Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

1. Real food is fuel for the body - and the planet.

By following the green eaters' mantra – eat seasonal, local, organic foods – you can enjoy fresher, tastier foods and improve your personal health. According to one study, organic milk has 68 percent more beneficial Omega-3 fatty acids than conventional milk. Making green food choices also has global consequences. Buying local means supporting the local economy and reducing the greenhouse gas emissions required to get food from its origin to your plate. Buying fresh food means reducing packaging and energy used for processing. Choosing organic foods means helping promote organic agriculture and responsible land use.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

2. The average woman absorbs more than four pounds of cosmetics during her lifetime. Guys, you're not off the hook.

Your skin – the body's largest organ – absorbs up to 60 percent of the products you put on it every day, from soaps to shampoos to sunscreens. Considering that most of us use about 10 different products daily, that can really add up. Choosing green personal care products often means using plant-based ingredients in place of petrochemicals, preventing these chemicals from being absorbed into your skin.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

3. Making stuff takes lots (and lots and lots) of energy.

Every object you own – your furniture, your clothing, your beer cans, your stuff – comes from somewhere; every object has an environmental impact. Nothing simply comes from "the store." To help mitigate the footprint of your material life, choose goods made from green (or greener) materials, such as sustainably harvested wood, organic cotton, or repurposed and recycled materials. Your choices will help protect forests, habitat, clean water, and biodiversity; ensure sustainable land-use practices; and reduce the amount of waste clogging up our landfills. Buying less stuff and second-hand stuff helps achieve this goal, too.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

4. Clean, renewable power is already available to everyone.

We use electricity to power our lights, computers, and televisions, but what happens before you flip the switch? Your electricity has to come from somewhere. More than half of America's electricity comes from coal-burning power plants, which also happen to be the country's largest source of air pollution. By generating your own power, or purchasing renewable energy credits (also known as "green tags"), you contribute to our collective capacity for generating more clean power from wind, solar, and other sources, and you help reduce demand for energy from more polluting sources.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

5. Better transportation means less global warming.

Anytime you choose to walk, ride a bike, or take public transportation, you reduce (or totally eliminate) the carbon dioxide and particulate emissions created by driving a gas- or diesel-powered car. You'll help slow global warming and help stave off our date with peak oil. Choosing greener options such as a train over air travel for long-distance trips can immensely reduce your carbon footprint.

Making proper use of the blue recycling bin has become an iconic action. Reducing the amount of stuff we consume is the first step (and the first word in the mantra reduce-reuse-recycle), finding constructive uses for "waste" materials is the second. Why? Nothing is ever really thrown "away" - it all has to go somewhere. By recycling and reusing, we reduce the amount of waste that sits in landfills (where even biodegradable products often can't break down due to lack of oxygen and sunlight). Recycling materials also saves energy compared to using virgin materials to create new products. Some materials, like aluminum and glass, can even be recycled without being "downcycled," or turned into a product of lesser quality.
7. Your clothing choices impact more than just your appearance.

Making clothing involves a large amount of materials, energy, and labor, including the pesticides used to grow crops for textiles, the dyes and water used to color them, and conditions under which laborers work. By choosing eco-friendly clothing - say, purchasing organic over conventional cotton, one of the world's most chemically dependent crops - you also choose a better product that is easier on the soil and groundwater. How you care for your clothes - using cold water in the washing machine, eco-friendly detergents, and line-drying (at least part of the time) - can all reduce the impact of your wardrobe. Wearing second-hand styles helps divert traffic to landfills, and in some cases - perhaps unsurprisingly - can be 95 percent more efficient than buying new.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

8. Greener goods are more humane.

Just as it requires materials and energy, all "stuff" requires another common resource: the human kind. If you opt for green and ethical goods, you are often supporting local and global craftsmen and communities. Supporting "Fair Trade" products and fair labor practices ensures that goods – from coffee to clothing – were not born in a sweatshop. Buying goods made in the U.S. (and preferably purchased near where they were made, which cuts down on transportation costs) means production practices are governed by strict labor laws.
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

9. Water is not a renewable resource.

Clean water is perhaps the planet's most precious resource, and with the increasing effects of global climate change for many regions across the globe, our ability to have enough high-quality H20 on hand could likely change in the near future. Being water conscious helps reduce strain on municipal treatment systems and ensures there's enough to go around. By shifting away from bottled water, we can reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (from shipping), the energy required to produce (petroleum-derived) plastic, and the volume of waste trucked to our landfills (from empty bottles).
Less of a Footprint - Top Ten Tips

10. There's nothing corny 'bout peace, love, and understanding.

When Dr. Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, the awarding committee recognized her accomplishments by saying, "Peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment." Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement, helped the world connect the dots between women's rights, sustainable development, democracy, and world peace. The connection between peace and the environment has been cemented by Nobel Prize Laureate Al Gore and the IPCC, who have driven home the points that global climate change is an issue of science, technology, human behavior, ethics, and peace, and that one person's actions can truly make a difference. Equating the two - peace and the environment - allows us to understand the big picture and the manner in which we're all connected.
Less of a Footprint – By the Numbers

1 pound per hour: the amount of carbon dioxide that is saved from entering the atmosphere for every kilowatt-hour of renewable energy produced.

60 percent: the reduction in developmental problems in children in China who were born after a coal-burning power plant closed in 2006.

35 percent: the amount of coal's energy that is actually converted to electricity in a coal-burning power plant. The rest is lost to heat.

5 percent: the percentage of the world's carbon dioxide emissions produced by air travel.

1.5 acres: the amount of rainforest lost every second to land development and deforestation, with tremendous losses to habitat and biodiversity.
Less of a Footprint – By the Numbers

137: the number of plant, animal, and insect species lost every day to rainforest deforestation, equating to roughly 50,000 species per year.

4 pounds, 6 ounces: the amount of cosmetics that can be absorbed through the skin of a woman who wears makeup every day, over the period of one year.

61 percent: the percentage of women's lipstick, out of the 33 popular brands tested, found to contain lead in a test by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics in 2007.

1 out of 100: the number of U.S. households that would need to be retrofitted with water-efficient appliances to realize annual savings of 100 million kilowatt-hours of electricity and 80,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions.
Less of a Footprint – By the Numbers

3 trillion: the number of gallons of water, along with $18 billion, the U.S. would save each year if every household invested in water-saving appliances.

86.6 million tons: the amount of material prevented from going to landfill or incineration thanks to recycling and composting in 2012.

95 percent: the amount of energy saved by recycling an aluminum can versus creating the can from virgin aluminum. That means you can make 20 cans out of recycled material with the same amount of energy it takes to make one can out of new material.

113,204: the number, on average, of aluminum cans recycled each minute of each day.

40 percent: the percentage of energy saved by recycling newsprint over producing it from virgin materials.
Less of a Footprint – By the Numbers

Sources: Consumer Reports; Environmental Health Perspectives; Raintree Nutrition; Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), EPA Water, and EPA Recycling; Worldwatch Institute; Energy Information Administration; Ready, Set, Green; Earth911.org; The Telegraph; Yahoo! News

Credit: Team Treehugger
HTGG
June 26, 2014