

PROJECT IDEA STARTER

Going Green: Learning to Lead a Sustainable Life



By Audrey Dimmerling, 4-H Educator,
OSU Extension–Columbiana County
Author and Reviewer Jill Bartolotta,
Extension Educator, Ohio Sea Grant

Alisha Barton, Family and Consumer Sciences Educator, OSU Extension–Miami County

Beth Bollas, Program Assistant, OSU Extension–Lake County

Kate Homonai, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences–Vinton County

Dan Remley, Associate Professor, Field Specialist for Food, Nutrition, and Wellness, OSU Extension

Laura Stanton, Family and Consumer Sciences Educator, OSU Extension–Warren County

Tony Staubach, 4-H Educator, OSU Extension–Hamilton County

Many of you have heard the phrases “go green,” “eco-friendly,” and “sustainable lifestyle” tossed around on social media, the news, and in conversation. But what do these phrases mean and how do they affect us, the planet, and other living organisms?

Being sustainable means that we live in harmony with our natural environment and all living creatures. That’s a big concept. So where do we start? Let’s look at what you do in a single day. Over one day’s time, think of how many items you use, the food you eat, and how you get around. All your actions use natural resources. Natural resources are substances such as water, sun, wind, trees, oil, and minerals that we use daily. They make the essentials we need like houses, food, and fuel for transportation. Some resources like sunlight and wind are renewable and readily available, depending on the time of day and weather conditions. Non-renewable resources like oil and other fossil fuels are in short supply, meaning once we use them, they are gone. Living a more sustainable lifestyle means we make it a priority to:

- reduce or eliminate our use of non-renewable resources.
- limit our use of renewable resources.

If we do this, we will live in better harmony with the natural environment and the negative effects humans have on the Earth will decrease.

Unfortunately, this important lesson has taken humans a long time to learn. To better understand our relationship with living sustainably, let’s go back in time to the mid-1700s and the Industrial Revolution. This was a time when our overuse of fossil fuels led to blackened skies, toxic air, and poor living conditions. Humans later realized it is dangerous to burn fossil fuels (like coal) without any cleaning or purification procedures. Move forward to the 1960 and ’70s in

PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.



Examples of repurposing.

the United States when factories could dump chemicals into the water. So many chemicals were being dumped that rivers were catching on fire! Imagine water on fire! The most famous river fires happened in Cleveland, Ohio on the Cuyahoga River. Rivers catching on fire jumpstarted an environmental revolution. Humans were slowly realizing how our misuse and overuse of natural resources and getting rid of toxic waste (like chemicals and plastics) improperly, is not sustainable.

As a global community we must take better care of the only home we have ever known—Earth. The journey to sustainable living starts with you. You have the power to make a big difference and this 4-H idea starter gives you simple tools to do it. When you have completed this project, you will know how to reduce the use of materials like plastics, keep items from going to the landfill, and go back to living in harmony with the natural environment.

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific areas members want to address

during their project adventures. Using 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the list below or make up your own.

Explore and learn about being environmentally aware. Try new ways to help keep our planet clean and safe. The activities below include hands-on learning that teach about the four R's: **Reduce**, **Reuse/repurpose**, **Recycle**, and **Refuse**. To repurpose an item is a cool way to keep something from going to a landfill. You start with a discarded object, then reuse it to serve a different purpose. Start looking at trash with a fresh eye!

Reduce

- Keep a calendar of the times your family gets takeout food in a month. Set a goal to reduce these purchases to lessen the number of plastic and Styrofoam containers used. Keep a record of a month of ordering takeout, then track a month of avoiding these carryout containers. Was there a big difference in what you threw away?

- Shorten your daily showers. Take the five-minute shower challenge at green.harvard.edu/tools-resources/green-tip/4-ways-measure-5-minute-shower.
- Visit a bulk-food store and explore ways your family could purchase food items so you use fewer single-use containers.
- Look around your home and write down all the single-use containers you see, such as liquid soap pumps, liquid laundry detergent bottles, individual yogurt cups, and juice boxes. Talk with your project helper or go online for ideas of how to avoid using these packages and reducing the waste they create. Make a chart of the single-use item and its replacement.
- Challenge yourself and your family to be plastic free. Make a list of the plastic items you use now and write a replacement item next to it. See how many switches you can make!
- Make a list of foods in the refrigerator that are near expiration, then create a menu to use them and reduce food waste.
- Research basic food composting and create a composting container in your backyard. Be sure to check with community leaders for guidelines in your area.
- Find and visit a farmers market. You'll support local growers and avoid some of the packaging that grocery stores use. Try some produce that is new to you! Don't forget to take your own reusable bags and containers.

Reuse/Repurpose

- Create a bird feeder using a milk jug or a two-liter bottle. Check online to get started.
- Donate gently worn clothes to a secondhand thrift store. Write down how many articles of clothing you collected and the date you donated them. Mark your calendar to repeat this task for every season of the year.
- Design a cloth produce bag from an old T-shirt. Make a few and give them as gifts!
- Visit a yard sale and look for an old piece of furniture. Give it a new life by repairing and restoring it.
- Exhibit a piece of re-purposed furniture at the county fair.
- Plan and host a celebration using only reusable materials for the plates, silverware, cups, and decorations.
- Re-purpose an item for a gift.
- Start seedlings for a vegetable garden in containers you would normally throw away. See some great ideas at [youtube.com/watch?v=7APD3hyJP74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7APD3hyJP74).

- Make an idea journal or notebook by reusing cereal boxes (for the cover) and recycled paper.
- Reuse glass jars to store food and eliminate the need for plastic baggies, aluminum foil, and cling wrap. Take a look at all the beautiful ways to store food in a new way at thewellessentials.com/blog/best-glass-jars-food-storage-plastic-free-kitchen.

Recycle

- Research the company that collects your recycling materials and study what they accept. Make a poster with this information and share it with your family, community leaders, and club or group.
- Investigate the common items that cannot be placed in your recycling bins. Check what your family recycles to make sure you are including things that 1) can be recycled and 2) that are properly prepared.
- Search online for “How to make recycled paper.” Learn how to make handmade paper

from recycled materials and create a greeting card for someone special.

- Plan and follow through with a recycling drive in your school. Take pictures of each step in the process. Visit this ecolife website at ecolife.com/parenting/green-teen/school-recycling.html or one like it to get started.
- Interview community leaders about their thoughts on recycling. Submit an editorial about recycling to your newspaper.
- If you don't already have one, create a recycling station in your home or garage. Look online to find a few categories for the things you can recycle, such as paper, plastics, and cans. Take pictures to share with your 4-H club to encourage others to recycle.

Refuse

- Go straw-less. When eating out, politely refuse the straw and plastic lid. Learn why straws are a problem for our environment at sustainablemorristown.org/single-post/2018/12/03/10-reasons-you-should-give-up-plastic-straws.
- Use reusable cutlery and cloth napkins for packed lunches instead of disposal options. Visit a thrift store and find silverware and material for cloth napkins.
- Start using a reusable water bottle and track the number of times you fill it for one month. Each time saves a single-use water bottle from being used.
- Refuse plastic grocery store bags and use reusable bags instead. Create a way to store



When starting a compost pile, check your community's guidelines.

these bags in the car for easy access when shopping.

- Go online for waste-free lunch ideas. Find a few simple ideas to use, then set a goal for when you will pack completely waste-free lunches.

CONTINUE TO LEARN

Explore Other 4-H Projects and Help the Environment

4-H project books and idea starters keep you learning about living more sustainably. Here are some examples from extensionpubs.osu.edu:

4-H Project Books

- Take ***My Favorite Things***, start a collection, and keep items from going to the landfill.
- Learn how to make a quilt and use old articles of clothing for the fabric. The popular ***You Can Quilt!*** project book shows you how to be a quilter and be of service to your community.
- ***Get Started in Art*** offers fun ways to reuse materials while learning concepts of art and design.
- Put your new-found reduce, reuse, recycle, and refuse skills to work on your own home and take ***It's My Home***.



- Avoid packaging and enjoy organically grown vegetables by starting a garden. ***Grow Your Own Vegetables*** is a great book for beginners.
- Don't waste food from your garden, take ***Canning and Freezing*** and preserve your harvest.
- Learn what makes trees so important in our lives. ***Why Trees Matter*** is a great starting place.
- Help our bees succeed by learning how to help them thrive. Their ability to pollinate more than 90 commercial crops is essential to our planet. The ***Beekeeping Project and Record Book*** shows you the basics you need to get started.
- Reuse your 2-liter bottles by taking ***Rockets Away***, which uses these bottles to build water rockets.
- Take ***Young Engineers in Solar Energy*** to learn how to use the sun as an energy source in ways you've never imagined.

4-H Idea Starters

- ***"Local Foods—Does It Matter What You Eat?"*** explains how to make sure we have a safe and nutritious food supply.
- Learn what ***"Climate Change"*** is and its effects on our planet.
- ***"Get Started with Composting"*** and learn how to turn vegetable scraps, grass clippings, leaves, and other organic materials into valuable fertilizer.

- ***"Field to Faucet: What Determines Water Quality"*** shows the connection between how taking care of the land leads to healthy streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes.
- Fresh, clean water is limited. ***"Ways of Knowing Water"*** raises awareness about this precious natural resource.

RESOURCES

Learn more about protecting your community from environmental hazards by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Environmental Health at cdc.gov/nceh.

Protecting the environment is everyone's responsibility, start by exploring an environmental issue affecting our world today through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at epa.gov.

Learn more about the issue of plastic pollution, how it affects our water, and what you can do to help solve this issue by visiting NOAA Marine Debris Program at marinedebris.noaa.gov.

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