



Be Good to the Environment and Yourself

By Karen Peterson

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

So simple. Any good environmentalist, or wannabe, knows this is what we should be doing. But what are we actually doing to achieve these goals? Do we practice what we preach?

We have long since become a society of excess and disposables, and the only way to change this is by changing our attitudes.

Reduce. You won't have to recycle something if you don't buy it in the first place. Is the item a "want-to-have," would be "nice-to-have," or a really, really "need-to-have?" Do you need another cell phone, or does this one still do the job? From a Green standpoint, and in a tight economy, these are the big questions we should be asking ourselves before shopping for anything. Some purchases we can't avoid, so do your homework and seek out Green solutions. Is there a more energy efficient version, and a socially and environmentally responsible company behind the product? **Again, do your homework.**

If you have never seen [Chris Jordan's "Running the Numbers"](#) I & II, then I suggest you go to his website to see his artistic messages to all of us. **Make sure you click on his pictures to zoom-in.** These are images you won't soon forget.



Recycle. When you absolutely need something, try to buy items with minimal and recyclable packaging when possible. On large items and appliances, ask what happens to the old one if the company removes it from your home, or seek out recycling options on your own.

Recycle at home. You would be surprised at how many people don't do it. It's so simple and can have an enormous impact on the environment. Set up recycling bins in the kitchen. You used to have to wash out cans and bottles, but that's no longer the case. Save water and don't wash them out. Recycle junk mail and papers, or use them for scrap paper and notes. (itsecotime.com)

Forget about facebook, look at what Tom Szaky, a then 20-year-old Princeton University freshman, created in 2001. TerraCycle.net is an innovative company whose purpose is to eliminate the idea of waste. They do this by creating collection and solution programs for all kinds of typically non-recyclable waste called "brigades," they turn collected waste into new products, ranging from recycled park benches to **upcycled** backpacks.



Reuse. On a small scale, this one's easy, right? Don't buy paper goods, plastic items or styrofoam anything. Bring re-usable canvas bags to the grocery store and every store you frequent. Stay away from plastic water and beverage bottles. Good start, and if this is all you're going to do, then please do it **religiously**. But, there's so much more you can do.

Consider this: One study showed the average power tool bought by a homeowner, is used for just half an hour in its lifetime. And yet, most homes have the same tool sitting in the basement. **Borrowing is free.** Ask around, make some calls, or post a note on a community bulletin board before you purchase the tool, the kitchen appliance you need for one occasional recipe or that wheel barrow you need for a once-a-year gardening project.

Freecycle.org is a great website that connects people getting rid of useable stuff to people who want that same stuff. Need a new computer keyboard or mouse? Ask the network. Replacing your microwave oven? Offer it to the world. It's as easy as connecting, arranging a time and place to meet, and giving stuff away, for nothing. If you can't find the item for free, look into renting. Hardware stores often have rental programs for power equipment and tools you may only occasionally use. (1)

Visit Your Library. The average American family spends a lot of cash on books, magazines and newspapers. Community libraries are free and offer the same materials. You can also borrow music and movies and save the cost of renting or buying.

Goodwill® and second-hand stores are thriving in this economy and they're perfect places to find items that can be reused. Get creative, be eclectic. You can find some amazing items for your home, and donate items you no longer need for someone else. One woman's trash is indeed another's treasure. Don't keep filling up landfills by throwing things away.

Remember (existentially speaking) **things don't make us happy**. To have more... want less. You may be surprised at how much you already have. Enjoy good friends, fresh air, a beautiful sunny or snowy day. Don't take the earth for granted. **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** and do whatever you can to help protect our planet.

(1)Excerpts from www.thedailygreen.com

Photos stock.xchang, istock, chrisjordon.com