

protect our planet ON EARTH DAY AND EVERY DAY

Worrying more lately? Between gloomy economic news and downright scary environmental forecasts, it's tough being a consumer. But that hasn't stopped four out of five shoppers from buying green, and almost 20 percent say they're purchasing more environmentally friendly products, despite the economic downturn. Another survey shows that even those whose financial situations are only fair or poor don't mind paying more (up to 15 percent) for eco-friendly products. But they want labels they can trust, like "certified organic."

PLANETARY HEALTH

Dying forests, melting glaciers, an endangered species list that's steadily growing, droughts, and violent weather around the globe are just some of the indications that our home is in peril. Don't wait for Earth Day to make changes that will protect the planet's health and your own. Here are a few ideas:

- **Bike to work** (or keep one at the office for running errands without using fossil fuels). You can save time and money while improving mental and physical health. If cycling's not feasible, use public transportation or carpool, and walk as much as possible.

- **Recycle everything you can.** But don't waste water getting every can or jar perfectly clean. (Instead, scrape out as much food as possible with a skinny spatula and rinse with leftover dishwater).

- **Compost if you don't already;** food scraps and yard waste comprise nearly one-quarter of the trash generated in this country. Mix green wastes—aquarium water and algae, dead houseplants, fresh grass clippings from chemical-free lawns, vegetable kitchen scraps, manure (from chickens, horses, pet rabbits, and rodents), and weeds—with brown wastes (dried stalks and leaves, hedge prunings and twigs, pine needles, and straw). Turn periodically to create valuable additions to your soil.



- **Weatherize your home** to reduce cooling and heating costs, and put many unemployed construction workers back to work.
- **Be careful not to bring toxins indoors.** Leave shoes at the door and keep washable throw rugs near entryways.
- **Green your cleaners.** Substitute vinegar for fabric softeners in your rinse cycle and string a clothesline. Remove stains with baking or washing soda, castile soap, glycerin, hydrogen peroxide, or club soda. Look for natural and organic ingredients in air freshening, cleaning, garden, and pest control products.
- **Know the energy efficiency of appliances.** If you're upgrading your TV, nix plasma screens, which use three times as much energy as rear-projection sets and approximately 20 percent more than liquid crystal displays (LCDs). But be aware that a synthetic chemical, nitrogen trifluoride (NF3), used in LCD manufacture, is a potent greenhouse gas with 17,000 times the global warming effect of carbon dioxide.
- **Consider compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)** because a single bulb can save you \$80 or more over its lifetime, depending on local electric rates. Some Energy Star bulbs have been banned in Europe because of their high mercury content, so look for Earthmate, Feit, Litelectronics, MaxLite, Philips, and Sylvania brands of CFLs instead.
- **Cut down on plastic use,** which is increasingly linked to health risks such as heart disease as well as to environmental damage. The good news is that many natural products manufacturers and retailers are moving toward environmentally friendly plastics—or eliminating their use altogether. For example, Eden Foods uses cans free of bisphenol-A.
- **Buy paper products with recycled content** (particularly post-consumer fibers), and tell toilet paper and tissue manufacturers to stop using virgin wood for throwaway products.

LABELS YOU CAN TRUST

Global warming trends have already produced irreversible damage, and without significant reductions in fossil fuel use, we face worldwide food shortages. Organic agriculture not only protects soil, species diversity, and water but also uses less fossil fuel while protecting farmers, farming communities, fish and other wildlife, and consumers from toxic, synthetic pesticides.

The organic label means that foods and other goods are nationally certified to have been produced without persistent and toxic pesticides and herbicides, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), irradiated materials, sewage sludge (a source of heavy metals, drugs, and other toxins), synthetic growth hormones, and antibiotics. While organic food is a bit more expensive, many consumers believe it's worth it. For example, Kate Gosselin of TLC's *Jon & Kate Plus 8* makes organic foods—especially dairy, meat, and produce—a priority for her large



TOFURKY TUESDAYS

Going meatless, even one day a week, helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To learn more, visit www.tofurky.com or www.humanesociety.org, which are cosponsoring this Earth-friendly way to experiment with vegetarian fare, ranging from deli slices and jerky to roasts, sausages, and tempeh burgers.

family. Pediatrician Alan Greene, MD, has managed to eat only organic foods for the past three years, and while he admits it's been a challenge (especially when traveling), he has been surprised to learn "how few people know that organic means without pesticides, antibiotics, or hormones."

Organic cotton farming also exerts a low impact environmentally—and is safer for people as well. Look for the organic cotton label in everything from personal care (sanitary products, cotton puffs, and ear swabs) to clothing, home furnishings, and toys. Because chlorine gas is a potent toxin, also look for chlorine-free feminine hygiene and other cotton products. In addition, organic cottonseed is preferable in animal feed.



Also look for "certified organic" (for food-grade ingredients) and, coming soon, "made with organic" in personal care products. Avoid triclosan, registered as a pesticide but used as an antibacterial in commercial toothpastes and cleansing products. And look for natural beauty aids and personal care products that don't contain allergens, artificial colors, carcinogens, DEA, irritants, and suspected endocrine disruptors, including glycol ethers, parabens, phthalates, petroleum byproducts, SLS, toluene, and xylene. ■■■

SELECTED SOURCES *The Bike to Work Guide* by Roni Sarig with Paul Dorn (\$7.95, Adams, 2009) ■ *Clean Home Green Home* by Kimberly Delaney (\$19.95, Knack, 2009) ■ "Clean Jar, Clean Conscience?" by Nina Shen Rastogi, 2/3/09; "Think Globally, Ask Locally" by Jacob Leibenluft, 1/13/09, www.slate.com ■ "Compost Ingredients" by Willi Evans Galloway, www.organicgardening.com ■ "Emphasis on Weatherization Represents Shift on Energy Costs" by Matthew L. Wald, 12/30/08; "FDA to Reconsider Plastic Bottle Risk" by Julie Scelfo, 12/24/08; "For Three Years, Every Bite Organic" by Tara Parker-Pope, 12/2/08, *New York Times* ■ "EPA Should Test Demasculinizing Pollutants Collectively, NRC Says" by Janet Raloff, *Science News*, 12/18/08 ■ "Infertility Is Linked to Chemicals Found in Cookware, Clothing" by Catherine Ho, 2/0/09; "Why Obama's Green Jobs Plan Might Work" by Marla Dickerson, 1/4/09, *LA Times* ■ "Organic Cotton Facts," www.ota.com, 2/09 ■ "An Organic Diet for a Family of 10? Yes, She Can" by Jennifer Huget, *Washington Post*, 2/3/09 ■ "A Shopper's Guide to Home Tissue Products," www.nrdc.org ■ "Survey: 8 Out of 10 Still Buying Green Despite Recession," *Sustainable Food News*, 2/9/09