

The Sensible Environmentalist

Simple Ways to Protect the Environment

DEAR DR. MOORE:

What do you consider the most important thing we can all do to protect the environment?

It's an impossible question because no single environmental issue takes absolute priority and many are in fact linked. But I think the most important thing we can do is understand that even small efforts—from turning off unnecessary lights to using non-toxic cleaning products—add up to a meaningful impact.



Dr. Moore

For example, there are lots of ways to save energy. In addition to the obvious (such as fixing leaks or adding insulation), try switching from incandescent lights to fluorescent. Or plant a tree. According to the US Forest Service, well positioned trees outside a home can reduce air conditioning needs by 20% and save 20-50% of the energy used for heating.

I also try to reduce my own environmental footprint by:

- Turning off the tap. Water shortages are becoming increasingly frequent, yet North Americans use more water per capita than everyone except the Japanese: about 90 gallons a day, compared to the European average of 53 gallons. Wasteful practices (such as leaving the tap on when we shave or clean the counters) comprise 14% of that amount. That's more than 12 gallons a day, per person, treated to drinking quality standards and often heated—that's lost down the drain.

- Avoiding quick starts. Driving a fuel efficient car is a simple way to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, which (in addition to being non-renewable) are enormously polluting. But did you know that rapid acceleration and braking can lower your gas mileage by as much as 33%?

- Using renewable materials and energy whenever I can. This can be as simple as using wood instead of other, non-renewable materials—or, if you own your home, choosing non-polluting alternatives to oil and natural gas, such as a geothermal heat pump, which captures solar energy that's been absorbed into the earth.

- Eating farmed salmon. It may seem like an odd choice for this list, but the campaign against farmed salmon is so misinformed that it has to be addressed. The bottom line: farmed salmon is safe and healthy to eat, and takes the pressure off wild fish stocks, which can't possibly meet the demands of a growing global population.

Of course, there's also the "reduce, re-use and recycle" philosophy—which incorporates some of the ideas above. But doing our part to protect the environment is really as simple as being mindful of our actions and choosing an environmentally responsible path.

A co-founder of Greenpeace, Dr. Patrick Moore is Chairman and Chief Scientist of Greenspirit Strategies Ltd. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com