

## ***Sustainably Speaking***

Mick Winter

### **Sustainability. It's Not Just a Good Idea. It's a Money-Saving Idea.**

Why would we want to live sustainably? Why should we do without the things and lifestyle we're used to in order to (supposedly) benefit some abstract future?

Well, the pleasant surprise for many of us is that because of the excess and slack built into our lifestyles, we really don't have to give up much, if anything, in order to live sustainably. In fact, by living a more sustainable lifestyle, we can *gain* a lot.

You don't have to live more sustainably for the sake of the planet; just do it for yourself.

- Use less energy and you **save money** on your utility bills. It's a bonus that using less energy helps society and the planet.
- Use less gasoline and you **save money** by going to the gas station less frequently. It's a bonus that you slow down depletion of fossil fuels and help in a small way to lessen air pollution.
- Grow some of your own food and you **save money**, get a little exercise, and are able to eat healthier food. It's a bonus that the use of petroleum-based pesticides and natural gas-based fertilizers is lessened, that less food has to be transported long distances by polluting, highway-clogging trucks, and that less packaging is needed for the food you eat.
- Walk or ride a bicycle more—and drive less—and you **save money** on gasoline, wear-and-tear on your car (that means fewer costly repairs and you extend the life of your car), and get healthier. It's a bonus that you help reduce air pollution, and slow down fossil fuel depletion.
- Use less water in your home—in the kitchen, the bathroom, and your yard—and you **save money** on your water bill. It's a bonus that the water you don't use helps keep aquifers at a higher level, can be used for growing food, and helps contribute to healthy rivers.
- Use less gas, oil or electricity for heating your home or the hot water you use, and you **save money** on your utility bills. It's a bonus that you use fewer fossil fuel resources and lessen the need for new power plants.
- Use less electricity for lighting your home, and you **save money** on light bulbs and electricity bills. It's a bonus that you again lessen the need for new, probably polluting, power plants.
- Share tools with your neighbors and you all **save money** by not needing your own separate set of tools and not having to hire someone to do repairs or maintenance on your home. It's a bonus that the fewer tools you buy, the fewer resources that are used by society to produce and transport those tools.
- Share errands that require a car with neighbors and you **save money** on gasoline. It's a bonus that the result is less air pollution, and decreased use of fossil fuel.

Starting to see a pattern here? You don't need to do these things for the planet or the environment. Do them for *yourself*—and your family. Do them to **save money**. The environmental benefits just naturally and automatically follow. Your motivation doesn't even matter.

By using less fossil fuel energy and fewer resources, you'll potentially save lots of money. You'll probably eat healthier and get healthier. You'll have more contact with your family and your neighbors. And, yes, you can likely even enjoy life more. All this and, as a bonus and without any sacrifice, you'll

be helping the planet and the environment as well. And that just might make a difference—if we haven't already screwed things up permanently.

Not a bad deal, eh?

*Mick Winter is the host of NapaNow.com and the author of “Sustainable Living for Home, Neighborhood and Community”, available through local bookstores and at [www.sustainablelivingbook.com](http://www.sustainablelivingbook.com).*

## ***The Big Three [sidebar]***

With these three simple actions, you can make a major change in your energy use, personal health, and well-being. If millions of us did these actions, it would make a major change not only in our own but in our country's well-being. All three actions require little, if any, cost and will produce results very quickly.

### **Replace light bulbs**

The most important and effective energy-saving and money-saving thing you can do in your home or office is to replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Incandescent bulbs are basically little heaters that also produce light. They make light by passing electricity through a small wire. The wire heats up and glows, producing light. Unfortunately only 10% of the energy they use produces light; the other 90% produces heat. This is a very serious waste of energy.

Compact fluorescent (CF) bulbs use 66-75% less electricity to produce the same amount of light as an incandescent bulb.

It's been estimated that if every U.S. household replaced just one 60-watt incandescent light bulb with a CF bulb, the pollution reduction would be equivalent to removing one million cars from the road. Think how it would be if we all replaced *all* of our bulbs.

### **Advantages of CF bulbs**

**Long Lasting** - While CF bulbs cost more than incandescent, they can last anywhere from 8,000 to 15,000 hours, compared to the typical 1,000 for an incandescent bulb.

**Money Saving** - If you replace a 100-watt incandescent bulb with a 32-watt CF bulb (that provides an equal amount of light), you can save at least \$32 over the life of the bulb. Replace 10 bulbs in your home, and that's a savings of more than \$300. A bulb can pay for itself with normal use in just five months. And PG&E often gives rebates on CF bulbs.

### **Hint**

Remember “**Watt Four**”—CF bulbs use about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the wattage as incandescent bulbs to produce the same amount of light (lumens). So as a rule of thumb, replace an old incandescent bulb with a CF bulb of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  the wattage, i.e. replace a 60-watt with a 15-watt.

### **Walk—or Ride a Bike**

- ♦ Helps with air pollution
- ♦ Saves fossil fuels
- ♦ Saves you money

- ◆ Improves your health

There are countless benefits to walking or bike riding. The physical exercise from moving your body will increase your blood flow, strengthen all the muscles in your body, loosen your joints, improve your breathing, help you lose weight over time, and increase your appetite yet help you be satisfied with lower food intake.

Your mental outlook will improve and emotionally you'll feel more positive. You'll also be able to get outdoors, see your neighbors and the neighborhood, enjoy nature, reduce auto pollution, save money on gas, and feel the pleasure of being outside in the air. And it's all free.

### **Hint**

If you absolutely can't get along without driving, at least drive *less*. How? Try these tips:

- ◆ Combine trips. Wait to combine a number of errands into one trip
- ◆ Telecommute at least once a week
- ◆ Carpool or use public transit whenever possible
- ◆ Share errands with neighbors

### **Plant a Garden**

Plant a garden in your yard or start a community garden. Either way, you'll have a source of free, healthy vegetables and herbs, and you'll get exercise outside in the fresh air.

Growing your own food is essential to improving your self-sufficiency. No matter how much food you're able to grow, it all helps. The more you grow, the less you have to buy at the store.

When you grow your own food, you know exactly how it has been grown. If you wish, you can grow organically, using non-hybrid "heirloom" seeds, assuring that you get the healthiest, tastiest and most nutritious food possible.

No matter how small your living space, you can still grow some of your own food, even if it's just sprouts, herbs, or a couple of tomato plants.

### **Start a Home Garden**

A garden in your yard can be as small or large as you wish and have space for. A 4'x4' area can produce a lot of food, particularly if you do "intensive" gardening.

There are many different methods, styles, techniques, and theories of gardening. Our local nurseries can give you advice. They know the soil and climate in our area. You can also check with the University of California Cooperative Extension office at 1710 Soscol Avenue in Napa or call Master Gardeners at 253.4221.

### **Community Gardens**

Neighborhood gardens (also called "community gardens" or "urban gardens") are shared plots within an urban or neighborhood setting. Gardeners share tools, knowledge and labor to produce food for themselves and others. There are an estimated 18,000 community gardens throughout Canada and the United States.

There are already community gardens in several cities in the Napa Valley. Talk to your neighbors and see if there's interest in starting one; then check with the Master Gardeners, the U.C. Cooperative Extension, or your city's Parks and Recreation department.

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