

Living Sustainably



When it comes to sustainability, just one person can make a difference. That person can be you, your family, your neighbors, or anyone. But all it takes is a change in mindset.



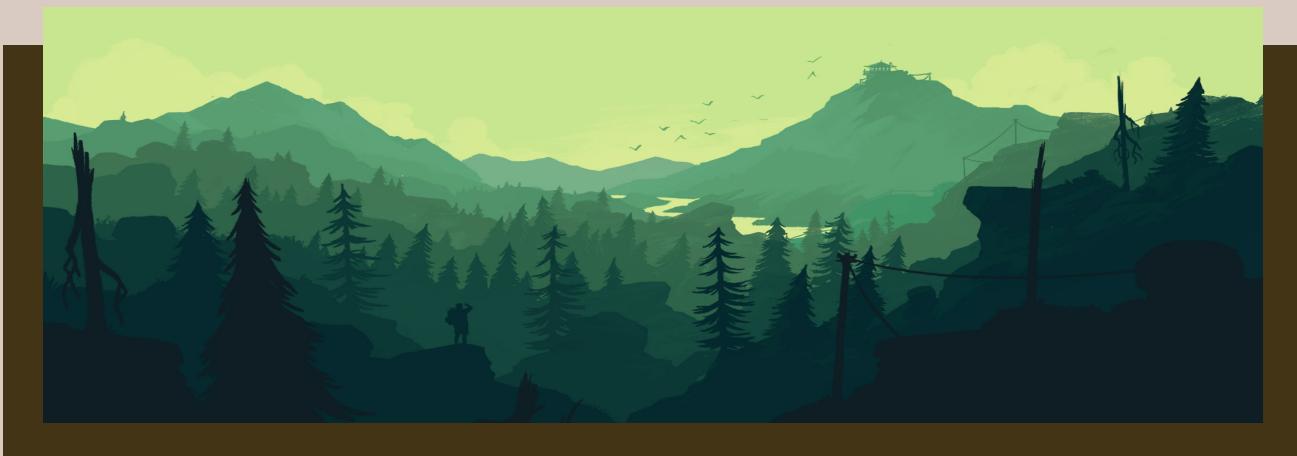
In Cheshire, we like to consider ourselves to be eco-friendly, but can we do better? There is always room for improvement. We need to teach future generations what it means to be sustainable and to prepare them for changes in climate and pollution that we can't foresee. Even if just one kid in our small Connecticut town leaves with a drive for change, we will be serving our purpose.

Did you know that planting trees can help reduce your energy costs? Plant a tree to shade your air conditioner to help keep it cooler and save on utility bills.¹

Well, why should I care? You probably wouldn't word the question as bluntly as this, but the truth is that most of us tend to consider living sustainably to be of secondary importance. We have so many other things to worry about: our careers, our finances, our families, and our futures. We're just so busy with our own lives that we often overlook the gifts that the Earth gives us every day—the gifts that make everything we do possible.



We breathe because of the trees that surround us. We consume food that grows from the dirt beneath us. We enjoy the beauty of nature that surrounds us. If the Earth treats us this kindly, wouldn't it be our duty to return the favor?



You've probably noticed signs of the Earth's declining health. We all love trips to the beach, but have you noticed the trash scattered across the sand and washed up on the shore? Have you noticed creatures trying to eat plastic items, injuring themselves in the process? I can assure you this is not the worst of it. Our lush and lively planet will soon become gray and barren if we continue on our current track.



Did you know that we dump around 17.6 billion pounds of plastic into the ocean each year? By around 2050, the plastic in the ocean will outweigh all of the ocean's fish combined!²



But can I even make a difference?

While it's true we can only do so much to live sustainably in an industrialized world, **we can still make even the slightest lifestyle changes and have an impact.** Have you ever noticed recyclable items being put in a trash bin? Do you frequently leave the lights on when you leave the room?



Small habits such as these are common, even in the Cheshire community.

Permanent changes may be hard to make, but we can take it one step at a time, starting with the basics. **Here are some tips to make quick and easy changes in your habits and promote a better environment for our town and our planet.**



Reducing food waste

Up to 160 billion pounds of food are wasted each year in America.³ That's around 35% of the nation's food supply. How can we be throwing so much food away while we have millions of families struggling to put food on the table? For those of us who have steady access to high-quality food, here are some ways to reduce household food waste and help reduce these alarming statistics.



Saving your leftovers

After a meal, it's rare to have absolutely no leftovers. So what do we do with them? **Instead of throwing it away, store and preserve the remaining food for future consumption.** Instead of spending more money to buy extra food that will contribute to more food waste, eat your leftovers. It's still the same food as when it was cooked, right?

Composting

After eating a banana, you'll probably throw the peel away. It doesn't seem to have much use to you on its own, but fruit scraps are perfect for making compost. **To improve the quality of your soil, try making a compost bin** (see next page for steps). It'll eliminate excessive food waste while helping your garden flourish.

Composting 101

Step 1: Choose your composting bin

It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Even a simple plastic storage bin works perfectly for composting.

Step 2: Find a flat, sunny area of your yard to set up your composting bin

Step 3: Add a layer of twigs at the bottom of your bin and a layer of leaves on top

This will help increase air circulation and allow for drainage.



Declutter your fridge

If you can't see most of the items in your fridge, it's probably time to clean it out. It's easy to forget about the food at the back of our fridge, which leads to items spoiling and being thrown out.

Step 4: Alternate between adding layers of brown material and green material to the bin over time

Examples of brown materials:

- Dried leaves
- Sawdust
- Paper



Examples of green materials:

- Vegetable and fruit scraps
- Eggshells
- Animal manure

Step 5: Take care of your bin

Stir up your compost once a week and make sure the compost stays moist (you can add water if needed).

Step 6: Harvest your compost

Your compost could be ready in a couple months, or even in a couple years, depending on the size. Once it's ready, it should be dark with a soil-like consistency. Add a layer of your homemade compost to your garden and help your plants grow!

Keep your fridge organized so you can keep track of what foods you have. It'll help lessen your food waste and probably save money since you won't be buying items that you didn't know you already have.

Eco-friendly transportation

Owning a car is certainly convenient, but is it really necessary to drive everywhere you go? Motor vehicles make up for over half of all nitrogen oxide emissions, and the statistics are only getting worse.⁴ Car pollution causes nearly 80% of lung diseases, and our air pollution crisis causes millions of deaths annually.⁵ Obviously, we can't all buy electric vehicles, but by being more mindful of the types of transportation we use, we can arrive at our destinations in a much more sustainable way.



If your destination is nearby, consider biking or walking. Cheshire is very biker-friendly and pedestrian-friendly, so take advantage of it!

If your destination is a bit farther away, consider using public transportation or carpooling. Research bus routes near you or ask to ride with a friend who has the same destination. It's better for two people to use one car than for each to use their own.

If you really need to drive, there are a few things you can do to be sustainable. Keep your tires inflated and your engine tuned to improve gas mileage. Avoid idling and use cruise control to save gas. Small changes like these can go a long way.

Limiting plastic usage

Right now, our planet is facing a plastic pollution crisis, and it's only getting worse. While plastic has many beneficial uses, we use far more plastic than needed. Half of all plastic products are intended to be single-use, resulting in 60 billion pounds of plastic waste being generated annually, and that's just in America.⁶ While eliminating plastic from our lives is impossible, we should move towards using more eco-friendly materials.

Did you know that plastic packaging makes up 40% of plastic production? Buy large amounts of food in a single package instead of multiple smaller packages.⁷

Avoid plastic bags

5 trillion plastic bags are produced each year around the globe. What's worse is that people tend to use them once, and only 1% are recycled.² Instead of asking for plastic bags at the store, bring your own reusable cloth bag. It'll save money in the long run!

Avoid single-use plastic

While single-use plastic items can be convenient, it's not worth the damage they cause. Stay away from styrofoam, plastic bottles, plastic utensils, and anything else with a reusable alternative. Bring your own mugs to cafes, buy food in bulk to avoid excessive plastic packaging.



Reuse your plastic

Using plastic is inevitable, even if you try to completely avoid it.

When you do have to use plastic, try to find a new use for it. Use plastic bags as garbage bags, use plastic containers for storing items, and use milk jugs to water your plants.

You can even repurpose plastic in a more creative way, like turning plastic bottles into gardening pots or bird feeders. If you really can't think of any way to repurpose your plastic, make sure to recycle properly!



Plastic Bottle Bird Feeder



Step 1: Prepare the bottle by washing it out and drying it

Step 2: Carve two small holes about 1 inch from the bottom of the bottle

You can do this by using a thumbtack or knife. Carve to about the diameter of a pencil.

Step 3: To make a perch, push a pencil (or something similar) through the holes

Step 4: Repeat steps 2 and 3 but about 3 inches up from the first perch

You can add even more perches if you'd like!

Step 5: Above each perch, carve in a hole about 1 inch in diameter

Step 6: Carve two small holes at the neck of the bottle and thread 2 feet of twine/string through the holes
This will be to hang the feeder.



Step 7: Fill the feeder with birdseed and hang it away at an ideal height of 5-7 ft.

Make sure it isn't too close to any structures.

Admire the many types of birds we have here in Cheshire by inviting them to visit your yard!



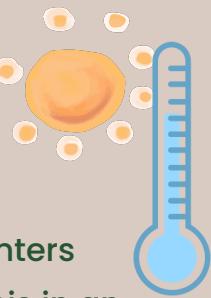
Efficient Energy Usage

While energy is vital to modern humanity, its production uses an alarming amount of fossil fuels while creating an alarming amount of greenhouse gas. Did you know that around 66% of the energy produced in America is lost before it reaches consumers?⁸ What makes this statistic worse is that we consumers tend to forget about the small things that waste energy, like keeping the fridge door open for too long. To reduce the environmental cost, we need to be more careful about how we use this resource for the sake of our Earth (and the sake of our wallets).



Turning down the thermostat

Admittedly, Connecticut winters can be brutal. To combat this in an eco-friendly way, **add more insulation to your home to retain heat and keep your windows open so the sun can warm up your home.** Also, make sure that all your doors and windows are tightly bound to your house to prevent drafts and heat loss.



Reduce your water heating bill

Water heating takes up a large portion of our electricity bills, but there are ways to reduce the cost.⁹ Upgrade your water heater to a more efficient model. Insulate the pipes near the water heater for heat retention. **Be more mindful about your overall water usage by taking shorter hot showers and doing full loads of laundry.** You can even buy low-flow faucets and showerheads to make it a little easier to reduce your water usage.

You can have an impact

With these simple tips in mind, we hope you feel educated and empowered enough to make a difference. We alone cannot defeat the environmental crisis faced by humanity, but this should not discourage us from putting in the effort to live a sustainable and eco-friendly life. We must inspire our community to make the necessary changes to progress towards a greener future.

If you already practice these habits, challenge yourself to incorporate sustainability even further into your life. If you don't, I encourage you to reflect on your lifestyle and consider the changes you could make that would best fit you and your circumstances.

Even as just one person out of the billions on our planet, you can make a difference, and that starts with developing simple habits in your day-to-day life. The biggest impacts often start with the smallest changes. Our **beautiful green earth needs us more than ever**. It is time for us to return the love that it has always shown us. The fate of the planet is in our hands.



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