



but the research by the **Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA)** at

<http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/energyefficiency/lighting/faq-health.html> concludes that “a small number of people with very severe light sensitive conditions may be adversely affected by the very small amount of UV light emitted from a bare CFL”. The Agency has another report which people who may have that sort of condition should read.

But, my understanding from the report is that the majority of people will not be adversely affected, especially if the globes are no closer than twelve inches when they are used.

The potential hazard from the mercury content of the CFL’s while it is working properly is regarded as low.

CFL’s are being improved all the time. But, some CFL’s are not as good as others.

But, cleaning up a broken CFL should be done very carefully.

I suggest that you can your local energy authority or public safety authority before you start to use CFL’s so that you have the most current information.

The vapour and the spilt mercury mean that special precautions need to be taken every time a CFL breaks.

To reduce the possible risks, pregnant women, children and pets must be excluded from the room where the broken bulb is located.

Do not let anyone walk through the area of the spill.

You might want to get a copy of the information about cleaning up a broken CFL from this page document on the Energy Star web site:

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls_mercury

At the time of writing, you could download this document from this page on the Energy Star web site:

http://www.energystar.gov/ia/products/lighting/cfls/downloads/CFL_Cleanup_and_Disposal.pdf

Appliances

Our electrical appliances save us effort and help us to accomplish more in less time.

But, they consume electricity or other fuel and require us to store and maintain them.

Before You Buy a New Appliance

Sometimes, you need to replace an appliance because the old one no longer works or the new model has features which would significantly improve the results you get or it may save you money because it is more efficient or less polluting.

But, at other times, we buy the new item when the old one can still produce the results we want and the new one does not offer any real improvements. That’s a common, understandable action which is, of course, encouraged by the suppliers through their advertising and promotional offers.

Your first question should be, “Do I really need the new device?”

Energy Ratings

When you are convinced that you need the new appliance, and before you pull out your wallet or credit card, check the Energy Ratings of the different models on offer.

Our refrigerators, microwaves, ovens and other high-cost appliances are significant users of electricity. Clothes dryers usually have very heavy power requirements.

Almost all suppliers of all these appliances provide information about the ratings which their appliances get from the U.S. E.P.A. Energy Star Rating system at <http://www.energystar.gov/> or the equivalent program in your country, such as Australia’s Energy rating System at <http://www.energyrating.gov.au/> and the European Union’s Energy Labelling Scheme: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/Environment/consumerprod/energylabels/index.htm>

Switch off

Switch off what you aren't using. There's no reason to have power flowing into many of your appliances or the devices which charge them 24/7.

Unplugging devices that are not in use is wise – it improves safety as well as lowering energy consumption.

Low-cost Options

Here are some energy-saving suggestions which cost little or nothing but can have an impact on your power bills.

Set your thermostat a little higher. You and your family probably won't notice the difference if you raise the level on your thermostat slightly but you will be pleased when your next few power bills arrive.

Put on a sweater instead of using a heater.

Open and close windows to adjust the temperature and circulate some air in the room.

Adjust your curtains or window blinds to reduce the need to use heaters and lights.

Use sealing tape that has a strip of insulating foam on it, or old-fashioned draught excluders (tubes of recycled cloth filled with material, foam or sand) to cut draughts and reduce the loss of warm air from your home.

Consider installing vents for better air-circulation during summer.

A ceiling fan will use a little power but it will cool your room during the summer and push idle warm air down from the ceiling area during winter.

A skylight can reduce the amount of lighting you need in the day-time. Part of the cost can be recovered in using less power. The light you get will also be completely natural and, possibly, better for you.

Washing Machines and Clothes Dryers

Reduce the number of times you use your washing machine. Washing small loads means you use less water each time but the overall power used will be higher and you will use more effort and time for your washing.



Front loading washers may have less power demands than top loaders of similar capacity. If you can get a comparable deal on a front loader, this could be significant.

Clothes dryers are relatively high power users. Wherever possible, use sunlight to dry your clothes instead of a dryer.

Keep the filters and other parts of your laundry equipment clear of fluff and other matter. It not only reduces the efficiency of the cleaning or drying process, it can be re-deposited on your washing which may need to be re-done.



Buy a folding drying rack or two for use inside when you have a few items that aren't completely dry or when there is wet weather. Make sure that the drying clothes and the racks are always a safe distance from any heater.

Try washing your laundry using the cold water cycle to save expense and energy.

Modern cleaning products, including the eco-friendly ones which do not contain phosphates or petrochemical-based ingredients, can clean most garments and other items in cold water.

If you find that some items and stains need more effort, trying soaking them in a strong solution of an appropriate cleaner for a couple of hours before you do your next lot of washing.

Computers

Computers usually draw little power themselves but monitors and other accessories increase the amount required.

This Australian study <http://www.energyrating.gov.au/library/pubs/2007-factsheet-computer-monitor.pdf> estimated that energy consumption by a computer with a CRT monitor was likely to be about seven times as high as

an equivalent machine with an LCD monitor. They estimated that a laptop would use about half the power of an equivalent desktop computer with an LCD screen. That is a broad generalization but the study is worth checking for the other information and conclusions in it.

Many computers have a “sleep” mode which turns off more parts of the system than “standby” mode and is designed to save more energy.

But, for both energy efficiency and safety reasons, it’s better to shut your computer down and then switch it off.

Many people customarily leave their computer on all the time. One potential problem with that, apart from the higher energy use and wear on the machine, is that there is slightly more risk of some part of the system being damaged if there is a power failure or lightning strike.

Poisons and More: Various components in computers and associated equipment contain dangerous substances such as heavy metals and other poisons. One estimate is that electronic equipment is the source of about 70% of America’s dangerous waste each year.

For this reason, you should not just throw your old machine on the local landfill (if your city still has space for one).

These pages will give some information and links about recycling computers.

<http://www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/ComputerRecyclersRefurbishers.htm> has lists of computer refurbishers and recyclers throughout the UK, Scotland, Wales and Ireland organized by area.

The site <http://www.wasteonline.org.uk/> also has other “fact sheets” of interest to recyclers, especially those in the United Kingdom.

<http://www.computerhope.com/disposal.htm> Computer Hope say that they offer “free computer help for everyone” and the information about computer disposal was good.

<http://www.recyclingnearyou.com.au/> Site operated by Planet Ark and Sensis as an Australia-wide directory of recycling options.

Water Heaters

If you have a conventional water heater, you may achieve some significant savings over time if you wrap your water heater in an R-12 insulation blanket and also insulate the pipes. **NOTE:** Some water heater manufacturers do not approve the wrapping of their heaters so always check with them first.

Heaters purchased in the last few years will probably not require wrapping and any benefits from doing so, even where approved by the supplier, are likely to be very limited.

Hot Water on Demand

Another new option which is showing significant savings, despite its higher initial cost, is “demand hot water heater” technology.

These systems are available in gas and electric powered models. They are likely to last a few years longer than storage water heaters and have lower costs for operation and energy used.

Installation is best done by a licensed installer who knows all the relevant factors including what is required by your municipal and state authorities as well as the likely climatic conditions which the system will have to cope with.

Gas powered systems usually produce higher flow rates but electric systems are also popular.

There are currently two main types of gas systems; one type uses a pilot light while the other type has an intermittent ignition device (IID), similar to the spark igniters that some kitchen ranges are equipped with.

If the pilot light is constantly lit, that can reduce the cost benefit of using the on demand system.

No system is perfect in all situations. Before you buy a tankless water heater, you should also know that:

- × These systems are not usually able to supply sufficient flow for two major uses, such as your clothes washer and a hot bath simultaneously.

- × Electric systems may incur extra charges on your power bill if your supplier has a demand charge.
- × Not all systems have a “modulating temperature control”. Those which lack this feature may not be able to supply hot water at a constant temperature when flow rates vary.

The U.S. Department of Energy provides detailed information about how the systems work, what questions you need to ask suppliers and installers, as well as providing useful links to other information sources at

http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/water_heating/index.cfm/mytopic=12820

Solar Water Heating Systems.

Most solar water heating systems in the U.S.A. are used for heating swimming pools. But, as the cost of installing the systems continues to slowly fall, expect that more people may start using them for heating water for general home use.

When you have the new appliance installed and it is working to your satisfaction, check the recycling options for the old appliance.

Cleaners

Despite the ever expanding range of cleaning chemicals and products brought to our supermarket shelves in recent years, many people are opting to use less powerful but less destructive cleaners which were familiar to their parents and grandparents.

Baking Soda

It's called Sodium Bicarbonate by the chemists and the “cleaning kit in a box” by its thousands of users.

Instead of using corrosive and poisonous chemical cocktails to clean your drain, try pouring a half a cup of baking soda into it.

Then, pour about an equal amount of white vinegar down there.

For safety, keep you face and hands well away from the drain because there will be a chemical reaction between the baking soda and the vinegar.

This will break down many blockages, but not all. Even so, it's worth while to try this natural method before taking any more risky actions or calling a plumber.

This same routine with baking soda and then white vinegar can be effective for cleaning your toilet as well. After the vinegar and baking soda stop frothing, scrub the whole bowl with your toilet brush. You may need to repeat the process a bit later but that is still better than using some of the commercial cleaners promoted for cleaning drains and toilets.

Wipe a cloth moistened with a baking powder solution (two tablespoons of baking powder in a half cup of slightly warm water) over all the interior surfaces of your refrigerator. Put a small dish half-full of baking soda in the fridge and it will absorb odors for up to a couple of weeks. After that, use that baking soda along with some white vinegar to give your drain a quick clean.

Soak your cooking pots in a baking soda solution for about an hour before you try to scrub them clean. You will need much less effort that way.

Some people sprinkle some baking soda on their carpet before they vacuum it.

Sprinkle some baking soda over the interior surfaces of your oven about half an hour before using a scrubber to clean it.

Make sure that the oven is completely cold before putting the baking soda in it.

White Vinegar

I suggested that you use this with baking soda for clearing minor blockages in your drains.

But, like baking soda, it's also used for many other cleaning tasks.

Wipe some around your taps and bathroom basins where soap residue has been allowed to build up. If the residue is dried up, leave the vinegar on it for a while before trying to remove it.

Many people use it on a clean, lint-free cloth for cleaning windows.

On the subject of windows, never use newspapers to try to clean them or you will probably get streaks of ink on the windows as well as the marks that were already there.

Newspapers are great but they have no place in your cleaning kit.

Citrus Oils

The juice of lemons is very useful for cleaning glass and it leaves a nice smell which is why the chemical companies put natural or synthetic lemon fragrance in some of their most popular products.

Cleaners to Avoid

Least effective – most expensive: The product which many people think of as a cleaner but which probably has the least benefit when you use it is the small scented block which you suspend in the toilet cistern or inside the bowl of your toilet.

I have not heard of any benefit, except to the bottom line of the supplier, from using these blocks which seem to serve no purpose except to color the water in your toilet blue!

Phosphates: Most companies have eliminated or are removing phosphates from their products. They soften the water and this is claimed to improve the effectiveness of the cleaning agents in the product.



But, the phosphates are believed to encourage build-up of toxic and smelly algal bloom in our waterways (what a friend called “the veins in our country’s heart”). The bloom discolors the water and may seriously reduce the availability of oxygen in the water which destroys most of the creatures in the water.

I should mention that another major factor in the build-up of algal bloom is when the natural flow of the body of water is interfered with, often by land reclamation for building houses or factories or some other construction work, prevent the stretch of water being flushed of impurities.

Corrosive Cleaners: These are sold for use on ovens and in drains. They are fairly safe if used in strict compliance with the suppliers instructions but the chemicals which many of them contain have risks in their use and long-term when they are disposed of through our sewerage system or in landfill. Safer products may require more effort to achieve similar results but the effort is worth it.

Aerosol Cleaners: Many people use these products because they are very convenient. But they may contain chemicals which can harm the atmosphere as well as the earth. Avoid them and invest a little extra effort for the sake of the environment.

With all cleaners, including those which claim “green” credentials, always read the label and check about any ingredients which you are unsure of.

Always follow the directions.

Most companies provide a way to contact them for further information if you are unsure, either with a phone number or a web site address.

Cosmetics and Personal Care Products

Packaging

It's unlikely that major cosmetic companies will change their extravagant packaging significantly unless a particular company sees a marketing advantage for doing so.

The impetus for any such changes has to come from consumers like you.

Check the ingredients of your cosmetics

The ingredients list for many cosmetics is often long and not very clear to the concerned consumer; a jungle of chemical names and unfamiliar terms.

This web page gives a clear and fairly thorough explanation of the most common ingredients and why it can be a bit difficult to get clear answers from manufacturers.

http://www.safersolutions.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=62&Itemid=133

Here are a couple of web sites which offer information about ingredients for many products. I cannot vouch for any of the information on the sites.

The Environmental Working Group's "Skin Deep" Cosmetic Safety Database: <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/> claim that "Skin Deep" pairs ingredients in more than 41,000 products against 50 definitive toxicity and regulatory databases, making it the largest integrated data resource of its kind. The Environmental Working Group's site is at <http://www.ewg.org/>

The Cosmetic Ingredient Review <http://www.cir-safety.org/> "thoroughly reviews and assesses the safety of ingredients used in cosmetics in an open, unbiased, and expert manner, and publishes the results in the peer-reviewed scientific literature".

It was set up by the Cosmetic Industry's Trade Association (now called the Personal Care Products Council), with the support of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Consumer Federation of America. It is funded by the Personal Care Products Council but the information on the site reads, "CIR

and the review process are independent from the Council and the cosmetics industry. CIR operates under a set of procedures.”

Do they Contain Animal Products or are they tested on animals?

This is about caring for our environment. It is a very emotive issue and it can be difficult to get full disclosure.

Remember that the manufacturing companies may not do testing on animals but they may include ingredients in their products which are sourced from suppliers who do test on animals.

The Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics’ (CCIC) Leaping Bunny Program <http://www.leapingbunny.org/> says that it’s Leaping Bunny Seal indicates that “no new animal testing is used in any phase of product development by the company, its laboratories, or suppliers”. They also say that, “There is no fee associated with applying or gaining compliance with the Leaping Bunny Program.”

The European Coalition to End Animal Experiments (ECEAE) is a European organization which is aligned with the Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics. They claim to be “Europe’s leading alliance peacefully campaigning on behalf of laboratory animals”. <http://www.eceae.org/>

Long term effects

I believe that most, if not all, cosmetic preparations are carefully tested for:

- Possible side-effects on different skin types
- Possible negative effects if wrongly used, and
- Possible negative effects if they contact sensitive areas, such as our eyes.

But, some problems still occur.

A friend who worked in the theatre told me that a preparation which was often used by many make-up artists to reduce the wrinkles on some entertainers’ faces was very popular and worked well. But, she stopped using it when her doctor told her that repeated use of the substance on someone’s

face was likely to damage the skin by making it thinner and likely to cause them other, possibly serious, problems in the future.

There have been reports of eye infections which the users believe may be related to their use of particular cosmetics but this may actually be caused, like the skin problem, by using the product in a way which it was not recommended for.

Always read the ingredients list for whatever cosmetics and other preparations which you use.

And, make sure that you follow the suppliers' recommended usage guide. If you are unsure about using any preparation or get any irritation or other symptoms, stop using the product and check with the supplier or your doctor.

Basis of Claims to be “Natural” or “Organic”

These two terms are used in quite different ways to what you may think is reasonable.

But, the examples which I asked about were, apparently, quite legal because the terms have a variety of accepted definitions.

“Organic” might mean “of the Earth” or “produced without the use of artificial substances”, to you or me, but “containing a carbon atom” is also a definition which courts would probably accept. That gives producers a lot more latitude in what they use in their “organic products” than the other definitions.

“Natural” is also sometimes loosely defined as “derived from a natural substance”. The actual constituent of a product may have been produced from a natural, even healthy substance, but the method of extraction or processing may have involved, for instance, the use of chemical solvents.

The Skin Deep database I referred to earlier is one web site which offers their views about the merits of many products.

But, you can also use some of the information and claims to make your own searches in the Google search engine.

Your Garden

You might have got the impression that even the simplest option involved a lot of effort, time and expense.

I suggest that you find some garden related activity which fits with the time and other resources you have available.

Get the Gardening Bug

Gardening is a great hobby which, unlike many other hobbies, has an almost guaranteed payoff!

I have seen the benefits that friends and family have got from gardening.

If you need further motivation, check the Kitchen Gardeners' website at

<http://www.kitchengardeners.org/>

Almost Everyone can Grow Herbs, Vegetables or Flowers

The best way to start is to try whatever sort of gardening that is the most comfortable fit with your lifestyle and your important commitments and interests.

That might be:

- ❖ Some flowers which you can use to decorate your home when your friends come for dinner or a party,
- ❖ A few herbs and maybe some salad tomatoes, which can be grown in a small pot, to use when you cook your favorite recipes, right up to
- ❖ A full-size garden with several beds where you rotate different compatible crops and even produce your own mulch and worm castings and that magical worm juice!



Whatever type of garden you have will repay you many times over for the effort and expense that you put into it.

It also will give you something to take your mind off the issues you've faced at the office or even with your family.

Another benefit can be that you will definitely see some positive outcome from your efforts.

You’re using your time productively rather than wasting it watching some TV drama or playing a computer game.

If you grow your own produce, even if it is just tomatoes or strawberries in a few pots or herbs in a window box, you’ll know it was all worthwhile when you first taste something you grew yourself.

There’s no comparison with the produce at the average supermarket which has probably been transported hundreds of miles, picked before it was ready and stored in a controlled environment to ripen when the supermarket needed it.

Another benefit is that you know what you have sprayed on your plants rather than having to scrub everything to reduce the possibility that it’s coated with some poisonous chemical.

With many crops now being cultivated in laboratories as well as fields, you can see the advantages of growing your own.



If you have children, try to get them involved. This is usually no problem with young children as long as you get them to start with a simple task which they can expect to succeed, then try something a little bigger. That way, their confidence builds as they take on larger projects – great training for the future.

Instead of using factory produced fertilizers and sprays, use natural and much safer compounds to reduce the effects on the soil, plants and your family.

You don’t have to make these yourself unless you have the time and you really want to. There are many companies which offer all-natural fertilizers and even insecticides and fungicides.

If you want to make your own, this article might be a good place to start:

http://organicgardens.suite101.com/article.cfm/organic_liquid_fertilizers

If you want to recycle your own food scraps or other suitable items, setting up a worm farm and a compost heap is not beyond the average person. With the environmentally aware products which some companies offer now, you don't need a lot of space and there is little chance of offensive smells or other problems.

Here are a couple of addresses of suppliers:

- Tumbleweed composters, worm farms and other products are available around the world: <http://www.tumbleweed.com.au/>
- The Aerobin[®] is another Australian-designed compact recycling system which is available world-wide. <http://www.aerobin400.com/> It can handle almost any organic material which you usually put in your trash bin. Even small quantities of meat are okay but there must be a higher proportion of vegetable matter!

Your Lawn

The carefully manicured and frequently watered lawn is the pride and joy of many homeowners.

It also swallows an amazing amount of water, fertilizer and other chemicals to produce “eye candy”.

The first thing to consider is whether you want to get a less polluting, gas guzzling and noisy mower. There are many hand-operated models which require only minimum effort and your savings with not having to buy fuel and repairs could pay for one in a couple of years.

Or, get rid of the mower entirely and pay a deserving local kid to mow it every few weeks. You will probably still save money and get some time you can use more productively. I don't think many people suggest that pushing a lawn mower, either powered or not, is a good way to exercise.

Make sure that the lawn is not cut real short. I know that’s what many people like, but it reduces the grass’s ability to resist invasion by weeds and to use the water you generously provide.

Most of the water applied to a very short lawn just runs off.

Aerate your lawn. You should use a proper aerator which removes small plugs and leaves holes for the fertilizer and water to go down below the surface.

If your lawn or garden is in soil which does not hold water, get some vermiculite or similar material and mix it into the first inch or so of the soil. This will hold more water where the lawn or other plants need it.

Remember that, if your children and pets are allowed to play on your lawn, they may come into contact with whatever sprays or other chemicals you apply to the grass. Some chemicals can build up in the soil or the grass and other plants to potentially dangerous levels over time, even though you carefully follow the supplier’s recommendation when you apply it.

Transport

The family car is very useful but it is also one of the most expensive investments we make. And, the costs keep coming and they're increasing all the time.

Many people are reconsidering whether they really need a second car.

But, there are also a number of people who are choosing to get rid of their only car and use alternative methods of transport:

- ✓ Bicycles
- ✓ Motor scooters
- ✓ Motorcycles and
- ✓ Public transport

The benefits can include lower costs, healthy exercise, less frustration and even quicker travel when commuting in some areas!

Some people think that the health benefits are overstated because people using these vehicles or even walking are still forced to breathe the pollution which car drivers are protected from to some extent.

But, the stress level is generally better for non-car drivers and they get healthier exercise than drivers who just press a pedal or tap a horn.

Obviously, this is not viable for people that frequently need to travel long distances or get themselves or their children to appointments and events.

I use public transport quite a bit. It used to be mostly used by people that did not have their own transport and could not afford cabs.

But, more people are choosing to use it now because of:

- ✓ Improvements to the equipment and the schedules
- ✓ High cost of using your own car for commuter trips; fuel, parking etc.
- ✓ More efficient use of time because you don't have to find a parking spot which might be some distance from where you need to go and battle through traffic tangles.

Minimize fuel consumption in traffic

- 1) Plan your trip to avoid known congested areas.
- 2) Maintain a steady speed where possible.
- 3) Stop your motor if you are likely to be stopped for more than three minutes.
- 4) Proper tire pressure will help fuel consumption so check it weekly during a general check of water, oil etc.
- 5) Don't use your car's air conditioning unless you are really uncomfortable without it.
- 6) Try to reach your top gear without delay.
- 7) Don't use your car as a spare locker. Heavy items which you don't need in the car may affect your fuel consumption.
- 8) Take roof-racks of any kind off the car when you don't need them to reduce drag.

Always help your car by dropping back a gear to get up a hill.

Car pools can help to reduce fuel use and other costs. But they don't have to be formal arrangements. Many women set up casual agreements to share the responsibility for taking their children and those of neighbors to school.

Make your next vehicle a more energy-efficient one (in manufacture as well as operation).

Fuel

Can you take your used oil to a recycler?

Have you investigated alternatives to gas? There is a lot of money being invested in vehicles which are propelled by:

- ✓ Low-sulfur diesel
- ✓ Fuels derived from vegetables including canola and soy
- ✓ Processed recycled cooking oil
- ✓ Hydrogen
- ✓ Liquified Petroleum Gas

... and other options. One of the most widely known is ethanol but there are others in development or even already in current use.

One bad point about using grain for ethanol, a procedure which is often encouraged and even subsidized by governments, is that less grain is available for feeding humans and stock.

This causes the price of the available grain and products made from it to also rise.

Water Wars

Did you know that one of the first parts of your body to suffer if you run low on water is your brain?

Drinking water in coffee, tea and carbonated (gassy) soda drinks actually reduces the amount of available water in your body because some stored water is flushed away when the other materials are eliminated.

Access to water and other necessities are likely to be the cause of many future disagreements, and even outright conflict between neighbors and nations.

There are more than a billion people on the planet already that do not have access to clean drinking water and maybe double that number who live in areas where there is inadequate sanitation.

The situation overall is not improving because much of the world's fresh water is coming under the control of private interests whose focus will, of course, be to make as large a profit as possible from the most valuable resource on the planet. Short-sighted governments grab short-term profits without regard to what we will have to pay for access to what we previously owned in the future.

Much of what remains available to the public is being contaminated either deliberately or through neglect.

Some contamination is caused through industrial and agricultural use but there is also the tons of rubbish dumped into water sources each hour and lack of maintenance of infrastructure.

Factories of all kinds use water and return it to streams, rivers and oceans in a degraded condition.

Many years ago, **Henry Ford** had a simple suggestion which, he said, would encourage businesses to take better care of our water. He suggested that the factories be required to draw their water requirements from below the outflow from their own factories.

We can help by reducing the amount of water we use, especially that which we carelessly waste and use it more wisely.

Reducing Our Use of Water

Even the simplest idea can, over time, cause respectable savings. If you stop letting the tap run while you brush your teeth, the savings of high quality drinking water will add up.

Instead of rinsing vegetables individually under the kitchen tap, put the plug in the sink and a reasonable amount of water. Then rinse the vegetables together. That will save a significant amount of water which would have run out of the tap and down the drain.

Reduce the amount of water you put on your garden and your lawn.

Do your watering in cool periods during the day, early in the morning or late afternoon when there will be a minimal loss to evaporation and your plants will get the most benefit.

Apply water to your plants in the most appropriate way. Some plants need the water applied on to the soil but others will get more immediate benefit when the water is sprayed on their foliage.

The Hidden Cost of Bottled Water

Drinking bottled water is popular but it's not good for the environment.

Producing each liter of bottled water requires the use of five or more liters of regular water.

Each plastic bottle requires heavy processing and some types of bottles are not accepted in some areas for recycling.

The very popular imported brands have higher costs than just the freight.

Transport costs, including the use of fossil fuels, is also significant.

Consider filling your bottles with tap water that you filter at home.

I won't tell anyone!

Using water more wisely

Use a broom to sweep your drive and sidewalk instead of hosing them down with valuable water.

Install a system to re-use grey water (from your laundry, shower, bath and kitchen) on your garden.

Simple systems consisting of pipes which direct the water from your house to the garden are within most people’s ability to install themselves. But, systems which use a pump to regulate the flow of water between your home and the garden will require the services of a plumber who knows local regulations and other issues.

More sophisticated and expensive systems can remove much of the soap and other impurities from the grey water which is much better for your garden but often too expensive for the individual householder.

These systems are often installed when new apartment complexes are built because the cost can be shared between all of the owners.

Replace your old shower and toilet with low-flow showers and dual flush toilet systems. These systems can save large amounts of water.

Some people recommend putting a brick or similar object in the cistern to reduce the amount of water for each flush but I was told this is not a good idea.

Replacing your old toilet from just a few years ago with a more recent model can save up to 80% of the water used for each flush.

Is it time you updated your bathroom?

Pool Cover

If you have a pool, reduce evaporation by investing in a pool cover. If you can afford it, consider paying a bit more to get a “solar pool cover” which will use the warmth of the sun to increase the temperature in the pool under the cover by several degrees.

Then, you will enjoy your swimming more and probably find yourself using it more often.

Sustainable Choices at Work

There are many ways which we can help to make our world more sustainable in our work environment as well.

Telecommuting

One method which is being more widely adopted each year is telecommuting.

This involves people doing some or all of their work from home instead of joining the throng of commuters which clog our public and private transport systems each morning and afternoon.

This has obvious advantages for the employee and can enable people whose circumstances would not allow them to take up a regular full-time job to be useful contributors to our companies and our country's growth.

The advantages for employers are being recognized by more companies each year, though many still are suspicious when their workers put the idea forward.

Some advantages for employers include:

- ✓ They can continue to employ experienced staff that, for whatever reason, cannot continue to work a full-time position. This includes women that decide that they want to be home to look after their young children. Formerly, the employee and her employer would have had to separate at great cost and inconvenience to both of them.
- ✓ Sometimes valuable employees, both men and women, want to increase their formal skills through undertaking courses which make it impossible for them to fit in with a normal office routine and hours.
- ✓ The employer avoids the expense and lost time involved in finding, hiring, and training a new employee who can provide a reasonable quality of work.
- ✓ Many teleworkers provide their own equipment and do not need office space or furniture.

- ✓ Most teleworkers appreciate the trust and greater level of responsibility which their employer shows to them. This makes them more enthusiastic and effective workers.

Some of the advantages which employees that have started teleworking tell me are important to them include:

- ✓ The elimination of the expense and stress of travelling between their home and their office or other workplace each day is like getting a significant raise in salary without incurring any tax liability.
- ✓ They don't have to take time off from their jobs and lose part of their pay when required to deal with family illness or other emergencies.
- ✓ Many people are more productive because they no longer have the constant interruptions from other employees or the enjoyable, but time-wasting, traditional gatherings around the water cooler or coffee machine.
- ✓ Some admitted that they find it much easier to deal with some of their colleagues by phone and email than they could when they shared an office.
- ✓ People that cannot take up full-time opportunities because of family commitments or disability can use telecommuting to successfully get work and add to their employment options.

But, there are situations where people and companies will find that telecommuting is not a valid option.

- Some people need the formal arrangement and regular supervision to give their best work.
- Some types of work involve meetings and discussion with other employees, clients, and suppliers which cannot be easily transferred to a telecommuting scenario.

But, there are also many proven methods which can be used to deliver presentations and conduct meetings where the people involved are not just in different cities but different countries.

There are also benefits for society in general and the environment when adoption of telecommuting is successfully accomplished.

Congestion during peak commuting times will be reduced as more people are able to take up this option. That will put less pressure on already over-stretched transport systems, parking etc.

Power - the Choices and Challenges



Traditional sources of fuel are being depleted and the value of what remains increases.



Current choices for power generation include electricity generated from coal, water, solar or nuclear sources.

The decisions being made now will have a major effect on the society and the environment which the next generations will have to live with.

You can find the **U.S. Government’s official energy statistics** at:

<http://eia.doe.gov/>



The **American Wind Energy Association** explains the benefits of recent advances in generating power from the “free” wind at <http://www.awea.org/>

The **commercial nuclear energy industry** offers its views and news at <http://www.nei.org/> and there is a related blog (web diary) at <http://neinuclearnotes.blogspot.com/>

Varied articles about energy matters from a business perspective can be seen at <http://www.321energy.com/>

The **International Atomic Energy Agency** site is at <http://www.iaea.org/>

Science Daily provides a range of articles focused on science related issues, many of the focused on Sustainability issues at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/>

What Can't be Recycled?

After searching and, where possible, checking on the best ways to recycle or re-use as many things as I could think of, I asked some friends if they could suggest anything which I had missed.

I got a couple of good suggestions, but one lady made a point which I had not considered and nobody else mentioned.

She said that people would like to know what can't be recycled or re-used to any useful extent?

I found that a bit hard to answer because some things can be recycled in certain areas, but not others for various reasons, such as there being no demand for the recycled product or no interest or money available to support the collection and recycling process.

So, this section contains information about some items which are not able to be recycled through municipal or commercial collection points.

You can't Recycle Pillows

Pillows are bulky and mostly have a useful life of one or two years at most.

It would be great if we could pass them on for someone else to use or to be recycled.

But, I could not find any organization that wanted them.

The problem is that pillows collect sweat, saliva and other fluids, dandruff, skin flakes I probably don't need to go on.

I know that most of us use covers and clean our pillows regularly but a lot of people apparently don't and most organizations literally won't touch them.

The best suggestions I heard were to use the filling to thicken up some of your other pillows or to recover one and let your dog or cat have it in their basket.

Egg Trays

The tray or box with individual compartments for chicken eggs would seem to be worth recycling but the sad fact is that the tray is the last stage of paper

recycling and the fibers which makes the tray are too weak to be used to produce anything useful.

Quality paper has fibers which are much stronger and longer. They are degraded through repeated recycling to the shrivelled fibers in the trays.

They do have one further use; give them to your own young children or a junior school in your community. The teachers and carers for the youngest students will help their charges turn them into many interesting playthings.

Useful and Interesting Links

I've put the most relevant links for various topics in the Chapters which relate to them.

But, here are a few more which I believe some of my readers may benefit from.

GPO Access <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/databases.html> is a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office that provides free electronic access to a wealth of important information products produced by the Federal Government. The information provided on this site is the official, published version and the information retrieved from GPO Access can be used without restriction, unless specifically noted.

The Bureau of International Recycling (BIR), Brussels, www.bir.org/ represents companies involved in the recycling industry. This page may be particularly interesting: <http://www.bir.org/aboutrecycling/index.asp>

The Soap and Detergents Association <http://www.cleaning101.com/>

The **Environmental Leader** <http://www.environmentalleader.com/> publishes articles about environmental topics.

On February 27, 2008 they reported that the Center for Resource Solutions launched **Green-e Climate**, claimed to be the nation's first independent certification for carbon offset products.

Green-e Climate's website is at <http://www.green-e.org/>

EPI Environmental Technologies Inc. <http://epi-global.com/> offers "sustainable alternatives to plastic shopping bags and other disposable items."

Natural Pest Control in Lawns - Chicago Wilderness Magazine

<http://chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/spring2005/natpestcontrol.html>

McHenry County Defenders, (815) 338-0393. Bug-by-bug solution list and recipe for make-it-yourself spray.

<http://www.mcdef.org/defyard.htm>

The U.S. Green Building Council <http://www.greenhomeguide.com/> offers an advice service. "Ask GreenHomeGuide a question about greening your home. We'll put your question to our network of the best and brightest green architects, designers, contractors and consultants across the U.S."

A **New York Times** report about building Log Homes without logs
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/22/garden/22logs.html>

The **Safer Pest Control Project** <http://www.spcpweb.org/> "is dedicated to reducing the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois" but the information may be of use to readers around the World.

Safe Lawns <http://www.safelawns.org/> offers "useful Tips and Videos About Organic Lawn Care".

Enjoy Your Sustainable Future

Thank you for reading my book. But, that’s just the first step.

I hope you have found some ideas and possibilities which intrigued or even excited you.

There’s many things you can do to improve our world and the one we will one day leave for our children.

I hope you will share these suggestions with your children because they also will face challenges in maintaining and improving our sustainable world.

I can only dream about the tools which they will create and use when it is their turn.

Andy MacDonald

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)