

# Sustainable Actions in Your Life

*Notes on achieving Sustainable Living*

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## Reuse, Reduce, Repair, Repurpose, Reinvent, Recycle

*Living sustainably means we ensure a good quality of life and resources for many generations to come. How do we practice sustainable living before you can vote and once you can vote? The points herein explore practical actions towards sustainable living for young people, their families, and the communities in which we all live.*

**The environment is global.** Climate change is global [[WHO Climate](#)]. Most of our markets are global. Energy is global. So, how can we use sustainable practices to reduce waste and pollution, save money, increase energy efficiency, and live in a healthier world?

**Fossil Fuels.** We know using fossil fuels creates the greenhouse gases that are driving climate change, pollution, environmental degradation, and impacting our health [[UN Site](#)]. So, we must reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. Plastic is a fossil fuel product, so we must reduce our use of that. One study predicts more plastic by weight in the oceans than fish by 2050 (how old will you be then?) [[Voting-Climate-Energy Overview](#)].

**Your Sustainability Journey.** To begin your journey towards sustainability, first - don't panic. Move forward with the easy stuff first, things you can do that are not expensive and can create a healthier environment at home, school or work. Start a calendar with monthly and yearly goals. Realize buying something cheap that will break will end up costing you more money and creating more waste, versus something sustainable (maybe costs a bit more) and long-lasting.

### **PLAN and PREPARE - *MAP IT OUT*:**

1. Make a calendar with goals and target dates for sustainable actions listed below.
2. Make a budget and prioritize "doable" sustainable actions that fit your timeframe & budget.
3. Make a map of local sustainable products stores in your community so you can plan smart shopping. Include donation drop-off facilities, such as Good Will and Habitat for Humanity.
4. Make a map for locations of recycling stations, hazardous materials drop-off stations (batteries, paint, pesticides/herbicides, etc.), and composting facilities.
5. Make a list and map of routes for community services and public transportation.
6. Start tracking your Carbon Foot Print as a measure of your progress towards sustainability [[Carbon Footprint Calculator](#)].

## **YOUR HEALTH:**

1. Before you buy - ***READ THE LABELS.*** Avoid products and packaging that are harmful to you and the environment (see below).
2. Eat local, organic, non-processed foods. Drink more water, less sodas and sweet drinks.
3. Exercise and walk in your community's green spaces: parks and natural areas.
4. Reduce time on social media (this can result in better sleep, less anxiety, reduced stress, and improved mental well-being).
5. Careful with Artificial Intelligence. Check your sources, check AI sources - are they real, are they accurate? Make sure you are still developing your critical thinking skills.

## **YOUR ENVIRONMENT:**

1. Your home, yard and work places all represent the built environment, and these are part of and within the larger environment. Making these spaces healthy is a critical sustainable action [[Healthy Environment](#)].
2. Visiting and exercising and exploring in natural spaces, especially community green spaces, improves your health and by frequenting such places helps strengthen your community's upkeep and expansion of green spaces.
3. Realize that everything we do and everything we have comes from the environment. The lists below delve into all of these things in our lives.
4. What you do and how you live your life will affect climate change and the environment.

## **ENERGY:**

1. Turn off all electrical devices when not in use, and unplug chargers when charging is done - a power strip with an "OFF" switch can make this easy. These things save you money.
2. If you are moving to or building a new home - be sustainable [[Energy Saving Homes](#)].
3. If it's cool in the room, put a sweater on before turning up the heat.
4. Replace old appliances with energy-efficient models.
5. Replace older light bulbs with energy-efficient LEDs.
6. Install solar panels / battery backup systems reduces GRID reliance [[Renewable Energy](#)] [[Solar Panel Installation](#)].
7. Use renewable/rechargeable batteries in home/work products and appliances.
8. Manage your time on-line; scrolling and AI queries use huge amounts of energy and suck up your time, and impact your critical thinking skills.

## **WATER:**

1. In-home water use can be reduced by taking shorter showers and use low-flow shower heads, use dual-flush toilets with water saving settings, using efficient dish washers, making sure faucets are shut off [[EPA Water Use](#)].
2. Avoid using bottled water, especially in plastic bottles.
3. In-yard water use - don't water in the heat of the day; early morning or evenings.
4. Use rain barrels to collect rainwater for yard/garden use.
5. Collect gray water from sink/shower drains (non-toilet sources) for watering gardens (but use organic soaps with minimal harmful additives).

## **PACKAGING:**

1. Reduce your use of paper and cardboard. Avoid plastic.
2. Shop at stores to where you can control packaging and/or buy in bulk and/or use your own reusable bags, boxes and containers (glass, metal and wood preferred to plastic).
3. Avoid single use/one-time use plastic packaging for food and other purchases. National Geographic reports that 40% of all single-use plastics are sourced from packaging.
4. Find packaging alternatives [[smart packaging](#)]
5. Support producer packaging responsibilities: EPR - Extended Producer Responsibility.
6. When dining out, bring your own glass, cardboard or metal “takeout” container for leftovers, don’t rely on styrofoam / plastic carryout single use containers [[Good Start Packaging](#)].
7. For left-overs at home, use glass or metal containers with wood or silicone snap tops - avoid plastic containers.
8. Take reusable shopping bags and cloth vegetable bags to the store (don’t use the plastic bags for veggies or other groceries).

## **PRODUCTS:**

1. Think before you buy! **READ LABELS**. Buy less, buy better [[Sustainable Products](#)].
2. Buy from brands that support sustainability, recycling, and reusing. Check their websites and keep a list on your refrigerator - check it out before shopping in stores or on-line.
3. Shop local & support sustainable businesses before buying on-line [[The Ditty Bag](#)].
4. Avoid disposable items/products - such as one-time use products (plastic bottles, takeout utensils, plastic drink cups).
5. Use a metal or glass water bottle, carry portable silverware set (metal or wood fork, spoon, knife, straw) and keep them in your backpack or car.
6. Focus on aluminum and glass containers that can be easily recycled; avoid plastic containers.
7. Use cleaning products made from natural, non-polluting compositions.
8. Utilize your library for books and information; it is also a great community gathering place.
9. It’s fun and wise to embrace a bit of minimalism [[minimalism](#)].
10. Shop reuse and second hand/thrift stores.

## **WASTE:**

1. Learn about how your city manages waste - how much, what is it, and where it goes [[Municipal Waste](#)]. Is any of it recycled? Is any of it composted? Is any of it burned? Is any of it hauled out of state to land fills? How can you reduce the waste in your home and at work.
2. Donate gently used items, materials and appliances to Good Will, Habitat for Humanity, and other community-based reuse services.

## **DIET & FOOD:**

1. Avoid processed foods (lots of empty calories, micro-plastics, additives that impact health).
2. Avoid plastic packaged foods.
3. Avoid heating up fast foods in plastic using a microwave.
4. Reduce meat in your diet, work towards a plant-based diet.

5. Choose fresh and unprocessed foods as much as possible.
6. Shop at farmers' markets in the spring/summer/fall, and food from community and home gardens [[Community Garden](#)].
7. You can grow your food in a small greenhouse or rooftop garden [[Green Wall Garden](#)] [[Rain Barrel](#)] [[Water Systems](#)] [[Permaculture Farm](#)] [[Rooftop Garden](#)]
8. Help make a "Seasonal Menu" with low impact, low carbon footprint foods [[UN Low Impact Diet](#)].
9. Help make a "Menu to Scale" that serves just what is needed, not excess - avoid waste.
10. Compost to reduce organic waste that would otherwise go to the landfill.
11. Some food scraps, such as citrus peels can be used in DIY house hold cleaners or insect deterrents.
12. Take reusable shopping bags and cloth vegetable bags to the store (don't use the plastic bags for veggies or other groceries).
13. Buy bulk when possible and fill up with your reusable container [[Sustainable Store](#)].
14. Use cloth towels instead of paper towels in the kitchen.

#### **HYGENE:**

1. Avoid soaps and shampoos in plastic bottles - use soap and shampoo bars.
2. Use a bamboo, non-plastic tooth brush and non-plastic dental floss.
3. Use eco-friendly products - check the labels. [[Eco-Friendly Products](#)]
4. Use products sourced as close to home as possible.

#### **TRANSPORTATION:**

1. Walk and/or ride a bike when possible - it'll help you stay in shape.
2. Use public transportation
3. Urge your family to get an electric car when appropriate (if they're shopping for a new car) to reduce the use of fossil fuels [[Best EVs](#)]. You'll save on gas/diesel, tune-ups, and many other maintenance issues. Use solar panels to charge your electric car.
4. Avoid large SUVs & Pickup Trucks unless you use them for business; rent large vehicles if needed to pull a trailer once or twice a year.
5. Work remotely when possible to reduce commuting.
6. Hold video conferencing when possible to reduce transportation carbon footprints.

#### **LANDSCAPING / YARD CARE / GARDENS:**

1. Your yard is part of the larger ecosystem [[Eco-Friendly Landscaping](#)].
2. Avoid carcinogenic herbicides and pesticides (Roundup is linked to some cancers).
3. Avoid ammonia - some health risks, and linked to nitrogen pollution in soil and lakes.
4. Consider native low-maintenance ground cover instead of grass.
5. Start an organic sustainable vegetable garden [[Eco-Friendly Gardens](#)].
6. If you do not have a yard, consider an in-home container garden for herbs & vegetables.
7. Use home compost for fertilizing (avoid commercial fertilizers) [[EPA Composting](#)]
8. Plant with nitrogen-fixing beans, insect-repelling cooperative plants, deter bugs with nets.
9. Collect rainwater in rain barrels for garden use.

## **RECYCLING:**

1. Understand what we can recycle and reuse and repurpose. Most plastics are not recyclable despite the recycling label on them - so reduce their use. These are recyclable: glass, electronics, batteries, aluminum, cardboard, paper [[Recycling Benefits](#)].
2. Understand the recycling lingo - a system created by plastics and oil companies [[Recycling Codes](#)]. Most plastics are not recyclable, so make wise choices on packaging and product selections.
3. Avoid “Wishcycling” - tossing things in the recycling can that cannot be recycled.
4. Realize that “Biodegradable Plastics” still have contaminants in them and take a very long time to completely break down. “Bioplastics” have the same problem. AVOID PLASTICS.
5. Upcycling, this involves upgrading furniture, bottles, bags, or other items, or using them in another project and utilizing them around the home or office.
6. Donate “gently used” and “in good shape” items to Good Will, Habitat for Humanity, and other outlets that accept material donations.

## **GET INVOLVED:**

1. Education: Be the example of how you can use sustainable practices [[Sustainability in Education](#)].
2. Start a Sustainability (Climate/Environment/Energy) Club at your school.
3. Learn more and inform your friends and family.
4. Write your elected officials and lobby for sustainable laws [[Climate Lobby](#)] [[CT Climate Movement](#)].
5. Write letters to the editor, or start your now blog.
6. Get involved in writing and advocating town/city, state and federal laws for the environment, climate change, sustainability, energy, farming and foods, and so on.
7. Volunteer in your community

## **ENTERTAINMENT:**

1. Exercise outdoors!
2. Seek out low-impact non-motorized sports out in the environment - hiking, walking, biking, canoes & kayaks [[Eco-Friendly Sports](#)] [[Eco-Friendly Activities](#)].
3. Puzzle Rooms and Escape Rooms for group fun.
4. In-person live gaming groups.
5. Outdoor non-motorized sports - team sports, competitive activities, geospatial adventures.
6. Seek out and plan Low Carbon Foot Print vacations (consider travel distances and places to stay; do your research).

## THREE SETS OF IMPORTANT FIELD TRIPS

Roger Kuhns (rogerjameskuhns@gmail.com) / Youth Climate Summit 2026 SE Connecticut

- *Visiting* the diverse places listed below brings you perspective in terms of scale, importance, and impacts to the environment (good and not-so-good), and our community necessities.
- **Remember:** All of our natural resources and all raw materials come from the environment! How we process our natural resources impacts everything around us. Know what industries exist in your community.
- **Ask** your teachers, parents and community for help organizing field trips.

**First** - *Please see these ecosystems soon.* Ask yourself about how the world will be different without these natural environments (also see nature videos & museums [[Planet Earth III](#)]).

- Trek on a **glacier**.
- Swim in a **coral reef**.
- Walk through an **oak savanna**,
- Meander a **prairie**.
- Explore a **boreal forest**
- Immerse yourself in a **rain forest**.

**Second** - *Please do these activities as soon as you can.* Ask yourself how bringing these practices into your life helps the environment and your health.

- Visit an **organic farm** and **sustainable products store**.
- **Ride a train** and watch the traffic on the adjacent highway.
- **Walk your community** - is it easy to do so?
- Ride in an **electric car**.
- Use less **plastic** - especially single use plastics and food wrapping.

**Third** - *Please visit these places as soon as you can.* Ask yourself how these facilities impact you and your community, and what alternatives we may have.

- A natural **gas power plant**.
- A **garbage land fill**.
- A **recycling facility**.
- A **robotics lab**.
- A huge **copper mine**.
- A **clear-cut forest**.
- A **mono-crop factory farm**.
- A **steel mill**.
- An **oil refinery**.
- A **plastics factory**.