

# 50 WAYS TO LOVE YOUR MOTHER

A pair of hands, one larger and one smaller, are shown holding a small, realistic globe of the Earth. The globe is positioned in the center of the frame, showing continents and oceans. The hands are cupped around the globe, symbolizing care and protection. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting.

*Simple steps for  
a greener,  
healthier planet*

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[smallfootprintfamily.com](http://smallfootprintfamily.com)

# 50 WAYS TO LOVE YOUR MOTHER

SIMPLE STEPS FOR A GREENER, HEALTHIER PLANET

BY DAWN GIFFORD



**SMALL  
FOOTPRINT  
FAMILY**

sustainability starts at home

Mother Earth is in dire shape. We're running out of resources, and trash and pollution seem to never stop increasing. But trying to live a little greener can seem quite daunting. Beyond recycling, what more can you do?  
Where do you start?

Here are 50 simple, "entry-level" ways to live a more sustainable lifestyle that will not only go easy on the planet, but will go easy on your wallet, too. And who couldn't use more money, right?



You might already be doing a few things in this guide. If so, thank you! You're awesome. Now, let's take it further, and save you even more money...

Try a few new ideas in this book each week, or work on one area a month until you've accomplished all 50. This will not only give you steady progress and steady savings, but it will take any overwhelm out of the whole process!

If you'd like a little help and support as you work your way through this booklet, I hope you'll join our Facebook Group, **Beyond Recycling**.

# Saving Water



Did you know that America faces a water supply crisis? Less than 2% of the Earth's water supply is fresh water, and yet we're using and polluting our water faster than we can replenish our clean supply.

Today, the average American directly uses approximately 140-160 gallons of water per day for cooking, eating, bathing, etc. But then we also use another 1500-1800 gallons of water each day that goes into producing the food we eat, the energy we use, the products we buy, and services we rely on. That's a lot of water!

It's more crucial than ever that we reduce our water usage as much as possible today so we have enough for tomorrow. Here are some easy ways to get started...

## 1. TURN THE WATER OFF WHILE WASHING HANDS, DOING DISHES AND BRUSHING TEETH.

It sounds so simple, but it really does save a lot of water to shut off the faucet while you scrub and brush.

Bonus points for putting a bucket under your shower or bathtub faucet while the water warms up. Use the water you collect to water your plants or rinse your dishes!

## 2. INSTALL SINK WATER AERATORS.

These are really cheap and easy to install and they greatly conserve the flow of water out of your sink, saving you money and water use.

Use an aerator like **this one** for the kitchen, and **this one** for the bathroom.

### 3. INSTALL LOW-FLOW SHOWER HEADS.

A low flow showerhead can significantly conserve the water coming out of your shower head without reducing water pressure. Some of them are quite fancy!

You can find a high-quality, basic low flow showerhead [here](#).



### 4. PUT A BRICK IN YOUR TOILET TANK.

Make your old toilet into a low flow toilet by putting either a brick inside a waterproof plastic bag or a recycled plastic bottle full of sand into your tank. You can also buy **"tank banks"** at the hardware store that will do this for you very neatly. These will displace and reduce the amount of water wasted on every flush.

### 5. WAIT TILL YOU HAVE A FULL LOAD OF LAUNDRY TO WASH.

This saves both water and energy on washing your clothes.

### 6. RUN YOUR DISHWASHER ONLY WHEN IT IS FULL.

By waiting till it's full, you make the best use of the water and energy needed to wash your dishes.

### 7. INSTALL A RAIN BARREL OR CISTERN TO COLLECT RAINWATER FROM YOUR DOWNSPOUTS.

The water you save from a rain barrel or cistern can be used to water all your outdoor plants. If you live in a rainy area, consider getting a cistern or several barrels and connecting them together because one rainstorm can yield hundreds of gallons in some regions. **Here are some great rain barrel options.**

Some cities offer free or reduced cost rain barrels, too, so check with your local environmental department

**LEARN MORE WAYS TO SAVE WATER HERE.**



## Saving Energy

Most of our energy use comes from fossil fuels like petroleum and coal that provide electricity and gas. These resources are non-renewable which means that we will eventually run out.

Burning fossil fuels also releases toxic pollution into the air, including mercury, sulfur dioxide, methane and carbon dioxide. This pollution not only affects our health, but it contributes significantly to climate change, too.

Everything you can do to be more energy efficient will save you money, improve the economy, and enhance quality of life for everyone. Start with some of these simple ideas...

### 8. WASH YOUR CLOTHES IN COLD WATER.

Clothes get just as clean, but without the energy spent on heating the water.

### 9. LINE DRY YOUR CLOTHES.

Dryers don't even come with an "Energy Star" rating—that's how bad they are in terms of energy consumption. Line or rack drying your clothes **saves a ton of energy** and therefore prevents air and water pollution generated from power plants. If you can't use a clothesline because of HOA or apartment restrictions, try **this heavy duty drying rack**.

### 10. KEEP YOUR FRIDGE COILS CLEAN.

Do you clean the back/underside of your fridge? All that dust might make it work harder than it needs to, costing you money.

### 11. REPLACE YOUR LIGHT BULBS WITH LED LIGHTS.

A small up-front investment in LEDs can save **hundreds or even thousands of dollars** (and a lot of energy) over the lifespan of these bulbs—which can be as long as 10 years! Buy them on sale and replace them slowly, as your other bulbs go out.

### 12. INSTALL A PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTAT.

This handy little device allows you to program your heat or AC to come on right before you get home, and turn down while you are gone or asleep. They are pretty easy to install yourself, and can save a ton of money on your utility bills, saving energy and reducing pollution. **Here's a nice, affordable model.**

### 13. REPLACE THE OLD WEATHERSTRIPPING ON YOUR DOORS AND WINDOWS.

Keep your house warm in winter and cool in summer by weatherstripping or caulking all the places the air leaks in and out of your home. **Here are the most common areas to seal up around the house.**

### 14. INSULATE YOUR HOT WATER HEATER AND YOUR WATER PIPES.

Pipe insulation and water heater blankets help your water heater to work less to heat your water, saving you money on electricity. **This water heater insulation kit** is fiberglass-free for easy, itch-free installation.

### 15. PUT ALL YOUR MAJOR ELECTRONICS ON POWER STRIPS.

Even when they are “off,” TVs, DVD players, cable boxes, WIFI routers, and computers continue to draw electricity all day. Put them all on a power strip and shut them totally off at night or when you leave the house to reduce energy use and save money. **This remote-controlled power strip** easily turns off all your electronics at once, without having to reach behind furniture. **Learn more about stopping vampire power drains in your home.**

### 16. SHUT OFF YOUR COMPUTER AND MONITOR WHEN YOU ARE DONE USING THEM.

Unless your company backs up your computers at night on a network, there is no need to leave it on. If there is a nightly backup, then just turn off the monitor. Turn your home computer completely off when you're done using it.

### 17. UNPLUG YOUR CELLPHONE WHEN IT IS DONE CHARGING.

Once that light turns green, you are just wasting electricity keeping it plugged in.

### 18. INSTALL OUTDOOR SOLAR LIGHTS.

Instead of lighting the path to your door using electricity, install some solar path lights or security lights that charge during the day and light up all night. **These solar security lights** are powerful and affordable.

### 19. GET A FREE ENERGY ASSESSMENT.

Many electricity utilities offer a free energy assessment where they will come out to your home and show you where you can improve your energy savings and reduce your electricity bill. If your local power company doesn't offer an assessment, **you can get one free online.**



**LEARN MORE WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY HERE.**



## Reducing Toxins

Did you know that the average American home contains more than 1,000 different chemicals? About 15% of those chemicals have been linked to allergies, birth defects, endocrine disorders, cancer, and neurological problems.

But household toxins don't just affect our health. They create toxic waste in their manufacture and use, contribute to air and water pollution, and generate solid toxic waste.

Obviously, no one wants to pollute their home with harmful chemicals and put their family, children and pets at risk. So anything you can do to reduce the chemicals you use in your daily life will be good for you, your loved ones, and the environment. Here are a few basic ways to begin...

### 20. MAKE YOUR OWN CLEANING SOLUTIONS.

Most store bought cleaners are full of nasty chemicals you really don't want polluting your home. But there are tons of great, non-toxic cleaning formulas you can make at home that work just as well, and cost just pennies to make!

**This is my favorite DIY cleaner recipe book.**

### 21. SKIP THE TOXIC FABRIC SOFTENER AND DRYER SHEETS.

Fabric softener and dryer sheets are some of the most toxic household chemicals we use. Instead, add 1/2 cup of white vinegar to the rinse cycle of your washing machine. Vinegar works naturally to soften your clothing and has the added benefit of breaking down laundry detergent very effectively. This means less detergent-sensitive allergies for families with sensitive skin. Don't be put off by the fragrance of vinegar. The odor disappears when the vinegar dries. Use **wool dryer balls** to fluff clothes in the dryer and reduce static cling.

## 22. CHOOSE ORGANIC FOODS WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

Organic foods not only **keep toxic pesticides out of your body**, but they keep them out of the air, water and soil too. If you can't afford a totally organic diet, choose organic meat, eggs and dairy first, which tend to contain the most pesticides, antibiotics and hormones. Then, choose to buy the **"dirty dozen" fruits and vegetables** organic too.

Bonus points (and extra money saving) for **meal planning** and buying **locally-grown**, so there's no food waste, little transportation pollution and you support your local economy, too.

## 23. AVOID CANNED FOODS AND BEVERAGES.

Most of the cans our foods and beverages come in are lined with **bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical linked to endocrine disorders and cancer**.

You can get many canned food items, like baby formula, crushed tomatoes, beer, or soup in glass containers or tetra-paks instead. A small handful of companies are offering their products in BPA-free cans, and the number continues to grow due to public demand.

**Here's a list.**

## 24. REDUCE THE USE OF PLASTIC AROUND FOOD.

Most plastics **leach phthalates, BPA or other toxic chemicals** into your food and beverages, especially if they get hot in the microwave or car. Use **glass containers to store your food**; glass and ceramic dishes to heat and serve your food and drinks; and a **reusable steel or glass bottle or thermos** to carry your beverages.

## 25. GET A GOOD WATER FILTER FOR YOUR TAP.

Tap water can contain chemicals you don't want to consume, cook with, or bathe in, like chloramines, fluoride and even heavy metals, petrochemicals, pesticides or pharmaceuticals.

**(Bottled water is usually no better though!)**

Save water, money and your health by putting **a quality filter on your tap**. Bonus points for putting a **filter on your shower**, too!

## 26. GROW HOUSEPLANTS.

The Environmental Protection Agency says that indoor air pollution is 2-5 times worse than outdoor air pollution. While you can certainly buy a pricey HEPA filter to filter the air in your home, houseplants can do a great job of cleaning your indoor air, too.

Choose several easy to grow houseplants like Dracaena, Spider Plant, Peace Lily, Snake Plant, Pothos, and Boston Fern, and put one in each room near a window or skylight.



**LEARN MORE WAYS TO DETOX YOUR HOME HERE.**

# Reducing Waste



If you're an average American, you produce 4.4 pounds of trash every single day. In a nation of nearly 324 million people, that amounts to more than 700,000 tons of garbage produced every day—enough to fill around 60,000 garbage trucks. That is a shocking amount of waste!

All that trash either ends up as litter in our oceans, lakes and streams, or it goes to the landfill, where it produces 20% of all methane emissions. It's hard to overestimate the importance of reducing, recycling and composting our garbage, and not letting it end up in a landfill.

Here are several easy-to-implement ideas...

## 27. USE REUSABLE BAGS AT EVERY STORE.

The easy way to remember your reusable bags is to **have a bag or set of bags that fits into your purse or pocket**. That way you'll always have them handy at every store. You can even get **reusable produce bags and bulk bags**, so you never need to grab a plastic bag at the store again!

## 28. USE WASHABLE TOWELS INSTEAD OF PAPER TOWELS.

Use rags or kitchen towels to clean up messes around the house. This not only saves you a few dollars, but also saves trees, water and oil, and keeps paper out of the landfill.

## 29. BUY RECYCLED PAPER PRODUCTS.

The recycled brands of toilet paper, computer paper and other paper products work just as well as virgin paper, but conserve millions of trees and billions of gallons of water. Recycled paper products can also prevent a lot of chlorine pollution from the bleaching process, too.

### 30. STOP JUNK MAIL FROM COMING TO YOUR MAILBOX.

Junk mail is not just annoying, it uses up tons of trees and gasoline every day. Plus all those ads create a major temptation to spend money on things you don't really need. There are lots of services to help you reduce the junk mail. [Check them out here.](#)

### 31. USE BOTH SIDES OF THE PAPER.

Once you print something out and no longer need it, flip it over and print again on the other side.

### 32. COMPOST YOUR FOOD SCRAPS.

You can save a ton of waste from going to the landfill by composting. The newer compost bins are easy to use and don't smell. If you live in an apartment or a house with no yard, small worm bins are an efficient way to compost, too. Once your food scraps are broken down, you have free fertilizer for your houseplants, trees and landscape!

Here is a list of [100 things you can compost](#) and here are [some easy-to-use compost bins.](#)



### 33. QUIT BUYING BOTTLED WATER.

Did you know it takes about **7 liters of water to make one liter of bottled water**? And bottled water is no better in quality than filtered tap water—it just costs more, contains plastic toxins from the bottles, and leaves a trail of waste everywhere. Get a good faucet water filter and a reusable water bottle to save money and help the environment. [Learn how to choose a good water filter here.](#)

### 34. USE RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES.

Gradually replace your regular batteries with rechargeable ones for all of your gadgets, remote controls, and smoke detectors in the house. Rechargeable batteries keep toxic disposable batteries out of the landfill, and saves you money in the long run. Buy them on sale and stock up over time. [This is a very reliable brand.](#)

### 35. READ YOUR FAVORITE NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE ONLINE.

Almost all magazines and newspapers have digital versions now, and many of them are free. Reading them online saves tons of trees and the energy and fuel expended on creating, delivering and disposing of the paper versions.

### 36. GET A LIBRARY CARD.

Reduce your consumer footprint and save lots of natural resources by checking out books and magazines from the library! Most libraries have online systems where you can find the books you want to read and have them delivered to your local branch.

### 37. USE ONLINE BANKING.

Online banking saves you time, stamps, gas, and reduces the amount of mail coming to your house. A lot of banks are offering incentives to go online, too. Don't be afraid: it's much easier for a thief to grab your bank statements out of your mailbox than it is for them to access your accounts online.

[\*\*LEARN MORE WAYS TO REDUCE WASTE HERE.\*\*](#)



## *Saving Gas*

Nothing would protect the environment and decrease our dependence on oil more than taking steps to reduce our transportation footprint. Transportation accounts for more than 30 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions.

In the city, car pollution also causes the grey smog that leads to hotter summers and those horrible orange, red and even purple air-quality days that cause asthma attacks in children and other health problems in adults.

Anything we can do to reduce burning gas and oil will give us all better air quality, and save you a lot of money!

### **38. KEEP A LOW MAINTENANCE LAWN.**

Do you have a relatively small yard? Why not try a push mower or an electric mower and save on gas and pollution? Better yet, replace that lawn with a vegetable garden or water-wise landscaping.

### **39. REDUCE YOUR COMMUTE.**

Whenever possible, use public transportation, carpooling or even bicycling to get to work or run errands. In many cases, choosing to live within walking or biking distance from work can save enough money on gas and car expenses each year to more than pay for the cost of living closer to town. Plus you'll never have to deal with traffic, and your body will thank you for the exercise!

#### 40. COMBINE YOUR ERRANDS.

When you can, combine your errands together, and run errands for friends and neighbors, too, so you can reduce the number of individual car trips. This will save gas and wear and tear on your car, plus help improve air quality in your town.

#### 41. ROTATE YOUR CAR TIRES AND KEEP THEM FILLED TO THE PROPER PRESSURE.

Keeping your tires inflated to the right PSI and rotated regularly saves fuel. Check them every 3 months or so, or once a season.

#### 42. AVOID IDLING YOUR CAR.

Unless you are sitting in traffic, it actually uses more gas to idle your vehicle for a mere 30 seconds than it does to turn it off and restart it. On top of that, the huge amount of smog created by idling vehicles is a major contributor to hot, hazy summers and diseases like childhood asthma. [Learn more about why idling is so bad.](#)

#### 43. BUY GAS IN THE MORNING OR EVENING.

Fill up your tank either early morning or later at night, especially during hot weather. When gas is cooler, it is more dense. When it is hot, it expands so you get less as you pump. After filling up, make sure your gas cap is tight so your gas doesn't evaporate out of your tank. In 2011, more than 147 million gallons of gas were wasted because of loose caps.

#### 44. WATCH YOUR SPEED.

Cars are most fuel efficient at 45-65 mph, when they are in the highest gear. Keep your highway speed at 60-65mph, and you can save up to \$900 a year on gas! Bonus points (and extra savings) for [learning to hypermile.](#)





## Reducing Consumption

We all depend on Mother Earth for everyday resources— land and water to produce food, for example. But humanity's excessive consumption of resources is just not sustainable.

Consumerism becomes excessive when it extends beyond what is needed. It's time to take a step back and realize that excessive consumption is not delivering on its promise to provide happiness and fulfillment, and it's harming the environment, too.

If we want resilient, sustainable communities, we need to reduce our focus on economic growth, materialism and consumerism. Consumption is necessary, but excessive consumption is not, and life can be better lived (and more enjoyed) by intentionally rejecting it.

### 45. TRY A SPEND-FAST.

Just for a single month, restrict your spending to only those things that you absolutely need to survive, like rent, utilities, medicines, basic food, gas or bus fare, etc. Ask yourself before you buy anything, "Do I need this to survive?" and if the answer is No, then don't buy it.

Things you will avoid buying for 30 days include movie tickets, junk food, fancy coffee drinks, clothing, music, haircuts, books, etc. Doing this just for a month will help you become much more mindful of your spending habits and help you save a ton of money.

**[Learn more about spend fasting.](#)**

#### 46. BUY SECOND-HAND.

These days you can buy almost anything—furniture, clothing, appliances, electronics—used and in good shape. This reduces your consumer footprint and saves things from going to a landfill.

#### 47. START OR JOIN A BUYING CLUB.

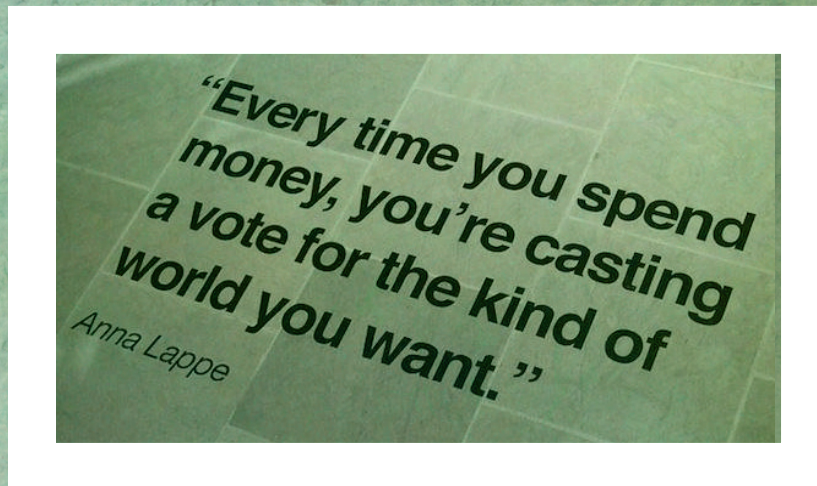
Buying clubs enable you to get bulk quantities of the things you usually purchase—but at a discounted or even wholesale rate. Costco, Sam's Club and **Thrive Market** are examples of buying clubs, but you can start a smaller one with friends and family members to save money on things you might not find at Costco, like a side of beef or a set of cloth diapers.

If you are unable to start or join a buying club, buy in bulk whenever you can.

**Learn more about starting a buying club.**

#### 48. WHEN BUYING BIG ITEMS, SPEND MORE TO BUY THINGS THAT WILL LAST.

Investing in a coffee maker that will last 5-10 years is a better use of your money than buying a cheap one that will break in a year. Doing this keeps things out of landfills for longer and saves you money and frustration.



#### 49. JOIN A CREDIT UNION.

Large banks invest your money in fossil fuels, coal, deforestation and other environmental and social nasties you don't want to support. In contrast, credit unions must invest your money right in your local community.

They also save you a ton on fees, and often have the best interest rates around, because they have to serve depositors—not shareholders. **Learn more about credit unions.**

#### 50. GIVE THE GIFT OF EXPERIENCES.

On the next birthday, holiday or other gift-giving occasion, consider giving experiences rather than things. A zoo membership, a fishing trip, concert tickets or a specially prepared, favorite meal are gifts that will often be remembered far longer and far more fondly than any toy, gadget or sweater you might otherwise give.



Going green is a journey. We're all at different places on that journey, and that's OK; the key is to just keep moving forward. You don't have to take on all of these ideas at once. One at a time, bring each idea into your life in a way that is sustainable for you.

Don't forget: Any journey is always easier and much more fun when you have companions! Find a friend or two, or enlist your family's support in going green. Check off the boxes you accomplish one by one, and celebrate your achievements together!

And please join our Facebook Group, **Beyond Recycling**, for more planet-friendly ideas, support and camaraderie, too!



## About The Author



**DAWN GIFFORD** is an award-winning eco-blogger, green building expert, sustainability consultant, Master Gardener and Permaculture designer.

She's the author of the best-selling book, *Sustainability Starts at Home: How to Save Money While Saving the Planet*, and the founder of [SmallFootprintFamily.com](http://SmallFootprintFamily.com)

Dawn lives in California with her 8-year old daughter.

## About Small Footprint Family

Our mission is to provide the information and inspiration you need to make safer, greener choices that save you money and sustain your family—and all families—in good health, for generations to come.

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