

Earth Month: Small Steps, Big Impact

By: GROW Ecological Commission

Our individual, everyday actions (while sometimes seemingly small) really do make a big impact! Planting only one native plant starts to attract more pollinators, changing one meal a week from meat to plant-based saves gallons of water, buying thrift instead of new saves pounds of carbon emissions. Over time, these actions build upon each other to create a healthier you, greener Westchester, and a more beautiful world.

This Earth Month, we challenge you to reflect on where you are and take a step forward in your sustainability journey. Whether that means taking a first step like using a reusable water bottle instead of plastic or adding one more action to your list of many, every action you take matters and contributes to improved environmental quality in your home and community.

Here are some ideas to get you started!

✌ Lifestyle

- **Consume Responsibly:** Your **dollar is your power** in creating the world you want to see. What issues are near and dear to you? Shop local or minority owned; look for products with certifications like Certified B, Fairtrade, or Forest Stewardship Council that meet standards of social and environmental sustainability; remove impulse purchases (wait 30 days - or even a day - to evaluate if you really need a new purchase); shop thrift or second hand.
- **Repair First:** Before buying new, see if it can be fixed. Embrace **reuse and repair** culture by visiting local cobblers, tailors, or electronics repair shops (which also supports local businesses and the local economy). Or turn something into a new art project. (Save the Date for Repair-a-Palooza September 26 @ Village Hall)
- **Zero Waste Living:** Aim to **go plastic-free and waste-free**. Switch to reusable bags, use bulk-buy stations, unplug appliances, turn off lights, reduce food waste. Every purchase and item in the home offers opportunity for change in reducing plastic and waste of resources (and saves money in the long run!). Save the Date for Reuse-a-Palooza – the community wide garage sale - September 19 & 20
- **Talk About It:** Talk with friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, elected officials, etc. about the changes you make and how easy it can be. This **spreads your positive impact** and you may even learn about new changes you want to make along the way.

🌍 Moving Through the World

- **Active Transit:** Nothing beats the added benefits of **walking or biking** when it comes to transportation options. It's great for your health and the air quality of our streets. Is there one errand you can do closer to home and walk?
- **Public & Electric Options:** For longer commutes, utilize the **train, bus** or consider making your next car an **Electric Vehicle (EV)**.

🏠 In the Home & Garden

- **Conserve Water: Shorten your showers,** install a rain barrel to capture runoff from your garden, water your garden in the early morning or evening to minimize evaporation. All are also great ways to reduce your water bill.
- **Plant-Based Eating:** Change at least **one meal a week to meatless**. There are incredible flavors and benefits to explore with plant-based eating; you could even notice having more energy, reduced inflammation, and overall improved health. (Have you tried one of the monthly recipes in this newsletter?)
- **Solar and Electric Conversions:** Consider installing solar panels and switching to electric heat pumps and induction stoves. These "**home conversions**" reduce reliance on fossil fuels and often lower long-term utility bills.
- **Compost Your Scraps:** Instead of sending organic waste to the landfill (where it produces methane), start a backyard bin or utilize SBC's curbside **composting** program.
- **Go Native:** Swap grass and ornamental flowers for **native plants**. They require less water, zero pesticides, and provide vital habitats for local pollinators. They attract more butterflies too!
- **Sustainable Lawn Care:** If you keep a lawn, adopt "**Slow Mow Summer**" and ditch the chemicals. Leave grass clippings to nourish the soil and make your next lawn equipment purchase electric. Been missing seeing fireflies? This is one way to help support a healthy habitat for them to come back.

The Big Picture: Sustainability comes down to making intentional choices that honor our resources, improve our wellbeing, and protect the environment for future generations. Every gallon of water saved, every native flower planted, and every bike ride taken adds up. With our everyday choices, we are all building a healthier welcoming Westchester!

Recipe of the month:

A sweet treat that's sugar-free and dairy-free? Yes, please! These no bake cookies are great to keep in the freezer for when you want a tasty snack; works as a quick breakfast or pre-workout fuel as well!

Healthier No Bake Cookies**Ingredients**

- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 1/3 cup coconut oil
- 1/4 cup non-dairy milk (like coconut, almond, soy)
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1.5 cups quick oats

Instructions

- Add peanut butter, coconut oil, milk, and maple syrup to a small pot and heat over medium low.
- Once the mixture starts to boil, let it bubble for one minute and then turn heat off.
- Add cocoa powder, vanilla, and sea salt and stir. Next, add in oats and mix until fully combined.
- Scoop out about 2 tablespoons per cookie and place on a parchment paper lined baking sheet.
- Lightly flatten/shape each cookie into a circle.
- Refrigerate for one hour and enjoy! These are best kept in the refrigerator or freezer since coconut oil starts to melt at room temperature.

Source: www.callascleaneats.com

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.

Green Fact of the Month:

Earth Day celebrations involve actions to protect our planet by reducing pollution, planting trees and gardens, decreasing the use of energy coming from fossil fuels, reducing waste, and protecting all animals on the planet. Some Facts: Over 1 billion people participate in Earth Day events on April 22nd each year. Since the onset of Earth Day in 1970, over 100 million trees have been planted in Earth Day events.