10 Ways to Be a Better Environmental Steward in 2018

Protecting the natural environment may seem overwhelming with increased natural disasters, melting sea ice, and threatened wildlife. But your choices can truly go a long way for your community and your health. Here are ten ways to be a better steward in 2018 and help others do the same!

1. Reduce the Carbon Footprint of Your Food

Reducing your carbon footprint can seem daunting when learning about the many ways in which humans contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions. But there are a few things you can do to directly cut back on your own influence. Start by looking at your consumables, especially your food. When you factor in transportation, land use, pesticides and waste, food produces up to twice as much pollution as all of the cars on the planet. Being mindful of where your food comes from and how it was produced is the easiest way to cut back.

2. Reduce your Meat Consumption

In addition to knowing where and how your food was produced, it is also wise to cut back on meat. Livestock take up 49 percent of all agricultural emissions on the planet, according to a 2017 study. Although going vegan may not be the best option for you, reducing your meat consumption to just once a week, or even once a day, can make a world of difference. Try healthy alternative proteins such as pea protein or vitamin-rich vegetables such as beets. Your body and the planet will thank you.

3. Buy From Local Farms or Start Your Own

Buying from local farms is a great way to ensure that your food stays close to home and cuts back on the transportation costs or "food miles" of delivering food across the country, which can account for up to 11 percent of agricultural emissions. If locally-sourced food is scarce in your neck of the woods, consider starting your own community farm project. This is a great way to pull your town together toward a common goal and even solve social issues like poverty, hunger, mental illness and more.

4. Compost your Natural Waste

Another great way to spare the environment from your waste is to compost. This simple technique would put a major dent into the 60 billion pounds of food materials that unnecessarily go to U.S. landfills each year. Many cities offer fairly cheap composting services and will make the entire process hands-off for you. You can also do it yourself and end up with rich soil for your own garden!

5. Change Your Mode of Transportation

Despite the surge of electric and hybrid vehicles in 2017, fossil fuel transportation still accounts for 27 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. Electric cars are more affordable and accessible than ever before, but there are plenty of ways to get from point A to point B in 2018 that will spare your wallet and the environment. Bicycling has grown tremendously in popularity, with more than 66 million bicyclists

on the road as of 2017. Public transportation and ridesharing are also great ways to cut down on your fossil fuel consumption in 2018.

6. Cut Down On Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics

Humans have created 8.3 billion tons of plastic in the past 67 years—6.3 billion tons of which have become waste in our landfills and natural environment, especially the ocean. Though these numbers may seem insurmountable, the simple decision to not buy single-use plastics, such as plastic bottles, plastic bags, plastic straws and any products containing microplastics such as exfoliators and glitter, would help tremendously.

7. Stop Buying Fast Fashion

Fast Fashion is the term used for clothing that is produced quickly and inexpensively, usually at the cost of the environment. The items are thrown away almost as fast as they are bought, and are filling up landfills at an alarming rate of 12.8 million tons of textiles annually in the U.S. alone—that's about 80 pounds of clothing per person per year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. You can drastically reduce these numbers by making smart, long-lasting decisions about what you choose to wear. There are also several companies doing their part to slow down fashion and create clothes that don't harm the planet.

8. Volunteer and Educate Yourself

Volunteering is a great way to educate yourself on environmental issues. Try volunteering for a community garden, a clean up crew, or even joining national service organizations like AmeriCorps. Working with others toward environmentally sound goals makes a real and lasting difference in a community.

9. Learn About and Vote for Climate-Friendly Policies

Exercising your rights as a citizen is a meaningful way to make a difference not just for yourself, but for your entire community. In recent years, several cities and states have made climate progress by banning fracking, plastic bags and certain harmful pesticides through the polls. Having conversations and reading current issues is the best way to stay updated on what is happening to the environment. You can also subscribe to the EcoWatch newsletter for email updates.

10. Participate in Public Events

People's Climate March*Wikimedia Commons*

In April 2017, the People's Climate March drew massive crowds of more than 200,000 people in Washington, DC. Then on Earth Day, thousands more joined the March for Science all across the nation. Organized marches, rallies and protests raise awareness in a visible way and engage the community to act toward progress.