

Going green: 12 simple steps

By Danielle Nierenberg December 29, 2011

As we head into 2012, many of us will resolve to lose weight, save money or spend more time with family and friends. But there are also some resolutions we can undertake to make our lives a little greener.

Here are 12 simple steps to go green in 2012:

1. **Recycle:** In 2009, San Francisco became the first U.S. city to require all homes and businesses to use recycling and composting collection programs. To make it easier to recycle, put a separate container next to your trash can or printer, and keep an airtight container in your kitchen for food scraps to be composted.
2. **Turn off the lights:** Flipping a switch is one of the easiest ways to save energy and reduce your energy bill. Turn off lights during bright daylight or whenever you will be away for an extended period of time.
3. **Make the switch:** In addition to turning lights off, switching to greener bulbs can also help. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 aims to outlaw the use of incandescent bulbs by 2014, so organizations like [General Electric](#) have produced online guides to decide which lighting option is best for your home.
4. **Turn on the tap:** Plastic water bottles create huge environmental problems — they end up in landfills, litter roadsides and pollute waterways and oceans. To reduce bottled water use, Chicagos City Council passed a measure in 2007 implementing a 5-cent tax per bottle of water sold in the city. By filling your glass from the tap, you can help keep nearly 1 million tons of bottles out of U.S. landfills.
5. **Turn down the heat:** The [U.S. Department of Energy](#) estimates consumers can save up to 15 percent on heating and cooling bills just by adjusting their thermostats. Turn down your thermostat when you leave for work or use a programmable thermostat to control your heating settings.
6. **Support food-recovery programs:** Food-recovery programs run by homeless shelters or food banks collect food that would be wasted by grocery stores and restaurants and use it to provide meals for the hungry. Encourage local restaurants and grocery stores to partner with food-rescue organizations.
7. **Buy local:** Author and consumer advocate Michael Shuman argues that local small businesses are more sustainable because they are often more accountable for their actions, have smaller environmental footprints and innovate to meet local conditions. If you rely exclusively on supermarkets, consider farmers markets and local farms for your produce, eggs, dairy and meat.
8. **Get out and ride:** Chicago, Denver, Minneapolis and Washington have major bike-sharing programs that allow people to rent bikes for short-term use, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing healthy exercise. If available, use your citys bike-share program to run short errands or commute to work. Memberships are generally inexpensive (only \$75 for the year in Washington).
9. **Share a car:** In 2009, car-sharing was credited with reducing U.S. carbon emissions by more than 482,000 tons. By using a shared car when traveling in a city, you can greatly reduce your environmental impact (and find parking more easily — many car-sharing programs have designated parking spots).
10. **Plant a garden:** Growing your own vegetables and fruits is a simple way to bring fresh and nutritious food literally to your doorstep. Growing a garden doesnt have to take up a lot of space, and in light of high food prices and recent food safety scares, even a small plot can make a big impact on your diet and wallet.

11. Compost: What better way to fertilize your garden than using your own composted organic food waste. If you are unsure about the right ways to compost, Web sites such as howtocompost.org provide easy steps to reuse your organic waste.

12. Reduce your meat consumption: Global meat production has experienced a 20 percent growth rate since 2000, yet livestock production accounts for about 18 percent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. Consider substituting one meal a day with a [vegetarian](#) option. For tips on how to make a meat-free meal, visit Web sites such as Meatless Monday and Eating Well, which offer numerous vegetarian recipes.

As we prepare to ring in the new year, lets all resolve to make 2012 a healthier, happier and greener year.

Danielle Nierenberg is project director of the Worldwatch Institutes Nourishing the Planet project.