

Making Maple Syrup and Saving the World

Making Maple Syrup and Saving the World - ten small ways you can help the planet.

Maple syrup production in the United States peaked in 1860. This had nothing to do with agricultural trends or culinary tastes. It was political and moral beliefs in action.

The Northern states were abolitionist, but their political efforts to end slavery in America had gone nowhere. That was not the end of their activism. Abolitionists urged people to eat no sugar made by slaves.

By happy coincidence, the north had its own source of sugar—the sugar maple tree. Tens of thousands of Americans made maple sugar on their farms, doing their part for the cause of freedom.

Today, as in the 1850s, political gridlock has blocked progress on a crucial issue: global warming.

We should continue to promote climate action at the state, federal and international level. At the same time, each of us can 'think globally, and act personally,' taking steps so that we 'walk more softly' upon the Earth.

Here are ten suggestions for reduced carbon living that I have found doable (I'm still working on numbers 1 and 5). I welcome your additions and feedback.

1. Consider solar panels. Prices have come way down in recent years, making solar power competitive. You don't need a lot of up-front cash, as many solar companies offer loans or leases that pay for themselves. When your panels generate more electricity than you use, you can 'net meter' the excess back to the grid, lowering your electric bill further.
2. Plant trees. Our streets used to be lined with shade trees, until road salt killed most of the sugar maples, and Dutch elm disease did its dirty work. Today, we can replant our streets with disease-resistant varieties, providing us with beauty and shade, while the trees sequester carbon.
3. Recycle. It takes less energy to reuse than to start with virgin materials. Urge your workplace, school, church, etc. to recycle, too. When my office started recycling, we found we generated just one bag of trash a week, so we canceled our dumpster, saving \$2000 a year.
4. Downsize your car. Next time you are in the market for a car, think smaller. If you are used to six cylinders, consider four. A small turbo-charged engine can have the same power as a bigger engine, but with much better mileage.
5. Look into a used electric car. Many electric cars, such as the Nissan Leaf and the Chevrolet Volt, are coming off three year leases—so many, in fact, that they can be bought for about one third their original price. This is a better deal than buying new and getting the tax credit. The cost per mile of an electric car is about one quarter that of a fossil fuel car.
6. Burn wood. You don't have to heat 100% with wood to make a difference. Any time you fire up the wood stove and turn down the thermostat is a plus. Extra points if you use wood

- from dead trees, wood cut by line crews, and any other wood that would be wasted. Pellet stoves are a popular, low-maintenance alternative, and wood pellet furnaces are cost-competitive with oil in larger installations, such as schools, municipal buildings, and churches.
7. Grow veggies. Huge quantities of fossil fuels are used to grow vegetables far away and ship them to New Hampshire. In a small space, you can grow plenty for your family. Start with things that are easy and productive, like potatoes, tomatoes, beans, and edible pod peas. The Earth will be happy, and you will smile because home-grown produce tastes better than anything you can buy in a store.
 8. Compost. Kitchen scraps, leaves and lawn clippings are not 'waste.' They are a resource. Put a compost pile in the back corner of your yard. If it looks unsightly, buy a compost bin, or make one from wood scraps from the recycling center. After a year, composted leaves make an excellent mulch for your veggies or landscaping.
 9. Turn off your furnace in the summer. Once the heating season is over, turn off your furnace. If your hot water is heated by your furnace, turn it on only when you need hot water. This will also make your house cooler in the summer.
 10. Eat less meat. It takes approximately ten pounds of vegetable matter to make one pound of meat. There is no nutritional reason for us to eat meat at every meal—it's just automatic in our culture. If there are non-meat foods you like, skip the meat at some meals.

Too many people fear that controlling greenhouse gases means a reduced standard of living. The above ideas are ways you can make your heating, electricity, transportation, waste stream, and food more 'carbon-lite,' without crimping your style.

Footer

Mark Fernald for State Senate District 9

P.O. Box 270
Peterborough, NH 03458
email

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