Eating Green

Does eating “green” conjure up images of spinach, or broccoli, or asparagus? While these are, without doubt, green foods, our thoughts are not about what's to be eaten but rather, about how a minor change in eating habits or practices can reduce your personal energy use footprint and contribute to the health of the environment. You don't have to be a vegetarian to make an impact!

Growing and transporting food accounts for an estimated 17% of the total energy consumption of the US. With food making up such a large portion of US domestic energy consumption, each of us has the means to reduce our total energy usage through relatively simple measures.

The Culprits

- Food Transportation
- Food Processing
- Kitchen Appliances-refrigerator/freezer and stove/oven
- Fertilizers and Pesticides

Rethinking use of these energy hogs will contribute to energy conservation, reduction of carbon emissions and a healthier environment.

Choose Local Foods in Season

Foods produced locally simply don't require sophisticated, expensive transportation systems which consume 14% of food's energy use to get to the table. And if chosen with reasonable care, locally produced food is fresher and tastes better. Selecting seasonal fruits and vegetables was so much easier years ago when the markets were bare of peaches, nectarines, artichokes, tomatoes and so many other foods in January and February. Now these foods appear in our markets throughout the winter and the trend is to bring more and more products from far away places to our markets and our dinner tables during winter. The lesson is simple: eliminating transportation will directly reduce energy consumption. Remember, those lovely winter grapes probably come from 1000 miles away or more.

Choose Organic Food

Neither fertilizers nor pesticides which together account for more than 1/3 of the energy used to make food are used in growing organic food. The good news*:* every day more display space in our supermarkets is devoted to organic foods. The better news: local farmers markets are flush with always local, organic foods and your purchases encourage expansion of the local organic food movement.

Whole foods, not processed

You guessed it; another 15% of the energy used to make food goes into processing. If you spend most of your shopping moments with fruits and vegetables, milk and eggs, meat and fish, you'll be fine.

Farm raised meat and poultry
Range or pasture raised animals eat naturally fertilized grass as their mainstay. Animals raised by mega-producers, usually located great distances from your home, are typically raised on a diet of heavily fertilized, pesticide enhanced grains. Purchasing locally grown meat, poultry, milk and eggs eliminate the transportation component of the energy required to produce your food. And you support local farmers and your community.

Other Suspects
Drinking water
The popularity of bottled water is the result of huge marketing efforts. Global consumption of bottled water reached 41 billion gallons in 2004, up 57% in just five years. In the US, we drink four 16 ounce bottles per week on average and every bottle is processed and shipped, sometimes from sources as far away as Europe or even Asia. A year's supply of plastic water bottles in the US consumes 47 million gallons of oil. As an alternative, tap water filtration systems are readily available, simple to install and very effective. And there are no plastic bottles for recycling or trash.

When you're on the go, a selection of dishwasher safe, plastic and stainless steel reusable bottles are available, starting at prices below $10.

Plastic or Paper?
- Ordinary plastic bags can't be recycled, can take 500 years to decompose.
- Plastic litter kills 1 million seabirds and 100,000 mammals annually.
- Paper bags are recyclable and biodegradable but when not recycled, end up in the landfill, sealed and unable to biodegrade.
- The answer: Reusable cloth bags. They're environment friendly!

Recycling and Composting
In the most supportive, sympathetic and conscientious communities, 30% or more of the material that ends up in trash containers and is sent to the landfill is actually recyclable or compostable. Proper sorting of trash will keep a "lid" on landfill expansion while reducing the need for new manufacture paper and plastics. In most locations, organically grown materials including food scraps (fruit, vegetables, meat, poultry, seafood, shellfish, bones, rice, beans, pasta, bread, cheese, and eggshells) can be composted.

Compost or Disposer? It's no contest. Composting reduces waste and the need for waste disposal. The disposer uses water and electricity.