

easy green living

{ WALLET FRIENDLY WAYS TO GREEN UP YOUR LIFE }

By ALLISON CANDREVA

It may be difficult to escape the current green phenomena. At every turn, there is an organic food item or an eco-friendly something. So, green is the new black. Well, being green. But not everyone can afford a house in the hills with solar panels and the hottest hybrid car. Instead, here are a few simple things anyone can do to green up their lives and help the environment without costing a fortune.

Dedee DeLongpré, director of the University of Florida Office of Sustainability, suggested some simple ways to make changes to help the environment.

Reducing one's carbon footprint can include things like using less plastic bags or disposable water bottles.

When thinking about a carbon footprint, DeLongpré said it is important to think about the whole "cost" of an item. When a plastic bag is



Photo by Allison Candreva

Using less disposable water bottles and more reusable water bottles saves money and the environment.

used, she said the footprint includes the whole process taken to make the bag and ship it to where it is used.

"When you flip a light switch," she said, "it burns fuel. The cheapest energy is the one we don't use."

One of the first things DeLongpré mentioned was making a clothesline. She said it saves a lot of money not running a dryer, and it is really simple to make. Some stores sell retractable clotheslines to put outside or in a bathroom above a tub. For those who are handy, Web sites like www.ehow.com (search: clothesline) have instructions on how to build one.

DeLongpré said using reusable water bottles is highly beneficial. It saves money using filtered water instead of disposable plastic bottles, and it is better

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

for the environment. In fact, according to www.filterforgood.com, “the average Brita pitcher filters 240 gallons of water a year for about 19 cents a day.”

Although the disposable bottles used are recyclable, most are not. According to [filterforgood.com](http://www.filterforgood.com), “In 2006, the average American used 167 disposable water bottles, but only recycled 38.”

“People have developed this obsession with bottled water lately,” she said. “All of the [tap] water around here is of very high quality.”

For those looking for BPA-free products, Nalgene

offers a series of water bottles. DeLongpré said BPA (Bisphenol-A) is a chemical compound found in brittle plastics that some are concerned is leaking into food.

Reusable shopping bags have also become popular and are an excellent way to help the environment. DeLongpré said plastic bags tend to be one of the higher percentages of roadside litter in Florida. According to www.reusablebags.com, “plastic bags don’t biodegrade, they photodegrade - breaking down into smaller and smaller toxic bits contaminating soil and waterways and entering the food web when animals accidentally ingest.”

Reusable bags can be found in supermarkets and some department stores. They are fairly cheap and cost around \$1 or so.

What about saving gas? At this point, not everyone can afford to buy hybrid cars. However, for those looking to save some visits to the pump but are not experiencing an influx of cash anytime soon, check out these tips.

The most efficient way to get around is riding a bike. However, if work is 30 plus miles away, a brisk bike ride may not be the best solution, DeLongpré said.

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Riding a scooter does use less gas, but DeLongpré said they are not exactly good for the environment. Scooters lack a catalytic converter, which filters the exhaust from car engines. By law, all cars and SUVs are required to have one but scooters are not.

For those not a fan of bikes or scooters, DeLongpré suggested carpooling or riding the bus, whichever is more efficient. Commuters would have to sit down with a pen and paper to see which is more convenient, she said.

People can also green up their homes with a few easy changes. DeLongpré recommended changing light bulbs to more energy efficient ones. She said they last eight times longer and save money and energy.

“The equivalent to a 60 watt [regular] bulb is a 13 watt energy efficient one,” she said. “They pay for themselves.”

Other home solutions include adding insulation to the attic or adding weather stripping around windows. A couple of changes that are a little more expensive include changing windows to double-pane windows or adding solar panels, which often have rebate offers available, DeLongpré said. She also suggested changing water heaters to on-demand water units, which just heat the water as needed.

DeLongpré recently added a rain barrel to her home. The barrel sits on the side of the house (beneath the gutter downspout) to collect rain and often has a hose attached to help in distributing water around the yard or garden. Although finished barrels can be purchased, they can also be made for about \$20. She said INDIGO in Gainesville offers a sustainable living workshop with a class on how to make rain barrels.

Although it may be convenient to pick up a 24-pack of water bottles, in the big picture, it is not good for the planet. These small lifestyle changes make a world of difference for the environment and also save some money.

Want more green solutions? Web sites like: www.lowimpactliving.com can help evaluate impact on the environment and offer many solutions, both high and low in cost. \$

Allison Candreva is a student in UF's College of Journalism. She may be contacted through the editor: editor@towerpublications.com