

## **LIFE IN GREEN**

Discover 15 easy ways to care for our planet.

Show of hands if this sounds familiar: You're sorry the planet is sick, but you're not doing much to lend a hand either. Maybe you're not ready to ditch your car, boycott your favourite brands, or bust your budget on earth-friendly products. But saving the earth isn't necessarily about sacrifice or grand gestures. And putting the planet first doesn't mean your needs have to come last. Follow our guide to a greener life, and you may find yourself reaping rewards too – better health and a bigger bank account, just to name two!

## **CLEAN UP YOUR ACT**

**Create your own eco-friendly products.** Skip the stores and spare your wallet by whipping up green alternatives in your kitchen. For general cleaning, mix baking soda with water and a dash of detergent – you'll get a solution that's tough on stains but gentle on the planet. If it's an air freshener you need, use vinegar. One part vinegar to five parts water (in a spray bottle) will take care of mild odours; for maximum impact, leave a bowl of vinegar out to soak up bad smells. Adding colour to your home? Try making your own paint – run a search online for “safe, natural paint” or “homemade flour paint” to get the recipes.

**Eat right – for the planet.** To a growing number of environmentalists, this means eating less meat. According to the UN, meat production accounts for nearly a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions; that's more gas emissions than from all forms of transport combined. Not enough reason to cut back? You've probably heard this one before – greening your diet will reduce your risk of cancer and heart disease. Whether you decide on a meatless meal a day or a meat-free day a week, you'll be making a difference where it counts.

**Use technology wisely.** Here are some tips to get you started:

Computers: Choose “sleep” or “standby” modes over screensavers, which can consume as much energy as an active screen.

TVs: If you're upgrading to a flat screen, give plasma TVs a miss; they're said to be the least energy-efficient models around.

Mobile phones: Charge your phone when you're awake, so you can pull the plug as soon as it's powered up.

**Connect with nature.** If you're plugged in to an electrical outlet or gadget 24/7, you could be suffering from what author Richard Louv calls “nature deficit disorder.”

Take a cue from the US National Wildlife Federation's call to enjoy “one green hour” (Greenhour.org) with your family every day, be it at a park or on a hiking trail. You'll consume less energy outdoors, and more importantly, you'll develop newfound respect for our natural environment.

**Make green investments.** Increasingly, companies are exploring green technologies and products, and the pickings are ripe for the environmentally savvy investor. If you're new to the game, get up to speed with e-resources like Sustainablebusiness.com and Altenergystocks.com.

## **GO GREEN AT WORK**

**Be a virtual activist.** You've probably seen the email signature "Think before you print this email," or a variation. Greening your signature is a simple yet effective way to remind others to curb their printing habits. If you want to do more, you could feature an eco tip or green link (e.g. [Thestoryofstuff.com](http://Thestoryofstuff.com)) instead.

**Give away media kits and other company documents on USB flash drives.** This not only cuts down on paper and ink usage – it's also a practical gift for the recipient.

**Set up a station for used office supplies.** This is where people can offload what they no longer need, and take what they do. Supplies get another chance to be useful, companies save money, and best of all – no more stationery swiping.

**Go staple-less.** Persuade the person in charge of office supplies to order some "staple-free staplers," which work like regular staplers, except they cut a flap and slit in each paper for stitching all the papers together. This device helps save energy because it cuts out the staple-removal process during recycling. The only drawback – the staplers are said to work best with five or less pages.

**Narrow your margins.** It took an aspiring actress-writer on a shoestring budget to highlight what many of us already knew – that you could save paper by decreasing your word documents' margins, so that more text could be printed on each page. Tamara Krinsky tells her story on [Changethemargins.com](http://Changethemargins.com), where she provides instructions on adjusting your margins and invites you to join her in petitioning Microsoft to reduce their default margins in Word. "It's not a new idea. It's not complicated," says Krinsky. "But if we all did it, it just might work."

## **GET A GREEN MAKEOVER**

**Simplify your skincare routine.** Dermatologists know a great deal more about skin than the people who're trying to sell you cosmetics. Most cosmetic beauty claims can't be proven, and according to some dermatologists, a gentle cleanser and a good sunscreen are sufficient for the average person's daily skincare needs.

**Check if the products you're using are good for you and the planet.** Visit the US Environmental Working Group's database ([Cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://Cosmeticsdatabase.com)) – this online safety guide will dish the dirt on over 40,000 skincare and make-up products, as well as provide lists of products that are deemed safe for use.

**Make better decisions.** Torn between two similar products in the same price range? Here's the quickest way to make a green decision: compare the contents of both products and pick the one with fewer ingredients. You can't go wrong by limiting your exposure to chemicals. If there isn't a clear winner, choose the product with less packaging – at the very least, it'll be kinder for the environment.

**Take a vacation – from chemicals.** Green author Diane MacEachern suggests two ways to do this: use fewer or no cosmetics when you're not working, and pick a weekend a month to "go natural," i.e. free yourself from all beauty and personal care products, apart from what you need to shower, brush your teeth, and wash your face.

**For every beauty problem, there's a DIY solution.** And the battle's half won if you know where to get help. Planet Green ([Planetgreen.discovery.com](http://Planetgreen.discovery.com)) offers beauty

recipes ranging from nature's answer to Botox (an organic spinach and kale mask) to an eco-blusher made by blending strawberries with beet powder and olive oil.

**BOX:**

**WHAT'S BEHIND THE ECO-BEAUTY LABEL?**

**Organic/Natural:** In a perfect world, these labels would refer to plant-based, minimally processed ingredients. Unfortunately, we live in a world where so-called "organic" or "natural" personal care products aren't regulated by authorities like the US Food and Drug Administration. That's why you'll find these labels on products containing animal-derived ingredients, petroleum products, synthetic colours, and other artificial ingredients.

**Hypoallergenic:** Many products with the "hypoallergenic" label do not contain the most common allergenic substances. But at present, there is no comprehensive or reliable standard for how the term should be applied, which explains why some hypoallergenic products may contain ingredients that trigger allergic reactions.

**Noncomedogenic:** This label – intended as a guide for acne sufferers – is applied on products that have been tested and found not to clog pores. Many believe the term also means "oil-free," but this may not always be the case. Further, because breakouts have various triggers, using noncomedogenic products will not guarantee a blemish-free complexion.