



SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Apache Warriors were famous for detecting the presence of Western invaders through pollution: they could see the smoke from their fires. Unfortunately, lifestyles that promote pollution are now, for all practical purposes, compulsory. With a bit of effort, however, it is possible to reduce the effect of your living on climate change by thinking about your everyday activities and by taking action to live more sustainably.

The changes that you can make to be more sustainable take many forms. From big things like planning your travel to take the train instead of flying, choosing clothes that can be worn for several seasons instead of fast fashion, as well as mending something instead of buying another one. The most simple measures such as carrying a re-usable cup for those take-away coffees, taking bags and containers to the supermarket, and refusing to buy items wrapped in plastic.



Diet

Thinking about diet can help to be more sustainable, too. The meat and dairy industry are now acknowledged to be an inefficient and carbon-heavy use of land. Some plant based foods are being grown on land from cut-down rain-forest. It is well worth researching the brands to see what their ethical policies are and how much effect they have on the environment. Home grown fruit and veg not only have better flavour, but also have not travelled around the world--their carbon footprint is tiny, if not non-existent. Eating seasonal and local foods rather than, for instance, raspberries and green beans in January that have flown half-way round the world to reach you is another way to sustainably alter your diet.

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Using simple home-made recipes for cleaning materials, shampoos, and soaps that are made of herbs, essential oils, vinegar, bicarbonate of soda, lemon juice... these alternatives are all so much better for the planet than shop-bought products which often contain plastics within them as well as the packaging.

Plastics

Plastics are perhaps the biggest scourge of the modern age. These usually are carbon-based materials that are strong, malleable, and can be cast into any shape required. They can be made from natural materials, but are usually made from crude oil and their production is linked in with the other parts of the heavily subsidised and state supported fossil fuel industry.



Plastics are usually not biodegradable and they are used in ways that encourage their disposal. Plastics are found in the sea, in the ice in Antarctica, and in the bodies of sea creatures. Recent studies have discovered micro-plastics in the cells of almost every living species, including human beings.

Non-biodegradable plastics are not a bad thing in themselves, as there may be some uses. However, they are used because they are inexpensive and disposable.

Recycling



Most towns and cities have a local dump, or more than one. These are usually big holes in the ground where all kinds of toxic and poisonous trash has been mixed with food waste and the few bits of plastic that didn't get thrown in the sea.

This happens because our societies are run on the idea that saving money is more important than saving the ecosystems that all life needs to survive. It is cheaper to mine new copper than to dismantle, collect, and melt down old copper.

In recent years, there has been a lot more recycling happening. Glass, cardboard, garden waste, hard plastics, metals, electrical appliances....all these are now commonly recycled. There is progress, but more needs to be done. Citizens are expected to separate their waste before it is collected or taken to the recycling centres. This is an improvement yet good research is needed to be sure what is happening to your waste. A lot of plastic is sold to countries far away from our Western eyes, where they are dumped in the jungle.

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Re-Using & Re-Purposing

Many items can be re-used after their working life is over. Clothes can be mended! Patching and darning are old skills that are being forgotten in the stampede to fast fashion. After the clothes become unwearable, they can be torn up for use as cloths and after that composted (only bio-degradable and non-aniline dyes can be composted). Many charity shops rely on donations of used clothing, too.



***Think before you put something into the rubbish:
can it be re-used by someone else or in another way?***



In days gone by, old shirts and skirts were re-purposed as patchwork, making quilts for the bed, or rag rugs for the floor. These are skills that still exist today. You will often see beautiful items on sale for a lot of money....it's a skill that can be learned using your own things, for free and for fun!

Furniture and leisure objects, too, can be upcycled, refurbished, and given a new life. In Ireland, there are now groups who will take things to be mended and sold for charity or they can teach you how to mend things yourself...that can be quite fun and very satisfying.

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