

Save Energy and Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

Inflate your car tires. When walking or biking isn't feasible, you can still take a step in the right direction by inflating your car tires to manufacturer recommended levels. Proper inflation can improve your gas mileage by about 3.3 percent -- a savings of about 7 cents per gallon (compared to under-inflated tires). It's the right thing to do for your wallet and the right thing to do for the Earth.

Turn down the hot water heater. Set your water heater to 130° F. While you're at it, turn down your house thermostat during the winter to 55° F when you go to bed or leave home. These simple actions can have enormous positive consequences, preventing the emission of more than 1,100 pounds of carbon dioxide over the course of the year, while cutting your energy bill by more than 10 percent. And that's just from you! Get your friends on board, and the benefits will multiply.

Purchase EnergyStar-labeled appliances. EnergyStar products are among the top 25 percent most efficient and can provide a 30 percent return or better through lower utility bills.

Wash and rinse in cold water. If everyone in the United States alone switched to cold water with their washing machines, we could save about 30 million tons of carbon dioxide each year -- and more than \$3 billion in energy costs, collectively. And what's more? Cold water cleans your laundry just as well as hot water.

Buy locally produced meats and produce. Sounds like a good idea, but you don't know where to start? Just type in your zip code on Local Harvest's website to see a list of farms and farmers' markets close to home, as well as nearby restaurants committed to supporting their neighbors. Buying locally produced food cuts out the middlemen and the vast amounts of energy required to get your products onto store shelves. Most produce in U.S. supermarkets travels an average 1,500 miles before it is sold!

Drink more water from reusable containers. It's great for your bank account, your health, and your planet. The average American consumed more than 400 beverage bottles (away from home) in 2006, leaving behind wasted plastic. That adds up to excessive amounts of fossil fuels and hydropower for mining, processing, refining, shaping, shipping, storing, refrigerating, and disposing of those materials. Of course, changing your drinking habits both at home and at work is applicable to just about every other habit, as well. You've heard it before and you'll hear it again: Reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Walk, bike, and carpool. In the United States, the car represents one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. However, you don't have to give up your car for a healthier planet, just expand your transportation options. Try combining trips or carpooling. Carpooling saves energy, cuts down on additional pollution, and allows you to take a turn as a passenger instead of driving everyday.