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52 resolutions for Earth Day

Your actions can make a difference
By **Cindy Sutter** Camera Staff Writer
Posted: 04/19/2011 01:46:02 PM MDT



Planting vegetables such as this tomato plant cuts the miles your meals travel. (PAUL AIKEN)

It's Earth Day Friday, which makes it a good time to make some resolutions about how to treat the Earth for the next year.

Here are 52 things you can do -- one a week -- to get you through until the next Earth Day.

The first two are the biggest: Buy less and drive less.

Jeffrey Hollander, co-founder of Seventh Generation and author of the new book, "Planet Home," advises people to go for 30 days without buying anything besides food, toiletries and gasoline. The 30-day pledge allows you to take an honest look at how much you consume.

As to the gasoline part, bike or walk whenever possible and take the bus or carpool if you have a long commute. If your employer lets you telecommute, do so as often as it's practical. Consolidate trips when you must use your car. In the summer, fill your gas tank in the evening to help keep ozone levels low. Do not top off the tank, and be careful not to spill gasoline.

With these and other greening-up ideas, the key is to undertake changes creatively. Embrace riding your bike on errands as a way to enjoy the outdoors and a get a workout. For almost everything you're giving up, you can also gain something.

Here are 50 more ideas to consider.

In the kitchen

Eat less meat. Let vegetables and grains feed you, not another animal. If you do eat meat, choose local sources. Beef and bison should preferably be grassfed and from a ranch that manages its pastures sustainably. If you already have one meatless day a week, add one more. Use smaller portions at all meals.

Eat as much local and organic food as you can afford. Visit the Environmental Working Group's website,

ewg.org, to find out the cleanest and dirtiest foods, pesticide wise.




Plant a vegetable garden if you have a yard. Growing vegetables instead of grass uses water and your own energy more wisely. If you live in an apartment, plant vegetables in containers on your balcony or plant in a community plot. The Center for ReSource Conservation offers a garden in a box.

Avoid processed food as much as possible. Processed means someone else manufactures it. That takes energy. Discover the pleasures of cooking.

Take time to eat and enjoy the foods of the season. You're less likely to eat processed food if you have time to eat. Appreciating good food is a way to connect with the Earth and its bounty.



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Buy organic sugar and coffee. Fair trade and organic is even better. Both sugar cane and coffee growing can be particularly destructive environmentally.

Use sponges or dish cloths rather than paper towels or wipes. Sponges can be sanitized in the dishwasher, and dishcloths can be laundered.

Use vinegar for cleaning counters and sinks. A study by Colorado State University found vinegar as effective as chlorine bleach for sanitizing.

Run your dishwasher only when it is full and save energy by avoiding the dry cycle.

When you replace appliances such as your refrigerator, buy energy efficient ones.

In the home

Use non-toxic cleaners or make your own. Eco-Cycle,

ecocycle.org, has recipes for household cleaners on its website.

Paint with low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints and varnishes.

If you must use a solvent or oil-based paint, don't use it on an ozone alert day, and use it in the evening. Keep it capped tightly, and dispose of any remaining solvent on a hazardous waster day at Eco-Cycle.

When remodeling, look for eco-friendly products such as linoleum or carpets made from natural fibers.

Reuse when remodeling, when possible. Check the ReSource yard for materials that can be reused, and donate used materials such as windows or flooring.

Use warm or cold water instead of hot for washing your clothes.

Put up a clothesline to be used on warm days.

Buy an insulating blanket for your water heater.

In the summer, keep shades drawn during the day to keep the house cooler and open windows at night.

Consider a swamp cooler instead of air conditioning.

Use a low-flow showerhead, and keep your showers short in duration.

Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet. Squirt glue in the bottle or put in wet clumping cat litter and seal to prevent leakage in the landfill.

Use reusable bags instead of plastic bags. Keep them in your car.

Carry your own water bottle -- stainless steel and BPA-free is best. Do your best to avoid bottled water. If you must buy it, make sure to recycle the bottle.

Look for products that use recycled material.

Buy flours, grains and spices in bulk and put in your own container. Avoid overpackaged goods when possible.

Stop junk mail and phonebooks if you don't use them; visit ecocycle.org for information.

Before winter comes, get an energy audit from the Center for Resource Conservation and follow suggestion to caulk leaks and insulate.

Install a programmable thermostat to use less heat or less cooling when you're not at home.

Keep your furnace and air conditioner well-maintained and change the filters once a month.

Use thermal curtains to keep windows from leaking air.

When it comes time to replace the furnace, buy an energy efficient one.

Use power strips for appliances, televisions and cell phone chargers. Turn off when not in use to avoid phantom loads.

Recycle. Hazardous wastes can be recycled at Eco-Cycle on special days. Old computers, game systems, televisions and DVDs can be recycled at the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials for a small fee.

Start a compost pile if your garbage and recycle pick-up doesn't include it. Try vermicomposting.

In the yard

and garden

Get an irrigation audit from the Center for Resource Conservation. Make sure all sprinklers are functioning correctly and watering your yard, not the sidewalk.

Water before 10 a.m. or after 6 p.m. to minimize evaporation.

Avoid pesticides and herbicides, which can wash into streams and rivers. Pull weeds when they're small and never let them go to seed.

Keep your lawn healthy and mulch around flowers and vegetables to help shut out weeds.

Set aside areas for xeric and native plants. Planting the "hell strip" next to the sidewalk with xeric plants can save a great deal of water.

Avoid mowers with a gasoline two-stroke engine. They create a huge amount of pollution.

Tune up your gas-powered mower and change the oil filter.

Use gas-powered tools only after 5 p.m. in the summer to avoid contributing to ozone buildup.

Be very careful not to spill gas for the same reason. Use a funnel to fill your mower.



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Put mulching blades on your mower to use grass clippings as a natural fertilizer.

Buy clay pots, which last longer, instead of plastic. Or build containers from reclaimed lumber from ReSource.

Recycle old plastic lawn furniture with a No. 2 designation. Black plastic pots that typically contain vegetable and flower starts can't be recycled, but some nurseries accept them back for reuse. Ask about it.

If replacing your mower, buy a push mower or a rechargeable electric.

Use drip irrigation for your vegetable or flower garden.

Plant trees, but pick those suitable for Colorado's dry climate. ReSource offers trees picked by City of Boulder's foresters for \$50.

In the family

Carpool for kids' sports.

Talk about the reasons for your choices with your children. Let your own behavior be a model for thrift, resourcefulness and respect for the planet.

Sources: ecocycle.com, conservationcenter.org; McClatchy News Service contributed to this story.

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