

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



Greening Your New Year's Resolutions

Dear EcoGirl: How can I include the earth in my New Year's resolutions?
Signed, Making a Plan

Dear Making a Plan: Thank you for your question. Yes, the new year offers us a handy time to step back and identify the changes we want to make in our lives. And it's smart to include caring for the earth among our intentions, because (1) the planet's well-being is key to our survival and the foundation of all we do; and (2) aligning with the earth can help us save money, be healthier, connect with others, and have more fun!

Here some example ways that you can eco-charge your New Year's resolutions. More about these and other useful actions is at www.askecogirl.info.

Resolution: Improve Your Health & Diet

Strategy: What's good for your body is often also good for the planet. Eating fresh whole local organic foods and less meat can help you lose weight, have more energy, avoid disease, and save money. Plus you'll reduce the eco-impacts of pesticides, packaging, industrial agriculture, and food transportation.

Action ideas:

- **Explore recipes that get you excited about cooking from scratch with fresh produce and whole grains.** You'll soon prefer it to processed products!

- **Buy organic foods**, to enjoy truly tasty and nutritious goodies grown without toxics. Organic is affordable when you buy direct and lower on the food chain. It's especially important to feed children organic, to reduce their exposure to toxics that can harm their development.

- **Plan outings to local farms and farmers' markets.** This trims food miles while helping local farms survive. Choose organic farms to reduce local toxics.

- **Shop regularly at your local farmers' markets, or sign up for a farm CSA subscription**, then savor your steady stream of farm-fresh delights.

- **Plant an organic garden**, to enjoy tasty healthy food that further trims your food miles.

- **Designate one day a week or month as a vegetarian or vegan day**, to reduce your livestock eco-impacts. (If you buy meat, choose organic from small farms.)

- **Take walks in nature**, alone or with others, for exercise that nurtures body, heart, and soul. Bring children along to encourage nature as their lifelong ally.

Resolution: Cut Home Energy Costs & Pollution

Strategy: Trimming home energy use saves money while reducing energy-related pollution and greenhouse gases.

Action ideas:

- **Install a programmable thermostat** to automatically lower heating costs while you're at work or school.

- **Get a home energy audit**, to identify your best opportunities for cutting energy waste and increasing efficiency. You can avoid up-front improvement costs with funding options such as SCEIP (www.sonomacountyenergy.org).

- **Consider solar power**, after improving your home's efficiency, to reduce your use of polluting fossil fuels.

Resolution: Trim Driving Miles & Costs

Strategy: By cutting your driving miles, you can reduce your car expenses and pollution without buying a new car, plus often enhance relationships and integrate more exercise into your routine.

Action ideas:

- **Seek carpool buddies** for your trips to work, school, and more.

- **Add public transit to your schedule.** Get information on your local system and start by exploring a simple route.

- **Designate one day a week or month as your "alternative commute day"** and get to work or school by walking, biking, or taking public transit.

Resolution: Act at the Community Level

Strategy: By joining our efforts with others, we can help create the community-level changes needed to ensure that both we and the earth flourish.

Action ideas:

- **Regularly contribute to groups you value.** In addition to donating money, consider offering your time and skills, even for just a few hours monthly. You'll feel good connecting with like-minded souls and being part of the solution.

- **Educate yourself and take action on eco-issues.** E-mail lists from nonprofits can make that easier.

- **Encourage your workplace and church groups** to take eco-actions.

I hope these ideas help you enjoy the fun of turning our current challenges into opportunities for a better future!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

© Copyright Patricia Dines, 2010. All rights reserved.

Published in the *Sonoma County Gazette*, January 2010.

For more Ask EcoGirl columns, see www.askecogirl.info