

INTERIOREXTERIOR

Romancing the Planet

By Lisa Alexander—Certified EcoBroker® Green Building and Sustainable Living Consultant

You've all heard about Global Warming and other environmental problems, but what are you actually doing to help improve our precious planet? If you think you are too small to help, you are so wrong.

Greenhouse gases aren't just coming from big factories; they are coming from all of us. The US generates over seven billion tons per year; that's twenty tons per American. Did you know that 51% of our nation's energy still comes from coal? Did you know you could source out cleaner energy, like wind power, and choose where your electricity comes from?

When you go to run errands, you can start contributing less to greenhouse gases by trying to get everything you need in one big trip rather than several small trips all week long. Do we really need that gas guzzling SUV for running to the grocery store? Did you know that only 10% of SUVs capable of four-wheel drive ever need or use it? It always amazes me that my icefishing friends complain about global warming and the fact that the lakes don't freeze over for them to fish anymore as they drive around town in their large trucks and SUVs.

Don't worry. If you really don't want to, you don't have to trade in your gas guzzling SUV for a hybrid car. There are a lot of other ways you can help save and romance our planet for generations to come. For starters, you can find out what your own personal carbon footprint is and how you can reduce and offset

the emissions you personally produce. Just go to www.carbonfund.org to find out how.

Now let's talk trash! Besides the carbon footprint we all create on this planet, we also create a garbage footprint. Did you know that in a recent project, scientists uncovered some garbage at the famous Fishkill landfill in Staten Island, NY that contained fully intact, readable newspapers from the early seventies? That's right; they were reading all about Watergate in 30+ year-old newspapers that looked like they were printed yesterday.

So you think everything you throw out biodegrades? Guess again. These scientists realized that the compacted trash at the landfill was not allowing sunlight and air to get to the garbage and start the decomposition process, not to mention all those plastic bags, made from petroleum, that never break down!

You can start changing your garbage footprint by buying and using recycled products and recycling your own products. American consumers go through about 2.5 million tons of paper towels a year. Use cloth or microfiber towels instead. They soak up dirt just like anything else, and they are washable and reusable. Buy other recycled paper products and recycle what you have at home; newspapers, magazines, junk mail, boxes, etc. If you can use cloth diapers instead of disposable, please do. They were good enough for our families and generations before us, and they, along with construction waste, make up to 65–70% of the garbage in our landfills.

Isn't it amazing how we've become such a disposable society. If something breaks, we just go buy a new one. Instead of always buying new and throwing out your old items, consider purchasing used, or sell or give away your old products. Go to eBay, craigslist, or freecycle.com.

Donate old cell phones and bring batteries and print cartridges to an office supply store. Check this out at www.earth911.org.

Search out computer recyclers in your area. Computers have hazardous materials in them such as lead and mercury that are dangerous to our landfills and environment. This lead and mercury end up in our water and plants. Computers also contain a certain amount of gold that is worthy of removing and selling, which is why there are people who will take

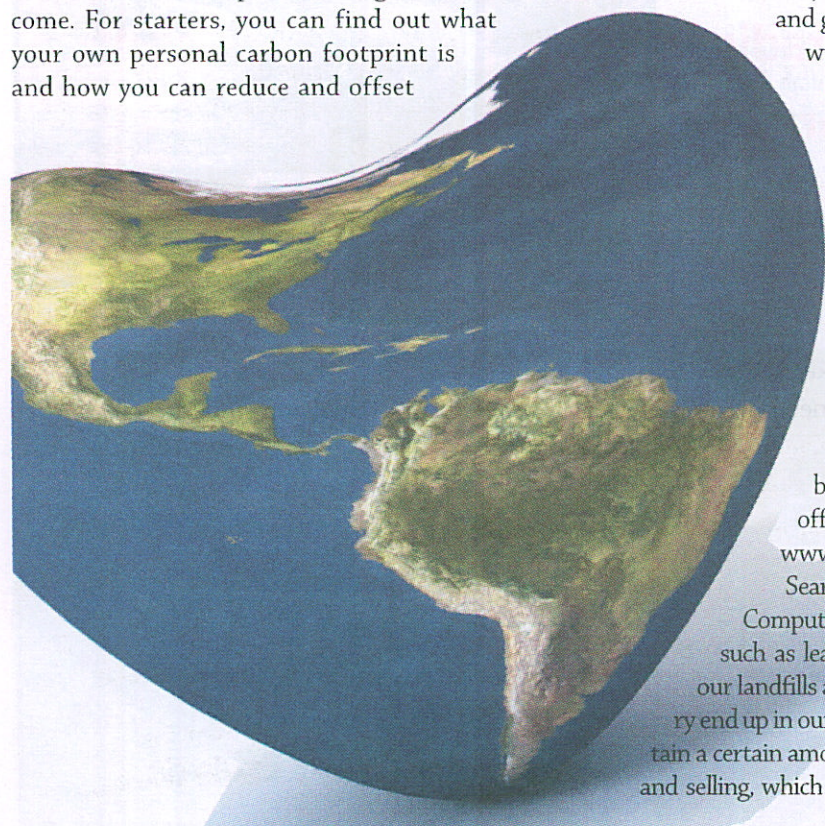
and recycle, refurbish, and reuse your old computers. Go to www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/recycle/ecycling/donat e.htm and check out www.ban.org/pledge/locations.html and www.computertakeback.com.

Let's start romancing our planet by cleaning it up in every way, literally. After chemical cleaning products go down the drain, they pollute and dirty up the planet more than they ever cleaned it in the first place. According to a study by the U.S. Geological Department, "66% of streams contain cleaning disinfectants, and 69% contained detergent metabolites — ingredients shown to harm fish reproduction and cause breast cancer cells to proliferate in test tubes."

According to treehuggernews.com, "If every household replaced just one 50 ounce box of petroleum-based powder laundry detergent with a vegetable-based product, we'd save enough oil to heat and cool 7,500 homes for a year." If you are not buying natural cleaning products, you are not living in a healthy home. You and your family are taking in hazardous chemicals in the air you breathe, the surfaces you touch after you clean them, the clothes you wear and wash in chemicals, and the plates you eat off of that are washed by and contain these cleaning residuals. Buy organic cleaning products at the health food store or check out www.newdream.org/procure/products for more information or ask your local grocer to carry some organic products.

Stop buying those "disposable" single serve packs of anything. Buy in bulk and split up using reusable containers. Decorative tins are a nice way to give goodies rather than those disposable plastic containers that people use once and throw away! They are made with petroleum and other chemicals and aren't biodegradable. Do you really want to eat your food out of these types of chemical plastics? Search out plastics made from vegetable oil instead.

God put us in charge of this beautiful blue planet and ALL the living things on it. From microorganisms to plants and animals and humans, we all need this planet and the resources it provides us for now and for the future generations to come. So this Valentine's Day, think of Romancing your soul and the soul of the planet that supports you and our life here.



Lisa Alexander hosted the popular show "Room for Improvement" on WFMZ channel 69 in the Allentown, PA area. The show was rated number one even in reruns.