

Lightening Your Ecological Footprint: GREENING EVERY ROOM OF YOUR HOME

by Joyce DiBenedetto-Colton, © 1995

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Start by assessing each room of your home.

A mindful life is the most meaningful action one can take to affect a harmonious, healthy world.

To be mindful, one needs to make informed, thoughtful choices. What can you do in your own home to live more *sustainably*? What can you do to make your living environment "greener"? See what you can do, one room at a time...

THE KITCHEN

DEFINED: "The kitchen" is the "room" upon which we must rely for our daily nourishment. This room extends to, and includes, the "garden" from which comes all that you eat. That includes every resource utilized to bring food to your mouth: The soil, air, water, tractors (which includes steel production, Btu/joule/kilowatt energy, petroleum, etc.), trucks, warehousing, refrigeration, and any possible chemical fertilizers, and pesticides/biocides; as well as any and all energy/resources required for food preparation (cooking), restaurant production, and clean up (washing and waste disposal). If animal products are consumed, you will need to factor in the production of livestock feed (pesticides, soil, water, tractors, etc.), livestock facilities operation/maintenance and livestock excrement disposal - as well as the way animals are treated.

PURPOSE: Why am I eating? Am I in need of sustenance? Do I have a craving? Am I habitually eating? Is it "mealtime"? Is this a social activity? Can I make mindful choices about what I eat? Will I feel awkward about the choices I make? What will I feel best about eating - realistically?

Taking action: Try a "step-up" each month or so, until most of your meals consist of organic whole foods.

EARTH-FRIENDLY FOOD SCALE:

↑
Home grown organic
Locally grown organic
Imported organic
Locally grown
Imported U.S. (other states)
Imported foreign

PERSONAL FOOD SCALE:

↑
Fresh raw fruits and vegetables
Fresh vegetables, sprouts and grains
Home-cooked whole foods
Home-cooked processed foods(?)
Quality restaurant food
"Fast-food" restaurant

Mindful suggestions for the kitchen: Read labels! -Choose organics, compost, use canvas/cloth bags (or reuse paper), choose the least packaging, REUSE bags and containers (make a "bag line" to hang washed plastic bags for reuse), use cloth towels, cloth napkins, REDUCE paper, buy RECYCLED, avoid disposables, use biodegradable detergents, try a loofa. Be aware that certain *commercial* crops (particularly farmed livestock and GMOs) are deleterious to the environment. STAY UP-TO-DATE ON INFORMATION (Google) REGARDING GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS AND FOOD IRRADIATION.

THE BATH

DEFINED: The bath includes all toiletries for personal cleansing, medicines, remedies and first-aid, towels, sponges and brushes, as well as water use and energy required for heating water.

PURPOSE: Why am I grooming myself? Hygienic reasons? Vanity? Personal cleanliness? Alignment of spiritual and physical? Social consideration? Sexual attraction? Can I make mindful choices about my grooming? Can I avoid causing animals to needlessly suffer? Are there products that can make me feel clean and healthy? ALSO: Can I make mindful choices about simple medicinal remedies? About shaving products, about make-up, about menstrual products?

Mindful suggestions for the bath: Read labels! Avoid synthetic chemicals. Look for the cruelty-free symbol. Try a loofa. Think "natural". Choose cotton towels, bath mats (avoid rubber or synthetic backings) and cotton shower curtains (with a lightweight liner). Use recycled bath tissue! Choose "natural" toiletries (shampoo, rinse, toothpaste, essential oil/fragrances). Natural, organic henna is a non-toxic hair dye. How about using plain old cornstarch as body powder? Use foods and herbs to keep your immune system strong, or as natural remedies.

THE BEDROOM

DEFINED: The bedroom includes, of course, your bedding, pillows, bedclothes, as well as throw rugs, furniture, and general atmosphere conducive to good rest and sleep. This area is best when it is clean, neat, uncluttered, and especially dust-free.

PURPOSE: Why am I sleeping? During sleep, your body accelerates its cleansing/filtering process. It is the best opportunity your body has to utilize its energy for purifying its system and discarding (passing) impurities and toxins. How can I create a restful, comfortable, secure, and healthful environment in which to rest, sleep, and share intimacy?

Mindful suggestions for the bedroom: Natural fiber (cotton, linen, hemp) bedding, such as futons (avoid poly-foam cores); comfortable non-allergenic pillows (feather pillows are composed of "natural" material, but are not "friendly"); organic cotton, 100% cotton or linens; solid wood furniture (sustainably harvested wood is "renewable" and pressboard continuously "out-gases" formaldehyde [HCHO] which is toxic in the air. Polyester sheets also emit gases and formaldehyde even after repeated washing.) Try to avoid wall-to-wall carpeting; tile & wood floors are best, because they are easily swept and cleaned as well as being cooler. Cotton or hemp throw (or area) rugs are better.

THE CLOTHES CLOSET

DEFINED: Your closet is where your clothing, footwear and accessories are kept. Your closet would also extend to your chest of drawers which most likely houses your undergarments, sleepwear and secret or precious keepsakes, as well as your jewelry case. Also, this is most likely where nail-care paraphernalia are kept; manicure set, etc.

PURPOSE: Why am I dressing? What am I conveying through my dress and personal appearance? For whom am I dressing? What symbols do I display? How are my choices socially influenced: Historically influenced: Environmentally influenced: Personally influenced? Can I make mindful choices about what I wear? Will I feel awkward about the choices I want to make? What will I feel best about wearing?

Mindful suggestions for the clothes closet: Read labels! Natural fibers like organic or natural cotton, linen/flax, hemp; avoid synthetic fibers and leather; choose no-iron; look for low-maintenance knits; recycled rubber soled shoes; fabric shoes; web belts; latex vs. vinyl. How toxic is that nail enamel? What purpose does jewelry serve?.. No ivory please!

THE CLEANING CLOSET

DEFINED: Includes household cleaners and all equipment that assists in the maintenance of the household, including laundry aids, washers (dish and clothes) and dryers (how about a clothes line?).

PURPOSE: "Why am I cleaning?" may seem like a silly question to ask. However, many people ask that very question, and not so mindfully, decide that it is not a good idea for them to clean. Their time can be better spent doing something else. However this is a critical question in the framework of a mindful existence. The mindful individual realizes the importance of taking responsibility for cleaning one's own "mess": Cleaning one's own toilet, washing one's own dishes, and leaving an environment as tidy as one found it. A functional, healthy life should allow enough time to look after oneself.

Mindful suggestions for the cleaning closet: Read labels! Choose biodegradable, non-toxic detergents and cleaners; white vinegar; baking soda; castile soaps; sweep/mop before choosing an electric sweeper. Try a hand sweeper for low pile carpet. Avoid paper towels - use rags.

BE AWARE THAT PROCTOR & GAMBLE, COLGATE AND MANY OTHER MAJOR COMPANIES PERFORM CRUEL AND OUTDATED PRODUCT TESTING ON ANIMALS.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR MINDFUL LIVING:

- Reduce or eliminate battery-operated appliances. Use rechargeable batteries in those you have.
- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents. (Eventually try solar.)
- Choose pencils and reusable pens for writing, as well as recycled paper.
- Walk or ride a bike more, and drive less.
- Plant a garden, even if it's simply potted herbs.
- Don't point fingers; make your point by doing it.

Choice #1: Reduce - is it really necessary?

Choice #2: Reuse - do you have to buy it "new"?

Choice #3: Recycle - when you have to buy it, buy recycled and recyclable.

Above all: **REMEMBER** - to exercise your mindfulness and you will live a truly meaningful life.

Take action - one small step at a time:

Audit each room of your home by listing 3 things you can do in each room to live a "greener", more mindful life. Start with the easiest. Practice one for a month, and then add another.

Find or create space in which you can reflect or meditate regularly on living mindfully.

To help you take action:

- For local green resources, go to: www.earth-learning.org
- To calculate the impact of your ecological footprint, go to: www.myfootprint.org
- For info on responsible science go to: www.ucsusa.org
- For info on health, diet and responsible medicine, go to www.pcrm.org
- For info on food safety issues, go to www.organicconsumers.org
- To explore organic food coops, go to: www.deliciousorganics.com or www.redlandorganics.com/CSA.htm
- For info on organic farming standards, go to www.ams.usda.gov/nop/resource.htm
- For connections between diet, environment and animal treatment, go to www.earthsave.org
- For vegan advocacy, go to www.veganoutreach.org or www.vrg.org
- For a listing of companies and charities that test on animals, including their web addresses, go to www.peta-online.org
- To further explore the "Green Life" go to: www.sierraclub.org

First, live it.