

40 Ways

Here's a list of 40 ways Californians can help preserve the state's environment, courtesy of the Earthworks Group and the California Department of Conservation:

1. Buy products made of recycled content materials.
2. Report scavengers, who take recyclables from county curbside recycling bins. It is against the law for any unauthorized person to take items from curbside bins, and those who do are robbing counties of the revenue from recyclables that helps pay for curbside programs.
3. Have a garage sale. Other people may be able to reuse your old stuff, so it doesn't have to be thrown away.
4. Start a compost pile to recycle leftover food like bread scraps and fruit and vegetable leftovers. Throw away fatty foods like meat and cheese, which can create unpleasant odors and attract pests.
5. Use a clean, low-phosphate or phosphate-free detergent in your laundry. Phosphates ultimately can damage streams and rivers.
6. Recycle glass. The energy saved from recycling one glass bottle will light a 100-watt light bulb for four hours.
7. Recycle old newspapers. If we all recycled our Sunday newspapers, we could save more than 500,000 trees every week.
8. Recycle aluminum. The energy saved from one recycled can will run a television set for three hours.
9. Instead of plastic bags, use reusable containers to store leftovers or when packing lunches. If just 25 percent of American homes used 10 fewer plastic bags a month, we'd save more than 2.5 billion bags a year.
10. Take a reusable cloth or mesh bag to the grocery store, and never again answer the question "paper or plastic?"
11. Plant a tree. If every American family planted just one tree, more than a billion pounds of "greenhouse gasses" would be removed from the atmosphere every year.
12. Drive less. This is a challenge in a society that loves its cars, but consider taking mass transit or riding a bicycle whenever possible -- even if its just once or twice a week.
13. Carpool to work. If every commuter car carried one more passenger, we'd save more than half a million gallons of gasoline.
14. Over the long haul, rechargeable batteries will not only help the environment but will save you money, too. Americans use approximately 2 billion unchargeable batteries every year.
15. Call your electric utility company and ask about the availability of an "energy audit." The company may be able to show you how to save energy and money on your monthly bills.
16. Use latex paint instead of oil-based. It's easier to dispose of and has fewer toxic chemicals.
17. Don't start your dishwasher or clothes washer and dryer until you have a full load.

18. A household can save up to 20,000 gallons of water a year by not leaving the faucet running when doing things like brushing teeth, shaving, washing dishes in the sink, or washing the car at home instead of a self-service car wash.

19. Keep your car tuned up. A well-tuned car uses approximately 9 percent less gas than a poorly tuned car.

20. Set your lawnmower blade on the highest setting, leaving grass 2-3 inches long. This encourages healthier roots and protects the soil better from the hot sun -- meaning less water is necessary to keep the lawn green and growing.

21. Ever been to a beach and seen it strewn with garbage? Next time you go, take a garbage bag and take out not only what you brought in, but a few things left by someone else as well.

22. Put a plastic bottle in your toilet tank to act as a displacement device. You will use less water -- from 15-40 percent for most households.

23. When you buy things, ask yourself, "Is it recyclable?"

24. Americans receive almost 4 million tons of "junk mail" every year; if only 100,000 families stopped their junk mail, we could save up to 150,000 trees every year. Write to Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, 6 East 43rd St., New York, NY 10017. (212) 768-7277. Let them know you want your name removed from mailing lists.

25. Start a "save-it" drawer with containers for things like rubber bands, paper clips, buttons, twist ties, nails and other reusable or easily tossed-out items.

26. Recycle plastic "PET" bottles (those with the number 1 inside the three-arrow recycling symbol) and plastic HDPE (those with the number 2) if they are recycled in your town.

27. Buy in bulk when grocery shopping. It saves money and uses a lot less packaging.

28. Use cloth diapers to cut down on the 18 billion disposables used by Americans each year -- enough to stretch to the moon and back seven times.

29. Insulate attics, walls, doors, windows and water heaters to cut heating and cooling use and save money.

30. If your city or county has a curbside recycling program, participate! If you don't have a curbside program, in California you can call 1-800-RECYCLE to locate your nearest recycling center.

31. Avoid styrofoam at all costs. It's completely unbiodegradable and simply won't go away.

32. Use "low-flow" faucet and shower heads to reduce water usage by as much as 50 percent.

33. Recycle your old motor oil. It can be reprocessed and sold as fuel for ships and industrial boilers.

34. White office and typing paper is easily recyclable -- and most recyclers will pay you for it! The average office worker throws away more than 100 pounds of high-grade recyclable paper each year. Making one ton of recycled paper uses about 60 percent of the energy of making a ton of virgin paper.

35. If every U.S. family reduced its average heating temperatures by 6 degrees Fahrenheit, we'd save about half a million barrels of oil a year.

36. Help protect the ozone by not buying aerosol spray cans containing CFCs (check the label).

37. Replace incandescent light bulbs with fluorescents, or use one 100-watt bulb instead of two 60-watt bulbs. You'll get more light and use less energy.

38. Bring a coffee cup to work instead of using styrofoam.

39. Be a smart shopper and buy things that last. Metal, wood and thick plastic are likely to last a long time. Items with a lot of small parts tend to break easily.

40. Lead by example and spread the word. Recycle, reduce and reuse whenever possible.