

EVERYDAY SUSTAINABILITY GUIDE

*7 Good-for-our-Planet Steps
That Are Easy to Take*



The Nature
Conservancy



[nature.org](https://www.nature.org)

YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE.

You want to do your part and help make our world a little greener, a little more sustainable. You want to do it to make your community more livable right here, right now. You want to do it to put our planet on a better path for your kids and grandkids. You want to do it because it's the right thing to do.

But where do you start and what do you do?

You start right here. Read on for seven straightforward things you can do in your everyday life that science shows us will make a real difference.



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OR NOTHING"
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WHEN IN DOUBT,
LEAVE IT OUT

1

LEAVE
THAT
"ALL OR
NOTHING"
MINDSET
BEHIND



1

LEAVE THAT “ALL OR NOTHING” MINDSET BEHIND

Too often, people get tripped up by feeling like getting a little greener requires lots of drastic changes. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Picking just one specific thing to do that you're excited about and that's a little bit of a stretch for you will go a long way. What's most important is that you stick with it — so don't be too hard on yourself if you let some other more minor things go.

Imagine if we could get every single person to shift just one behavior — our collective actions have the power to transform this world of ours forever.

So say goodbye to that all or nothing mindset and find YOUR one thing you can do. Whether it's on our list or not.

Carbon Footprint 101

Many of these tips help you reduce your carbon footprint. Your footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide emissions—a major contributor to climate change—that you and your activities are responsible for.

Some emissions are very direct: carbon dioxide in the exhaust from your car, or emissions caused by generating coal-fire powered electricity used in our homes.

But there are also less obvious ways that our daily activities expand our carbon footprint. For example, an apple grown 2,000 miles away has a higher footprint than one grown near you because transporting the far-away apple causes more carbon emissions.

That's why any step you take to reduce either those direct or indirect contributors to your carbon footprint can add up to helping combat climate change, one little bit at a time.

A top-down view of a dark-colored bowl filled with a variety of fresh vegetables. The vegetables include several florets of green broccoli, sliced orange carrots, bright green snap peas, and sliced white onions. The bowl is placed on a dark wooden surface, and some loose vegetables are scattered around it, including a whole snap pea and a slice of red bell pepper.

2

REDUCE YOUR FOOD WASTE

*Save Water,
Energy and
Your Wallet*

2

REDUCE YOUR FOOD WASTE

Our food and eating habits offer some of the best opportunities for reducing our environmental impact.

Consider the huge amounts of energy and water that go into growing our food. 92% of water consumed globally goes into food and fiber, and 24% of global greenhouse gases come from agriculture and associated deforestation (plus a bit from forestry).

Then think about this shocking fact: Roughly one-third of all food produced for human consumption gets wasted. Since we don't see the water and energy used to produce the food, it's tough to visualize how much impact that waste has!

It's easy to see why reducing your food waste is a simple and meaningful step for lowering both your carbon footprint and wasted water. Consider planning your meals and only buying groceries you will use before they go bad. See our quick tips for staying ahead of food waste.

Rescue Food Before it Goes Bad

Ever eye up your leftovers guiltily? Or know those veggies in your crisper aren't going to last much longer but get stumped about how to use them up fast? Consider these ideas:

Stir-Fry It - Simply chop any meat or vegetables, throw in some chopped garlic and sauté in a dash of sesame oil and soy sauce. Play with the flavors by adding extras like hot pepper or fresh herbs.

Salad It - A simple vinaigrette can transform any leftover raw veggies, cooked veggies, meat, eggs or grains into a sophisticated salad. Combine one part of your favorite vinegar (or even lemon or lime juice) with one part oil. Add a squirt of mustard or tahini for a creamier dressing.

Roast It & Sauce It - Throw some veggies in a roasting dish tossed with some oil, dried herbs of your choosing, salt and pepper, cover them and roast until soft in a 400 degree oven for 30-35 minutes. Cool slightly and puree in a food processor or blender with a little extra water if needed. Then use as a healthy pasta sauce.

Freeze It - Not just for leftovers you're sick of! Go ahead and freeze any ingredients you struggle to use all of, like tomato paste, fresh ginger, etc.

3

CHOOSE
VACATIONS
CLOSER TO
HOME

*Cut Back on Air
Travel When
You Can*



3

CHOOSE VACATIONS CLOSER TO HOME

Flying less is the #1 thing you can do to help combat climate change (unless you already rarely fly). Emissions from a single round-trip flight between Washington, DC and Borneo, Indonesia can equal the total household energy use (electricity, gas, etc.) of the average American family for a whole year.

Even if Borneo isn't your typical vacation paradise, you're making a big impact on reducing your carbon footprint any time you can avoid air travel, or even reduce the number of layovers or stops for a flight.

So consider staying a little closer to home for your next vacation. Check out what your region has to offer. Just getting an hour or two away can still feel like a different world when you change your scenery and explore some treasures in your own backyard.

Get Away Without Going Far

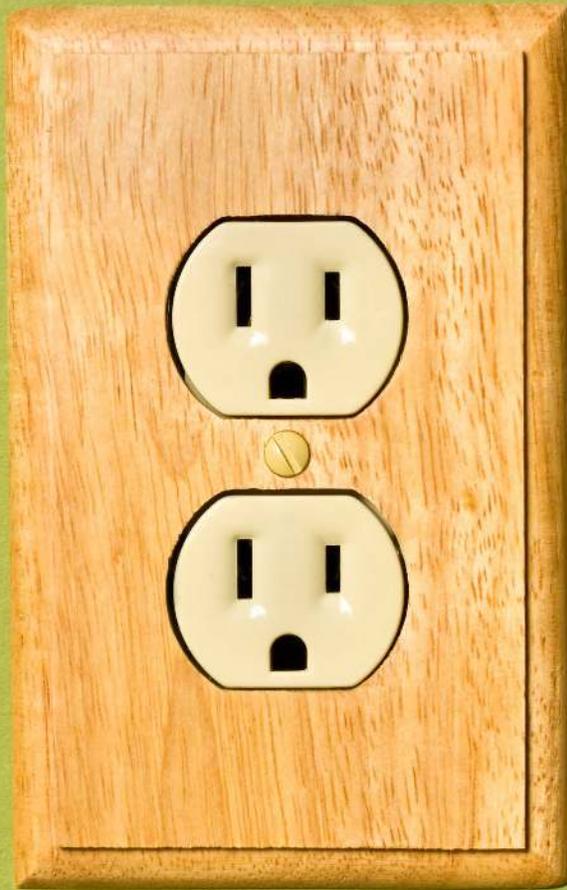
Try a staycation! Treat yourself to lazing about and reading, going for walks in nearby parks, exploring local bike trails, or going to that museum or restaurant you never make it to. Save some money and get to know your area a little better.

Look for nearby hiking or other ways to explore nature. Whether you do a few day trips, go camping, or rent a cabin, many people are within a couple hours of really cool places to get out in nature. Not sure where to start? Open your favorite map application and look for nearby blobs of light green that indicate natural areas!

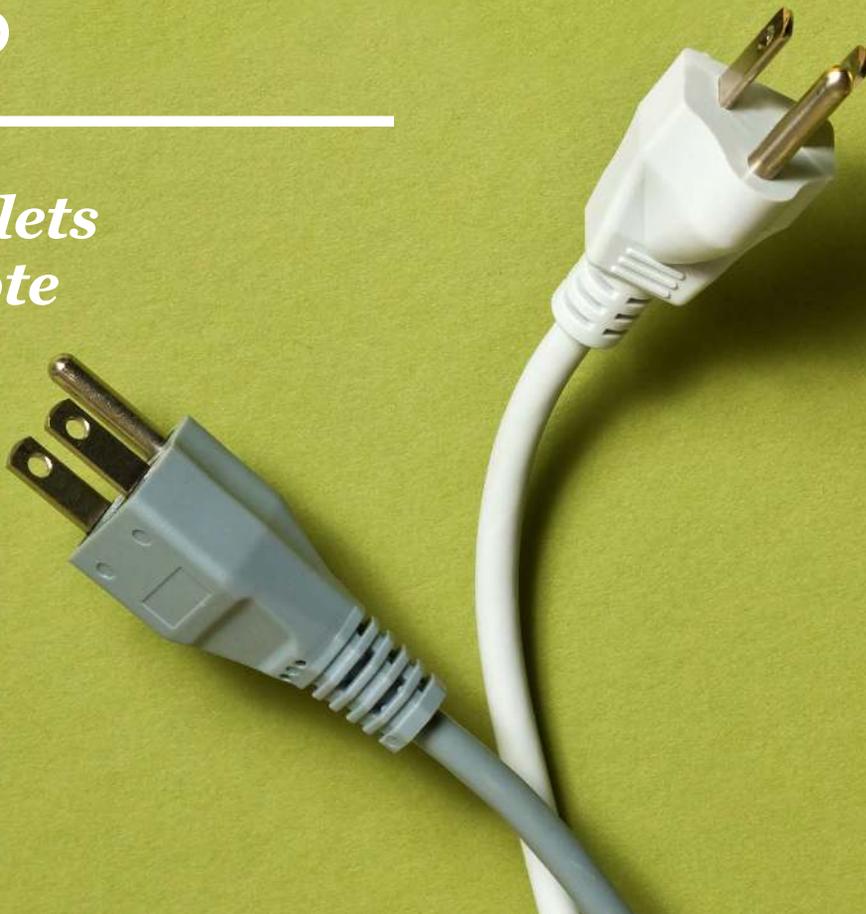
Check out convenient destinations you haven't explored yet. Look at your regional train and bus schedules for a city or region not too far that you haven't visited. There are lots of free travel websites to help you plan your stay and find cool things to do.

4

SHUT DOWN HIDDEN POWER HOGS



*Install Outlets
With Remote
On/Off
Capability*



4

SHUT DOWN HIDDEN POWER HOGS

Many of us now understand that our appliances use power even when they're turned off. It's easy enough to unplug your coffee pot when you're not using it, but unplugging the big power hogs like your stereo or WiFi router can be harder — especially if electrical outlets are behind furniture or out of the way.

The wide variety of 'smart' and remote-controlled electrical outlets that are now available make shutting down passive energy use a snap. Outlets range in sophistication from simple infrared remote controls to full-on app-based models that monitor your energy use and coordinate with other smart gadgets.

With such a variety to choose from, it just takes a little effort to convert your outlets to a more eco-friendly alternative. Not sure what your power hogs are? Many libraries will loan you a "kill-a-watt" meter to measure how much power devices consume when left on.

How to Choose a Better Power Outlet

Here are some of the features you should consider when upgrading your power outlets to a greener alternative:

Price point - Options can range from just over \$10 to well over \$50. Decide on your budget and how many outlets you want to replace to find the price range that's right for you.

Number of outlets - Some models allow you to control the top and bottom outlet independently. Others combine one remote power outlet with one that's traditional. Think about how your appliances are situated and what you'll be plugging in as you select your model.

Simplicity vs. Sophistication - Are you someone who will find it easier to click off your outlets with simple remote control by the door, or someone who will get jazzed about a super cool app that you can program and use from anywhere? There are options for every level of tech savvy, so choose one that fits your lifestyle and that you'll actually use.



5

EAT
MORE
PLANT-
BASED
FOODS

*Shift to One or
Two Plant-Based
Meals a Week*

5

EAT MORE PLANT- BASED FOODS

There's a reason mom always told you to eat your vegetables... It's good for your health and for the planet. Plant-based foods (veggies, grains and foods made from them) generally have a much lower carbon and water footprint than meat.

It doesn't have to be all or nothing. Shifting just one or two meals a week to incorporate more plant-based foods really adds up.

It's important to recognize that in places like the central and western United States, sustainably grazing cattle and bison is one important way to protect and manage natural grasslands, while in other places like Brazil the increasing global demand for meat is driving deforestation.

So when you do eat meat, look for responsible producers who are working to keep those grasslands healthy (or are committed to deforestation-free meat).

Good Sources of Plant-Based Protein

Pulses (beans/lentils/peas) - High-protein foods with the lowest environmental impact. Some are complete proteins on their own (e.g. soy), and others complement grains to form complete proteins.

Nuts and Seeds - While they use more water to grow than some other high-protein plant foods, they still offer a great way to get a little extra protein.

Meat Alternatives - From foods like tofu that have been around for thousands of years, to newer products like veggie burgers and sausages, they're quick and easy protein sources.

And don't worry about it! Most people don't know that it's unusual to be protein deficient as long as you eat enough total calories. Even foods we don't think of as "high protein" like broccoli and potatoes have good amounts of protein per calorie.



6

SEAL UP ENERGY STEALERS

*Insulate and Caulk
Your Home*

6

SEAL UP ENERGY STEALERS

It's common sense that keeping heat and air conditioning from leaking out of your home saves energy. The more energy you save, the less you use—and that reduces the carbon emissions, a major cause of climate change.

But did you know that basic home insulating has the same impact on reducing your carbon footprint as replacing old single pane windows with new energy efficient windows?

Insulating and caulking costs much less and makes a big difference. Caulking to seal up windows, doors and drafty areas is an easy do-it-yourself project (and pretty cheap for a handyperson to do if you're not a fan of home improvement projects). Upgrading your insulation will last for many years and, depending on how handy you are, may also be something you can do yourself.

Learn Your R-Value

R-Value is shorthand for any insulation's thermal resistance. The higher the R-value, the more effective the insulation. Depending on where you live, your type of home heating and cooling systems, and the specific area of your home you're insulating, you can determine the R-value you'll need.

The U.S. Department of Energy offers great online resources for learning what level R-value your home needs, including an R-value map for U.S. climate zones and overview of insulation material options.

A collage of various plastic and metal waste items including bottles, cans, and containers. The items are scattered across the page, with a prominent green bottle in the center. The background is white, and the items are in various orientations and colors, including blue, green, and silver.

7

WHEN
IN
DOUBT,
LEAVE
IT OUT

*Do Your
Homework
on What Can
and Can't Be
Recycled*

7

WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT

It's great that recycling has become widespread and is now second nature to lots of people. Recycling saves almost 16 million tons of carbon emissions each year, not to mention the added benefit of less landfill waste.

Most people don't realize that it's really important to learn what can and can't be recycled where you live. Trying to recycle things that aren't accepted makes recycling much harder. Improper items can break equipment and increase costs.

Do a little bit of homework with your local community's public works department to get official guidelines. Then commit to following them. You can also check out options for recycling things your community's program doesn't accept. Many grocery stores recycle plastic bags, for example.

At the end of the day 'When in Doubt, Leave it Out' is the mantra to live by. If you have something non-recyclable but potentially usable, see if you can find it a new home.

Most Common Recycling Bin Spoilers

Community recycling programs vary and you should check the specific restrictions for where you live. Here are some of the most common off-limits items that well-meaning people mistakenly try to recycle:

#5 Plastic

Commonly used for hot and cold food containers.

#6 Plastic

AKA polystyrene, commonly used for egg cartons, disposable cups and bowls, take-out containers, packing peanuts, etc.

Plastic Wrappers & Plastic Bags

Plastic bags mixed in with other recycling wrap around recycling equipment and damage it!

Oily/Dirty Containers

Contaminants are so harmful to recycling that a whole load can sometimes be thrown out if there are just a few dirty containers. They don't need to be spotless but do rinse them out.

Compostable 'Plastic'

It will often say "PLA" on the bottom instead of having a recycling number.

READY? SET? GET GREENER!

Armed with these simple tips for your everyday life, we know you're ready to go out and put them in action immediately.

Remember, it's most important that you focus on steps that you're excited about and that help you stretch a bit more beyond what you're already doing. Don't feel like you have to do everything at once. If something ends up being a major drag, give yourself permission to switch it up and push yourself in a different direction that may feel better.

Then spread the word with your positive enthusiasm. Your excitement has the power inspire others to follow your lead. Our planet's facing big challenges and we need all hands on deck to create a more sustainable future.

That makes every person and every action you take an important step in the right direction.

Especially you! You're already on the right path by downloading this guide.

So THANK YOU for standing with The Nature Conservancy and doing your part to help protect our one and only Earth.

Want to do more?

To support The Nature Conservancy's vital work putting the very best conservation science in action to take on the biggest challenges facing our planet today, donate online at [nature.org/donate](https://www.nature.org/donate).



Tremendous thanks to **Jon Fisher, Senior Conservation Scientist** at The Nature Conservancy, for lending his expertise and passion to this guide. He is one of the 600 Nature Conservancy scientists who work every day — in all 50 states and in 72 countries — to help build a future in which nature and people thrive together.