

Simple Ways
to Save
the Planet

it's
easy being
green

Mark Mann



IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

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Introduction

'The people in denial now are the equivalent of the Flat Earth Society. Humankind is in a race for life against global warming'

UK Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks (2006)

'Be the change you wish to see in the world'

Mahatma Gandhi

Making a change



It's easy being green

This book provides a short introduction to what 'being green' means, and identifies the key steps that make the most difference for the least effort and cost. Do these easy things first and worry about the hard stuff later.



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Our excessive use of natural resources – fuelled by population increases and a relentless pursuit of economic growth and material possessions – is causing alarming damage to the environment.

Human activity, such as burning fossil fuels, is causing a build-up of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere, which trap heat and cause global warming. Scientists tell us that if we don't reduce these greenhouse emissions by 60–90 per cent in the next few years, starting immediately, temperatures will rise with catastrophic consequences – including melting icecaps raising sea levels (which will flood coastal regions and displace billions of people) and more drought, hurricanes and storms.



That's not the only problem. We're close to wiping out much of the planet's marine life. We're destroying rainforests and other wild ecosystems, which is decimating the planet's wildlife and biodiversity. We're turning vast tracts of fertile land into desert by over-farming. We're polluting our waters, soil and air with chemicals that are toxic to plants, animals and ourselves.

In short, if we don't change – quickly – the future looks grim.

But we *can* change. There *is* hope. Awareness of the problems is growing. Millions of people are becoming green, and there's a stream of exciting new green technologies and ideas. And you can be a part of this change, by reducing your own ecological footprint and



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helping persuade others of the urgent need for change.

The impact of your actions goes further than you think. You may inspire other people to make their own changes. Buying green helps green businesses grow so they can reach more people. And politicians, retailers and manufacturers are all watching closely, trying to gauge the demand for greener products and policies.

Of course, a small book like this is only a starting point, so throughout the book and in Section 4: Resources I've listed useful organisations, books and websites that provide lots more information.



Signs of crisis

Since 1961, humanity's ecological footprint has tripled while 30 per cent of earth's wildlife and natural ecosystems have been lost.

Far from falling, annual global greenhouse emissions have risen 28 per cent since 1990 – and are still rising.

20 per cent of the world's population, mainly in Europe and north America, consume 80 per cent of its natural resources.

The average Briton generates as much CO₂ in eight days as the average Zambian does in a year.

The world's population rose from two billion in 1930 to six billion in 2000 and is predicted to reach nine billion by 2050.

Green principles

Some underlying principles run through this book; grasp them and you're well on your way to being green.



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1 Live with less: most environmental problems are ultimately due to our voracious demand for new things. Making all those new cars, gadgets, clothes and so on eats up raw materials and energy. Instead, learn to reduce, reuse, recycle – in that order. Reducing – living with less – is the best and simplest solution. Where you can't do without, reuse things by repairing, adapting, swapping, borrowing, buying second-hand, etc. And if you can't reuse something, recycle it – that way, no new raw materials have to be grown or extracted. Don't forget to buy recycled products to complete the recycling loop.

2 Reduce energy, water, chemicals, waste: being green means using less fossil-fuel energy, water and chemicals and creating less waste.



3 Green alternatives: something is green if it is natural, reusable, renewable, locally-produced, energy/water-efficient and non-polluting. Of course, often you have to use your judgement to make choices (such as between imported organic and local non-organic food – or perhaps you could find an alternative that is both local and organic).

Being green means...

Saving money: a few things, such as organic products, do cost more. But buying less, reusing more, buying second-hand and saving energy will still leave you better off.

Being healthier: consuming fewer chemicals and less meat; walking, cycling and getting more fresh air reduce the risk of heart and



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respiratory disease, diabetes, cancer, asthma and allergies. Time spent in nature reduces stress, a major cause of illness in modern society.

Creating new habits: it takes three weeks to create a habit. After that you'll stop even noticing you're being green.

Doing what you can: even if you only do the 'green thing' half the time, that's far better than doing nothing.

Learning to love nature: until we start to value nature for itself – and not simply because of how it affects us – we'll keep creating environmental problems.

Being happy with less: far from being a sacrifice, this can be liberating – stepping off