

Why You Should Live Sustainably (& Tell Your Friends Too)

June 13, 2021



The discussion surrounding the environment has been one that is, for lack of a better term, “heated.” In 2021, there are still people who discuss climate change as a joke or question the validity of the statement. In fact, the Pew Research Center found that 39% of Americans believe climate change poses a minor (23%) or no threat (16%). However, climate change is not a laughing matter as the effects of climate change could lead to increased temperatures, health impacts, famine, flooding, and so on. Therefore, this environmental crisis has signaled the importance of living sustainably and changing our habits to slow down the effects of climate change.



What is Sustainability?

Simply put, sustainability is the practice of maintaining your needs while acting in the environment's best interest. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, sustainability is based on the principle that what we need to survive and live well depends on the environment. Other organizations like the UN World Commission on Environment and Development also describe sustainability as when the needs of the present do not compromise the survival of the future generations. Regardless, there are ways that people can live more sustainably that will help the environment.

Fast Facts

According to the *50 Facts for 50 Years by Sustainability at Georgetown University*:

1. The US makes up only 5% of the world population, but it throws away enough plastic bottles in a week to encircle the Earth 5 times!
2. The U.S. is the #1 trash-producing country in the world at 1,609 pounds per person per year. This means that 5% of the world's people generate 40% of the world's waste.
3. The average college student produces 640 pounds of solid waste each year, including 500 disposable cups and 320 pounds of paper.

Some choices can be made to limit one's carbon footprint, so let's break down some of the choices you can make to help the environment.

Small Changes in Your Home

Whether you live in a dorm, off-campus, or at home, your home is the best spot to start reducing waste and living more sustainably. From buying more decomposable products to using reusable items, to reducing waste, you can begin to decrease your carbon footprint.

Reduce Food Waste

Another simple way to reduce your carbon footprint is by reducing your food waste. One simple way to start reducing food waste is buying food that you are sure you will eat so you throw out less food. Not only will this save you money in the long run, but it will also decrease the food waste in landfills.



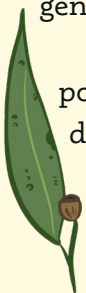
If you wanted to take that a step further, then composting may be for you. Composting is the decomposing of materials, such as fruit, vegetables, or paper products, into a fertilizer. To start composting, you have a couple of choices to start. You could get your own compost bin and maintain it yourself or you could find a compost center and bring your food scraps there. The easiest way to compost at Pitt would be to bring your food scraps to one of the many green compost containers located around campus.

Green Tip

The easiest way to keep food scraps from smelling up your kitchen or dorm is to keep a container for compost in the freezer. Once the container is filled with food scraps, compost them accordingly.



Compost Guidelines



Buy Reusable & High-Quality Products

Rather than using one-time items, like paper towels or cleaning products, it's better to invest in high-quality products that will last longer. Not only will investing in reusable products save resources, but you'll save money too. For example, Net Zero Co. estimates that "Americans [are] using around 13 billion pounds of towels annually—that is equivalent to throwing out around 270 million trees every year!" However, buying reusable paper towels instead of continuously buying paper towels could help.

The following are other products that could help you reduce waste in your home:

Waterbottle

The Biofriendly Planet estimates that if you drank 8 plastic bottles of water a day (as recommended) it would cost about **\$1,800 a year!** With water stations around campus, this is an easy swap.



Reusable Bags

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, it **takes over 1,000 years for plastic bags to decompose** which become microplastics that absorb toxins and continue to add to pollution.

Reusable Coffee Pods

According to the Story of Stuff Project, "the amount of K-Cups trashed into landfills as of today could wrap around the planet **more than 10 times!**"



Bamboo Cutlery Set

"Some estimates put the number of individual plastic utensils wasted at 40 billion per year in the United States alone" as stated by Forbes. Try to switch to reusable cutlery next time you get food on the go.



Bamboo Toothbrushes are just one of the many switches you can make

More Sustainable Swaps

Whether you are living on- or off-campus, there are ways that you can make the switch to environmentally-friendly products. For example, everyone needs to do laundry... but did you know that there are microplastics in your laundry detergent? According to Columbia Climate School, there are "over 2.5 million microbeads per a load of laundry." Switching to a plastic-free laundry detergent could greatly decrease your carbon footprint.

If you are living off-campus, one environmentally-friendly switch would be to use LED light bulbs. The Consumer Energy Alliance stated that benefits include "increased energy efficiency, lower electric bills, a longer bulb life, and a better and safer light source overall." With those benefits, making the switch to an eco-friendly product is a no-brainer.

If you enjoy shopping, try shopping second-hand rather than contribute to fast fashion. Not only can you get some great products, but you could also support your community by shopping at locally-owned thrift stores.

Take these products into consideration and take some time to research other eco-friendly swaps you can make in your life. Not only is it more cost-effective and requires lower maintenance, but it's better for the Earth.

Small Changes Outside

Your environmental impact can go further than just your house. Take your environmental impact outside! Whether you decide to volunteer, pick up trash you see on campus, or use reusable items, there are some simple changes you can make that would help the environment.

Carpooling & Public Rides

The Rideshare Company estimates that “The US could save 33 million gallons of gas each day if the average commuting vehicle carried one additional person.” If you are a student with a car on campus, consider driving with additional people. Not only can you save on gas, but it will benefit the environment.

If you are a student that doesn't have a car on campus, you can turn to public transportation! Did you know that your Pitt ID acts as a bus pass? Simply board a Port Authority Bus and scan your ID. Now you can explore Pittsburgh without wasting your money on gas and limiting your greenhouse gas emissions.



Recycle Single Stream Recycling

Paper
Flattened Cardboard, Magazines, Newspaper, Office & Glossy Paper, Paperboard, Mail, & Books

Metal
Aluminum, Tin, & Steel Containers & Aluminum Foil

Plastic
Bottles, Jugs, Jars, & Containers

Glass
Bottles, Jugs, Jars, & Containers

Recycling Guidelines at the University of Pittsburgh

All recyclables should be empty, clean and dry.

University of Pittsburgh
sustainable.pitt.edu/zerowaste
Questions? E-mail: zerowaste@pitt.edu

Learn How to Recycle

Fun fact! You can't recycle everything, so it's important to review recycle guidelines for wherever you're living. At the University of Pittsburgh, you can recycle paper, metal, plastic, and glass. Before recycling, remember to always rinse out your containers of any food waste or chemicals.

There are some absolute no's when it does come to recycling including, aerosol cans, grocery bags, batteries, pizza boxes, and styrofoam to name a few.

Small Changes to Your Diet

Go Vegan

Choosing to be vegan can have serious benefits for the environment. For example, “research shows that one person going vegan can save over 200,000 gallons of water a year” according to Future Kind. Among the other benefits, a vegan lifestyle can directly benefit your health. Healthline discusses benefits including, excess weight loss, increases in nutrients, and lowering the risk of heart disease. Check out VeganPittsburgh.org to find vegan restaurants in Pittsburgh. There are also lots of recipes online that would make the switch to veganism much easier.

Go Vegetarian

If veganism is too much too fast, then you should consider trying vegetarianism. There are similar benefits to becoming a vegetarian as a vegan. Also, the Vegetarian Society states that “eating a veggie diet means 2.5 x fewer carbon emissions than a meat diet.”

These small changes could help make a serious impact on the environment. It's important to consider making these changes because our world depends on us making such changes. There is no Planet B so make the switch today.

Acknowledgments

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Contributors:

- Pew Research Center
- The United States Environmental Protection Agency
- UN World Commission on Environment and Development
- Georgetown University
- Net Zero Co.
- Biofriendly Planet
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Story of Stuff Project
- Forbes
- Columbia Climate School
- Consumer Energy Alliance
- The Rideshare Company
- Future Kind
- The Vegetarian Society