

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Resolve to make your life a little greener

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Do you want to lessen your impact on the environment? No matter your living situation, there's a little something all of us can do to be a bit greener in 2012. Just adopting one new green habit can make a difference. Here are some tips to help get you started:

The first and most effective way to be greener is to recycle. Not sure of what you can recycle in your town, city or county? [Check out our list of what's recyclable in your area.](#)

Flip it and switch it. Conserve energy and turn off lights during bright daylight or whenever you will be away for an extended period of time. Although the light bulb measure failed in Congress in 2011, you can still choose to switch to CFL or LED light bulbs. CFLs use only 20 to 30 percent of the energy required by incandescents to create the same amount of light, and LEDs use only 10 percent, which helps save money on the electric bill while also cutting down on carbon emissions.

Ditch the bottled water. The amount of energy required to produce and transport bottled water could fuel an estimated 1.5 million cars for a year, yet approximately 75 percent of water bottles are not recycled. And if that doesn't persuade you, this might: not only will using tap water save you money, public tap water is subject to strict safety regulations - *bottled water is not*.

Turn down the heat when you leave home. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates consumers can save up to 15 percent on heating and cooling bills just by adjusting the thermostat. Turning down the heat by 10 or 15 degrees (Fahrenheit) for 8 hours can save you 5 to 15 percent on your home heating bill.

Support food recovery programs. Each year, approximately 1.3 billion tons of all food produced for human consumption gets lost or wasted, including 34 million tons in the United States, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. What can you do? Clean out your pantry and cabinets and donate any nonperishable canned and dried foods that you won't be using to your nearest food bank or shelter.

By local. Instead of relying exclusively on large supermarkets, shop local farms and farmers markets for produce, eggs, dairy and meat.

Plant a garden. Growing your own vegetables is a simple way to bring fresh and nutritious food to your doorstep. FAO researchers estimate that 200 million city dwellers are already growing and selling their own food. A garden doesn't have to take up a lot of space, and even a small plot can make a big impact on your diet and wallet. Start off simple by planting lettuce in a window box. Lettuce seeds are cheap and easy to find, and when planted in full sun, one window box can produce several salads worth throughout a season.

Fertilize your own garden using your own composted organic waste. If you're new to composting or want to make sure you compost the right way, websites such as HowToCompost.org and organizations such as the U.S. Composting Council provides easy steps to reuse your organic waste.

Reduce your meat consumption. You don't have to become a vegetarian, but cutting down on the meat you consume can go a long way. Simply substitute one meal a day with a vegetarian option. Need ideas for how to do that? Websites such as Meatless Monday and Eating Well offer vegetarian recipes that are healthy for you and the environment.

Source: Worldwatch Institute