

10 Ways to Save by Going Green

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The era of new American frugality ushered in by the recession has an added benefit. Many measures that families take to cut costs in tough times—turning down the heat or shopping secondhand, for example—are also good for the planet. "Our carbon footprint is directly tied to our consumption, whether that's consumption of energy or a consumer product," says Josh Dorfman, host of the Sundance Channel show *The Lazy Environmentalist* and author of the book and blog of the same name. Whether people realize it or not, cutting back has made them accidental environmentalists.

"Certainly, saving money is more important to most people than going green," says Dorfman. "For people to green their lifestyle, the solutions have to fit how they live. I think there are a lot of ways to make that possible." Below, you'll find 10—all of which will minimize not only your footprint but also your spending.

1 Get there, greener. You don't have to own a Prius to drive green. Any driver can increase fuel efficiency and thus save on gas by getting regular tuneups, keeping tires properly inflated, and avoiding idling. But considering that transportation accounted for nearly 30 percent of carbon emissions in America in 2006, the cheapest and best thing you can do for the environment is to drive less. According to the American Public Transportation Association, public transit ridership is increasing and in 2009 reached its highest level in 52 years. Or you can join the growing renaissance of fuel-free and fit bicycle commuting.

2 Enjoy home-cooked meals. Prepared foods may be convenient, but they cost more than the ingredients for a home-cooked meal—and come loaded with salt and preservatives. Chef Laura Stec, author of the environmental cookbook *Cool Cuisine*, says that preparing meals at home is cheaper, more healthful, and not as hard as we think. "We can't save money and benefit from the results of eating higher-quality whole foods if people don't know how to use them," says Stec. "It's not about recipes; it's about technique." Stec says fresh, nutritious food paired with simple seasonings can help novice cooks learn to prepare delicious meals. Packing a lunch of leftovers can save you more than \$100 each month.

#5 Work from home. "There was a time when people might have looked askance at home-based businesses," says Christine Esposito, president of Terracom PR. "But now it's one way to walk your green talk." Esposito moved her green business into her home to save money and stay true to its brand. Employees at traditional workplaces can talk to their managers about working from home just a day or two a week to save on transportation.

3 Eat your veggies. According to the Department of Agriculture, the average American eats nearly 200 pounds of meat each year—an amount that has not been good for our nation's waistlines. But the production of meat uses vastly more resources than produce, which is why climate scientists and green chefs like Stec recommend a diet that is mostly plant based. "Not only is the overconsumption of meat and processed foods and corn syrup contributing to problems with our own diets, but [it's harmful] to the health of the planet as well," says Stec. She recommends using meat as an accent for cheap and hearty grain-based dishes.

4 Flip the switch. The sight of a monthly utility bill can make you shiver—or sweat. But there are simple ways to keep cool in the summer, stay toasty in the winter, and still cut your bill drastically. Catherine Potter, manager for consumer content at smart grid software company OPOWER, recommends this fundamental step: When you're not going to be at home, turn your thermostat up a few degrees in warm months and down a few degrees in cold months. "That will really give you the biggest bang for your buck because it's free to do, and heating and cooling comprise over half of the typical home's energy use," says Potter.

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6 Buy none, get one free. The best way to save money, of course, is to pay nothing at all—and for free goods, one should look no further than the computer screen. "The trend is towards this community online where people can share or trade what they have and save money," says Dorfman. Freecycle, the pioneer of the bunch, is an online community where people can post items they want to give away or items they want, finding a new home for old stuff. Based on that model, there's Zwaggle, a community for new parents, and Goozex, where video gamers can swap their old games. Those on SwapStyle trade fashionable clothing, while NeighborGoods facilitates the sharing of tools and household items. There's even the self-explanatory PaperBackSwap. "In a time where we're so concerned about our budgets, these solutions that aren't necessarily designed to be green still enable us to live well," says Dorfman. "A byproduct of that is we consume less and reduce our impact."

7 Get paid to recycle. Sometimes, going green doesn't just save you money—it earns you money. Old phones, printers, monitors, iPods, and personal digital assistants—stashed in drawers and closets when they kick the bucket—are valuable to companies that refurbish, resell, and recycle them, and they'll reimburse you in cash. "From the lazy environmentalist's point of view, [recycling] is a pain in the neck," says Dorfman, who recommends E-cycler Gazelle. Second Rotation, EcoNew, and BuyMyTronics will also buy your broken gadgets. "You're getting paid to sit on your couch," says Dorfman.

8 Don't be trashy. Reducing your share of trash provides instant green gratification and can help you save on your grocery bill. Whether it's tissues, plastic sandwich bags, or cotton balls, most of our disposable goods have a durable alternative—like handkerchiefs or sponges—that will get the job done just as well and will pay for itself in savings. A surprisingly stylish influence has been the AMC television show *Mad Men*, which has brought 1960s-era accouterments like long-lasting straight razors and handkerchiefs back in vogue. But even if you find it hard to do without your paper napkins, the easiest change is to replace bottled water with a reusable water bottle.

9 Conserve water. Your water bill is inextricably tied to your energy bill through your water heater, so reducing your use of hot water can mean extra savings. Dorfman endorses a low-flow showerhead, enabling him to take long showers guilt free.

10 Don't buy it—rent it. Savvy entrepreneurs have launched sites to rent out anything from cars to handbags for short-term use and big-time savings, both carbon and financial. Car-sharing company Zipcar is the best-known example, but sites like couture-lending Rent the Runway are growing fast. "Sites like these enable you to get what you want without actually owning it and allow other people to use it as well, collectively reducing the environmental impact," says Dorfman. "It allows you to save money and still enjoy your lifestyle."