

# 15 Easy Ways You Can Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

Mental Floss (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/546289/easy-ways-to-reduce-your-carbon-footprint>) · by Michele Debczak · June 1, 2018



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Imagine a landmass the size of the entire continent of Africa burning as a massive forest fire for an entire year (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/life-unbounded/the-crazy-scale-of-human-carbon-emission/>). Such an enormous fire would release nearly 40 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere—the same amount that human activity produces every year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2015 (<https://www.climate.gov/news-features/climate-qa/which-emits-more-carbon->

dioxide-volcanoes-or-human-activities) numbers. The scale at which we're pumping out CO2 is alarming, and it is all serving to trap heat on the planet and fuel climate change (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/500600/interactive-maps-show-how-climate-change-will-impact-your-neighborhood>). Fortunately, there are small, easy steps everyone can take to reduce their personal carbon footprint (which you can calculate (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/503375/reduce-your-environmental-impact-carbon-footprint-calculator>) here (<https://www.conservation.org/act/carboncalculator/calculate-your-carbon-footprint.aspx#/>)).

### **1. SKIP THE BACON, EGG, AND CHEESE ...**



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Your breakfast sandwich, while delicious, isn't eco-friendly. Livestock consume a lot of resources and release the greenhouse gas methane into the environment every time they fart (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/538743/facts-about-animal-farts>)—which means animal products come at a high environmental cost. Add the toll that transporting and packaging the ingredients takes on the environment, and the average bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich comes out to about 1441 grams (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/528008/your-bacon-egg-and-cheese-sandwiches-have-hefty-carbon-footprint>) CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (a unit that measures global warming potential). For comparison, driving a car four miles produces about 1650 grams CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. Maybe grab some locally-grown fruit the next time you're looking for a portable morning bite.

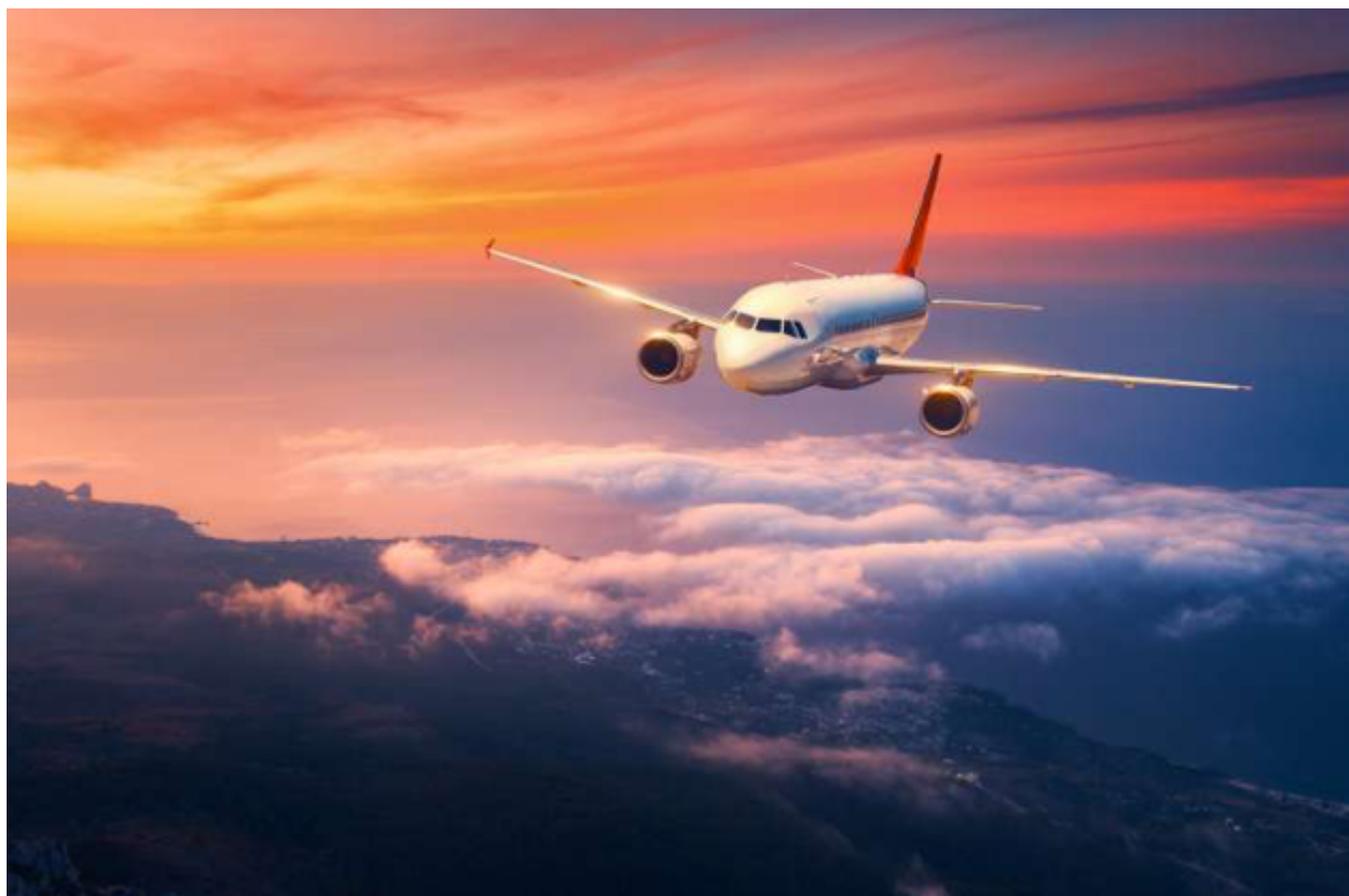
## **2. ... AND THE GRASS-FED BEEF.**



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Grass-fed beef has been embraced by the organic food movement, leading some people to believe it's the better choice for the environment. But a 2017 report (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/504985/grass-fed-beef-actually-worse-planet-report-finds>) released by Oxford's Food Climate Research Network shows this isn't the case: Grass-fed cattle only accounts for 1 gram of protein per person, per day compared to 13 grams from all ruminants, which includes cows, sheep, and goats. Despite this, grass-fed cattle still contribute one-third of all the greenhouse gases produced by ruminants—and the carbon-absorbing pastures they graze in don't do much to offset that. That said, grain-fed, factory-farmed meat isn't much better for the environment, and it comes with a whole different set of concerns, so a better option is to cut meat from your diet where you can.

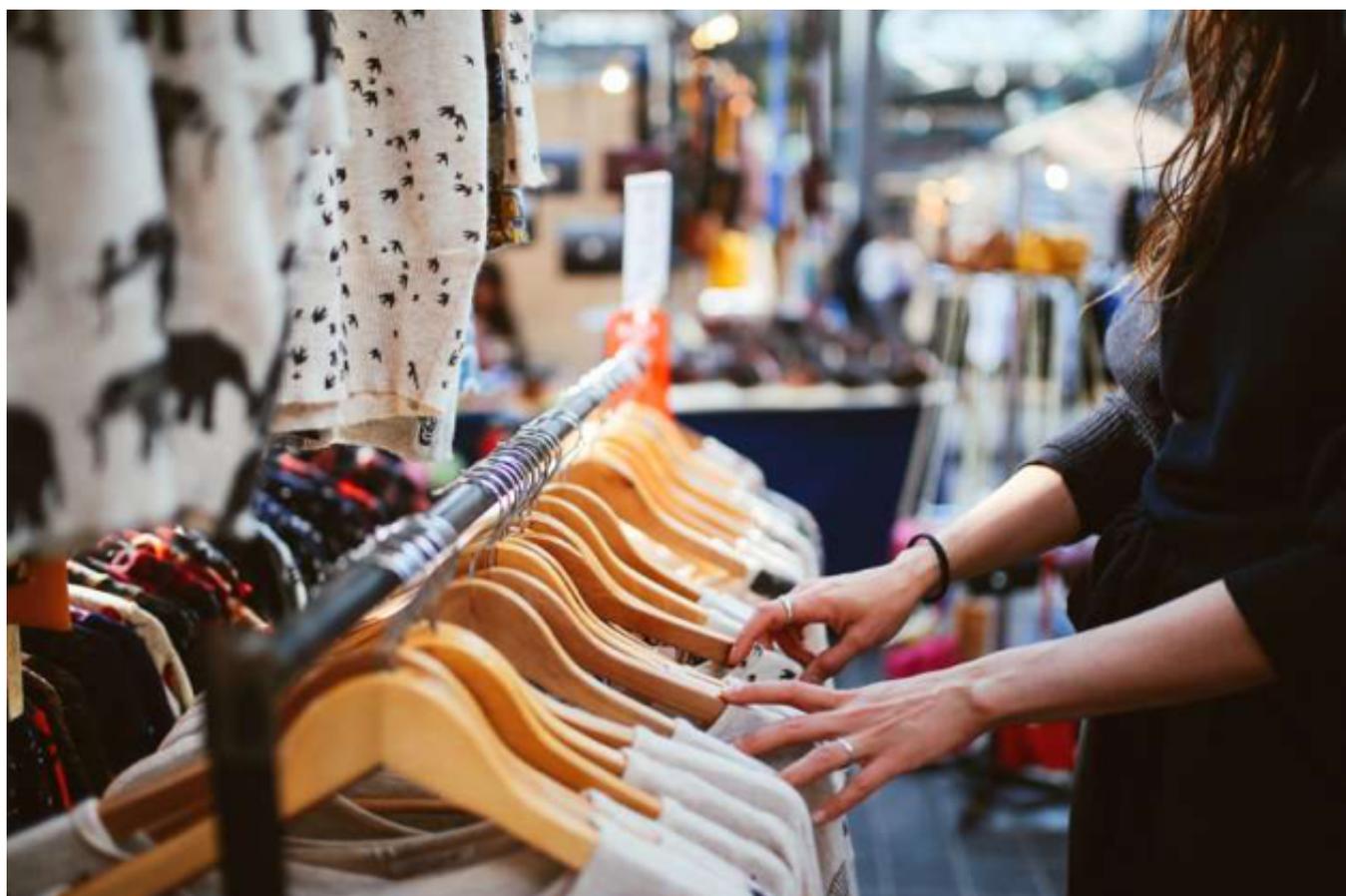
### **3. FLY COACH.**



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Traveling somewhere by plane is the quickest way to expand your carbon footprint. Just one round-trip flight between New York and Los Angeles produces about a fifth (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/27/climate/airplane-pollution-global-warming.html>) of the emissions your car creates in a year. The best option for the environment is to fly less or not at all, but this is unrealistic for some people. An alternative is to book your seats in coach. Because they're allotted less space, and therefore require less fuel, passengers flying economy are linked to three times less emissions than those flying in business class. Look at first class and the difference is even more dramatic: Those flyers account for nine times the carbon emissions of passengers in coach.

#### **4. SHOP AT SECOND-HAND STORES.**



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Next time you have a moment alone, check the tags of the clothes you have on. Unless you're a mindful shopper, your wardrobe likely crossed thousands of miles before ending up in your possession. The resources that go into making a single garment also add up: According to a report from Dame Ellen MacArthur's foundation, the fashion industry produces 1.2 billion tons (<https://www.thecut.com/2017/11/fashion-makes-more-carbon-emissions-than-some-air-travel.html>) of greenhouse gas emissions a year. Fortunately, there's an alternative to buying clothes from major chains that doesn't involve joining a nudist colony. Next time you need to replenish your closet, head to a second-hand store. Buying gently used clothing is better for the environment, and many thrift stores (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/525053/9-secrets-thrift-store-employees>) donate part of the proceeds to charitable causes.

## 5. BIKE.



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It's easy to see how biking can reduce your carbon footprint. While the typical passenger car releases about 404 grams (https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle) of CO2 per mile, a bicycle emits zero. If you live in a bikeable city or in an area with mild weather year-round, a bike is a worthwhile investment. Even if a bike can't replace your car completely, for shorter trips it's a great way to be gentle on the environment while saving gas money and getting a cardio workout at the same time.

## 6. TURN DOWN YOUR THERMOSTAT.



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Heating your home in the winter is expensive, and it can also be a major contributor to your carbon footprint. Do the planet and your wallet a favor and turn down the thermostat by a degree or two when you're in the house. At night you should turn the heat down even lower, and when you're away you should turn

it off altogether. Investing in a smart thermostat (<https://www.treehugger.com/gadgets/how-nest-thermostat-making-big-impact.html>) that senses when you're in the house and adjusts itself is another way to reduce your carbon emissions.

## 7. HANG YOUR CLOTHES TO DRY.



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If you have the yard space for a clothesline, take advantage of it. According to *The Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/green-living-blog/2010/nov/25/carbon-footprint-load-laundry>), a household that uses a dryer 200 times a year could shrink its carbon footprint by roughly half a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> by air-drying laundry instead. Even if you don't have the option to use a clothesline year-round, avoiding the dryer for just half (<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/garden/12clothesline.html>) your loads would make a difference.

## 8. UNPLUG THE APPLIANCES YOU DON'T USE.



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Just because an appliance is turned off doesn't mean it isn't consuming energy. According to How Stuff Works (<https://electronics.howstuffworks.com/everyday-tech/penny-pinching-save-energy-by.htm>), the "phantom energy" zapped up by electronics that stay plugged into an outlet around the clock can account for 10 percent of your electric bill (which, if you factor it out, would be more than a free month's worth of electricity each year). If you can't stand plugging and unplugging every gadget around your home all day, try leaving appliances you don't use on a daily basis, like toasters, desk lamps, etc., unplugged and only power them up when you need them.

## 9. REUSE WHERE YOU CAN.



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Every piece of waste you toss in the garbage adds to your carbon footprint. You may not be able to bring your trash production down to nothing (<https://www.goingzerowaste.com/>), but you can reduce it by investing in non-disposable goods that can withstand a bit of wear-and-tear. Reuseable shopping bags (<https://www.amazon.com/Tebery-Pack-Reusable-Grocery-Bags/dp/B071FT6BTW/?tag=mentalfloss0a-20&th=1>), food storage containers (<https://www.amazon.com/Enther-Containers-Compartment-Stackable-Dishwasher/dp/B072B9F7W4/?tag=mentalfloss0a-20&th=1>), coffee cups (<https://www.amazon.com/Stainless-Steel-Tumbler-Splash-Sliding/dp/B07BLL2W9D/?tag=mentalfloss0a-20&th=1>), and straws

(<https://www.amazon.com/Cupture-Reusable-Unbreakable-Color-Straws/dp/B07145SHSC/?tag=mentalfloss0a-20&th=1>) can replace many of the items that are often thrown away every day.

## **10. SWITCH OUT YOUR LIGHT BULBS.**



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If you still use incandescent bulbs to light your home, it's time to make a change. Incandescents use electricity inefficiently, adding money to your electricity bill and your home cooling expenses, thanks to the excess heat they generate. Energy Star-qualified (<http://homeguides.sfgate.com/changing-light-bulbs-environment-70834.html>) light bulbs like CFLs (compact fluorescents) and LEDs (light-emitting diodes) are more energy-efficient than the average light bulb and

last six times as long. If every household in America swapped just one regular light bulb for one of these options, we could reduce CO2 emissions by 9 billion pounds.

## **11. CARPOOL.**



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For trips where biking isn't an option, see if you can find a friend. Car travel isn't great for the environment, but hitching a ride with someone going the same direction as you makes a much smaller impact than driving alone. Next time you're at work, look around the office for potential carpool buddies. And before your next night out with friends, suggest a system that doesn't involve everyone coming in a separate car.

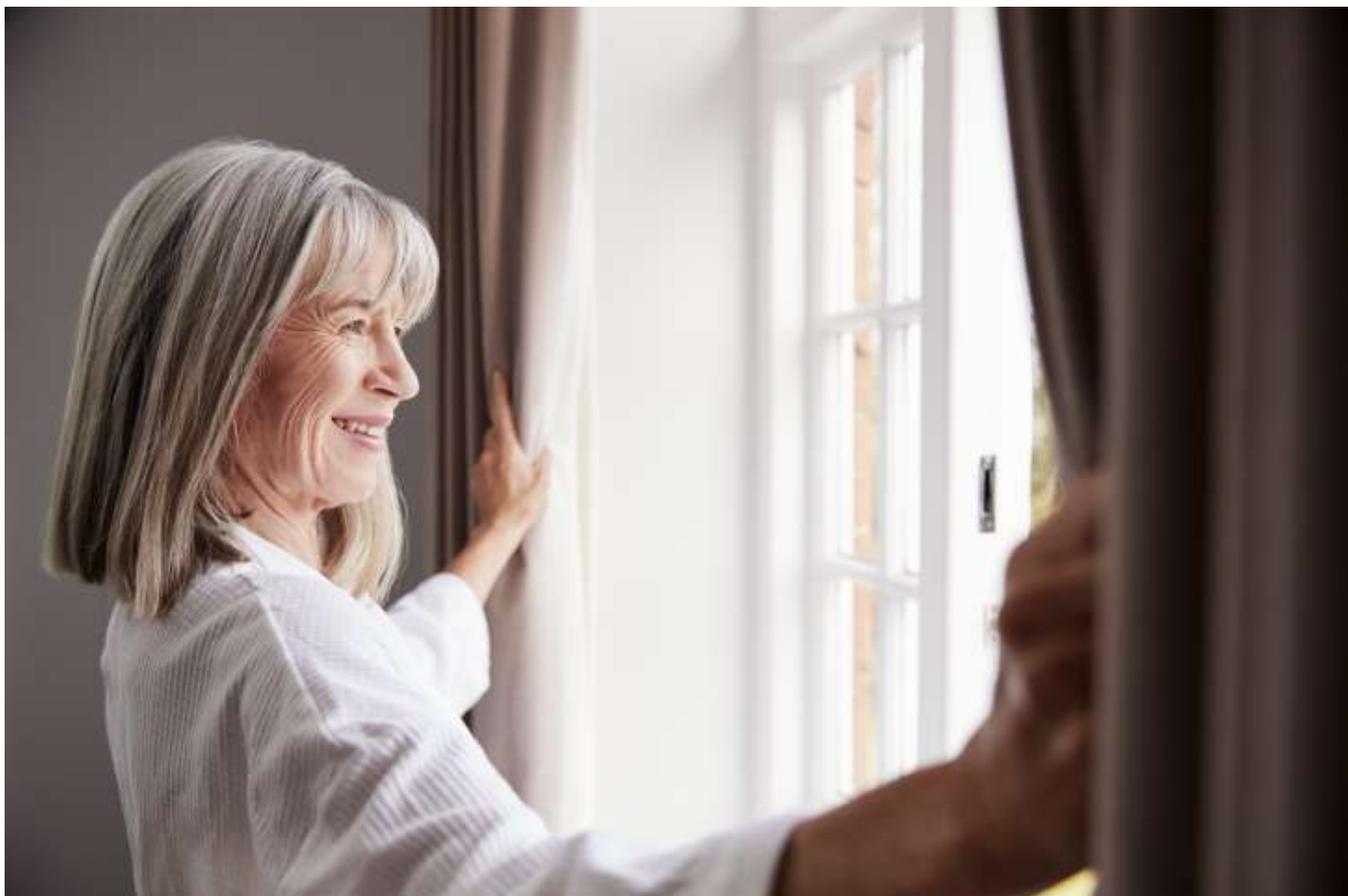
## **12. WASH YOUR CLOTHES IN COLD WATER.**



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One way to make your electric laundry machine a little gentler on the environment is to switch on the cold water setting. That simple change can reduce your washer's carbon emissions by 75 percent (<https://io9.gizmodo.com/why-are-you-still-washing-your-clothes-in-warm-water-1706931003>) and save you \$60 for every 300 loads of laundry you clean. And for lightly soiled clothing, cold water sanitizes just as well as a warm wash.

### **13. USE CURTAINS AS TEMPERATURE CONTROL.**



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Curtains aren't just there for privacy—throughout the year, they can help lower your energy consumption. When the sun is hitting the house, keep your windows clear in the winter to take advantage of that free heat source (<https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/my-money/2015/01/06/6-strategies-for-cutting-winter-heating-bills>), and close them during peak daylight hours during the summer (especially when you aren't at home). On winter nights, conserve energy by drawing your curtains closed and blocking the heat inside from leaking out, and either open your windows at night for a fresh breeze or close your curtains to keep the air conditioning in during the warmer months. Keep up these habits year-round and you'll see the difference in your heating and cooling bills.

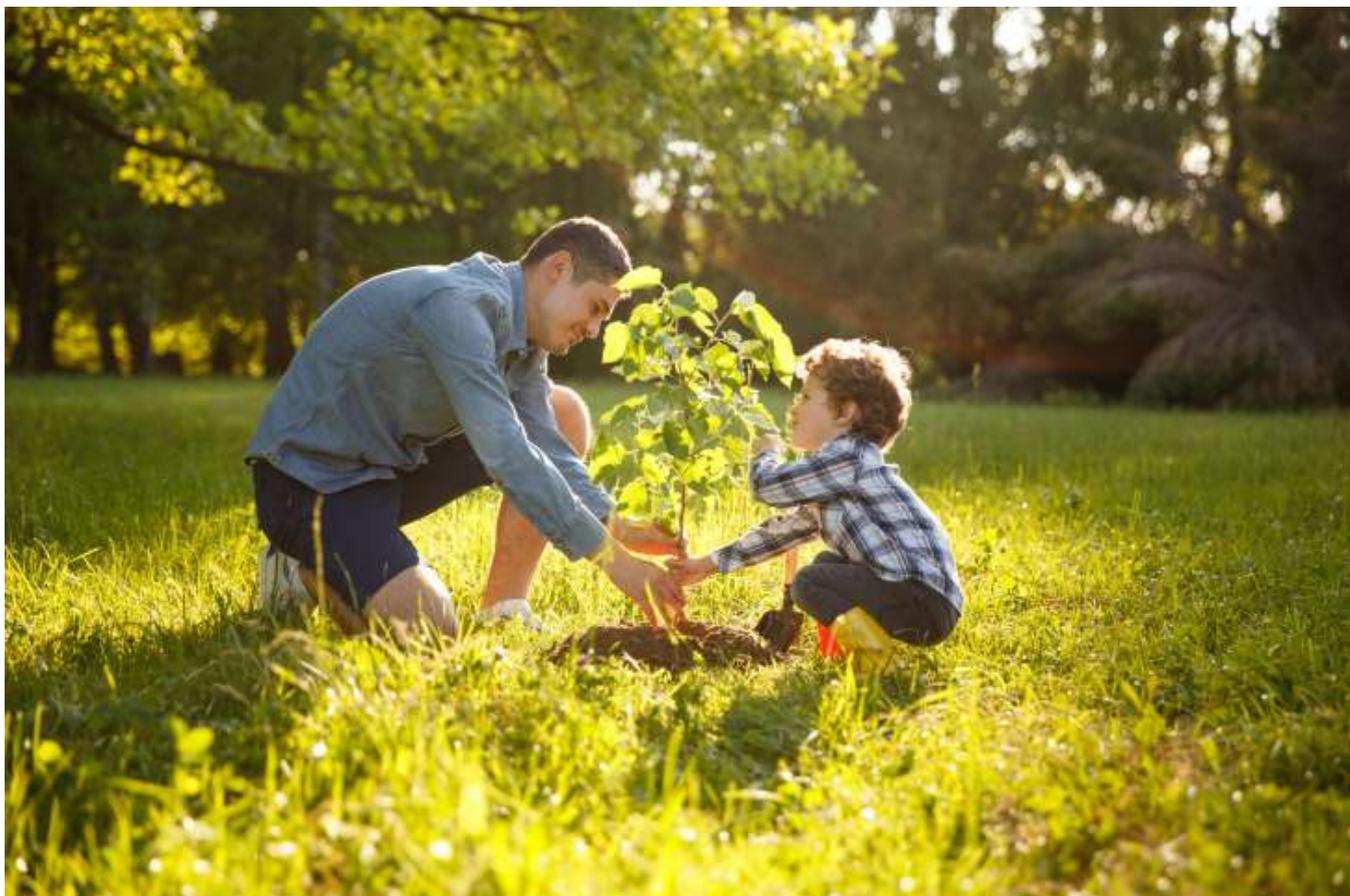
#### **14. TAKE SHORTER SHOWERS.**



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You don't need to deprive yourself of the pleasure of a hot shower to adopt a more eco-friendly lifestyle. According to *Mother Jones* (<https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2008/11/are-shorter-showers-beside-point/>), we would save 20.9 billion pounds of CO2 a year if we all shaved one minute off our shower sessions. If that change sounds easy for you, try taking the five-minute (<https://green.harvard.edu/tools-resources/green-tip/5-ways-measure-5-minute-shower>) shower challenge for a week or two.

## **15. PLANT A TREE.**



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One of the easiest ways to take care of the planet is also the most fun. Set aside an afternoon to plant a tree in your backyard and the benefits will last its whole life. A young tree absorbs roughly 26 pounds (<http://www.arboreenvironmentalalliance.com/carbon-tree-facts.asp>) of CO<sub>2</sub> per year and a mature tree can absorb 48 pounds (<http://www.americanforests.org/explore-forests/forest-facts/>). After 40 years, a tree will have sequestered 1 ton (<https://projects.ncsu.edu/project/treesofstrength/treefact.htm>) of carbon that would have otherwise contributed to global warming.

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