30 WAYS to GREEN YOUR PLATE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO OVERHAUL YOUR LIFE (OR EVEN YOUR KITCHEN) TO HELP SAVE THE PLANET. THESE SMALL STEPS CAN MAKE A HUGE IMPACT ON YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT—AND YOUR HEALTH.



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▶▶ You're already pretty eco-conscious (hello, reusable water bottle and energy-saving lightbulbs!). But you can do even more good by focusing on what and how you're eating and by incorporating a few easy tweaks into your daily diet. It's not hard to be a greener foodie; in fact, you don't have to give up any of your favorite fare. Just become more aware of how your groceries affect the earth and start making smarter choices. To help, we've come up with 30 ideas you can try this month—and all year long.

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MAKE PRODUCE A-PEELING

You'll not only be getting more vitamins and minerals from those unpeeled cucumbers, potatoes, and apples—you'll also be tossing less into the trash bin. Plus, researchers from Cornell University found that most of an apple's cancer-fighting antioxidants are in the peel. Just be sure to wash produce thoroughly first.



BREW A BETTER CUP OF JOE

▶▶ If you buy your coffee beans at the local supermarket, chances are they were grown in a foreign locale where farming isn't regulated. That means manufacturers can use chemical fertilizers and pesticides as well as slash-and-burn farming techniques (i.e., clearing forest areas to create open fields)—all of which have a big impact on the environment. In fact, a study in *EarthTrends* found that those practices have caused soil erosion and water pollution issues and reduced bird populations in places like Mexico and Colombia.

When buying coffee, look for labels like "USDA Organic," "Rainforest Alliance," or "Bird Friendly" (which is stamped on bags of beans that have been grown under the canopy of the trees where songbirds and other animals make their homes). "You probably won't notice a difference in taste," says Larry Larson, the founder of Larry's Beans in Raleigh, NC. "But these coffees are better for the planet." More ways to green your beans: Use recycled-paper or permanent metal coffee filters at home, and sip from a thermos or reusable travel mug on the go.

3/ BE LABEL-SAVVY

▶▶ Not sure whether to buy the natural or organic peanut butter? "'Natural' is a meaningless term," says Kate Geagan, R.D., a nutritionist and the author of *Go Green Get Lean*. Shop for foods with the "USDA Organic" seal, which means they contain ingredients produced without the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, growth stimulators, or radiation.

4/ GO WILD FOR ALASKAN SALMON

▶▶ "Like other seafood varieties, this one is loaded with omega-3 fatty acids, but it doesn't have the potential toxin risk farmed salmon can have," says Geagan. Those fish are raised in netted pens, commonly fed an artificial diet, and treated with antibiotics. Since wild Alaskan salmon feeds in relatively unpolluted waters, the risk of mercury contamination is lower.

It's also sustainably harvested, which means it's not overfished the way some varieties of tuna and sea bass have been. In fact, a report from the United Nations warns that our oceans could be depleted of fish by 2050 if we continue to catch and consume them the way we have been. Other healthy options, like sardines, pink shrimp from Oregon and Maine, rainbow trout, and black cod, are also in no danger of being overfished. Choose these first, or download a *Seafood Watch* Android or iPhone app for additional tasty choices.

5/ OPT FOR ORGANIC MILK

▶▶ At conventional dairies, cows are often given synthetic growth factors, like recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) or bovine somatotropin (bST), to increase milk production. But those hormones can up the levels of insulin-like growth factors in the milk, and because your body can't tell the difference between them and its own, health experts worry they could have a negative effect.

One study in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* linked elevated levels of these insulin growth factors from dairy consumption to breast, colorectal, and other cancers. "That's why their use has been banned in Australia, Canada, Japan, and the European Union," says Geagan.

To play it safe, buy certified organic milk. Or pour soy milk on your cereal: It's hormone-free and creates 50 percent less greenhouse gas during its production than regular moo juice does, according to researchers in Sweden and Seattle.

▶▶
SOY MILK CREATES 50% LESS GREENHOUSE GAS DURING ITS PRODUCTION THAN REGULAR MILK.



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GRAZE ON GRASS-FED BEEF

▶▶ The cut of meat isn't the only thing affecting your health; where it came from plays a role too. "Cows that feed on pasture grasses have a much smaller carbon footprint than conventional cattle do," says Karen Christensen, the co-owner of Mack Brook Farm in Argyle, NY. "Those cows are fed grain and corn produced in separate fields, which requires gas-guzzling farm equipment and chemicals. On farms like ours, the animals roam around and eat grass."

The nutritional payoff is huge as well: Research shows grass-fed beef contains two to three times more heart-healthy omega-3s and four times more vitamin E than corn-fed beef. "And it's lower in total calories and saturated fat because it's leaner," adds Geagan. Look for "grass-fed" labels on meat in your grocery store.

THANK THE PLANET

This Turkey Day, celebrate Mother Earth by putting these planet-friendly tips into play.

7/ TAKE STOCK

▶▶ The more meals you can create from one animal, the lighter your environmental impact. So don't toss that turkey carcass, says Annemarie Colbin, Ph.D., the founder of the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York City. Instead, put it into a stockpot, cover it with 4 inches of water, and add an onion, carrots, celery, garlic, dried herbs, and a few tablespoons of white vinegar to draw the calcium out of the bones. "Simmer the whole thing for six to eight hours, strain, and you'll have a fabulous stock that can be used to make soup, stew, and rice," says Colbin.

8/ PORTION IT OUT

▶▶ If you tend to cook enough to feed a small army, stop overestimating your troops' appetite. Here's how much you'll really need per person of some typical holiday dishes, according to Robert Lilienfeld, editor of *The Use Less Stuff Report*: 1 pound of turkey, 3 tablespoons of cranberry relish, and half a cup of eggnog.

9/ FREEZE YOUR ASSETS

▶▶ Toasting nuts kicks up their flavor—but it also (at an oven temp of 350°F for 30 minutes or so, including preheating time) uses 1 kilowatt hour of energy, about what it takes to do three loads of laundry. Cut down on your power consumption by cooking as many nuts as you can fit on your baking sheet in a single layer, then freezing the leftovers, says Maureen Ternus, R.D., the executive director of the International Tree Nut Council. They'll keep for up to six months in an airtight container.

10/ STEP UP TO THE PLATE

▶▶ Did you invite more guests than you have dishes for? Opt for single-use bamboo plates. Unlike paper versions, they fully biodegrade four to six months after disposal. Plus, bamboo grows up to 4 feet per day, while trees can take 24 years to reach maturity.

11/ GET THE SCOOP

▶▶ Whether you're planning to put a wild rice salad or dried fruit and nut stuffing on your holiday table, buying some of the ingredients from the bulk bins means less packaging, says Allison Enke, Whole Foods Market's registered dietitian. She also advises bringing your own bags.

12/ SEEK OUT SAFER CELERY

▶▶ Yes, organic may cost a bit more, but it's worth it when it comes to certain foods, including celery. The conventional version is near the top of the Environmental Working Group's "dirty dozen." The list of produce is ranked according to amounts of pesticide residue—which can increase your risk for Parkinson's and Alzheimer's later in life, according to a study in *Neurology*. Other contaminated crops: apples, spinach, and red bell peppers. (To see the full lineup, go to foodnews.org.) "Going organic is especially important if you're pregnant or nursing," says Geagan, "since pesticides have been linked to ADHD in children."

14/ WASTE NOT

▶▶ The next time you're emptying that limp broccoli into the trash, think about this: The U.S. could save the equivalent of about 350 million barrels of oil a year if we stopped tossing food into the trash. A study in *Environmental Science & Technology* found that's how much energy it takes to produce all the meat, produce, grains, and more that we buy but don't ever end up eating.

Before shopping, count the number of meals you'll realistically be home for and consider the ingredients you'll need so you won't overbuy. If you do wind up with excess, try freezing vegetables before they start stinking up the fridge, says Dan'l Mackey Almy, the founder of Fresh Is It!, a program that encourages fresh-produce consumption. "Or chop up veggies and meat, add a can of broth, and you've got a tasty soup." And whether you're at home or in a restaurant, wrap up what you can't finish and either eat it later as a snack or have it for lunch the next day.

15/ STASH SANDWICHES IN STYLE

▶▶ Instead of packing your midday meal in a toss-after-one-use brown paper bag, bring your lunch to work in a cute insulated tote, like those from Sachi (sachi-bags.com).

16/ SHUT THE DOOR!

▶▶ Opening the oven during cooking allows heat to escape, reducing the temperature inside by as much as 25°F and requiring the appliance to use more energy to reheat itself, reports the California Energy Commission. Instead, flick on the oven light to check on your food while it's baking.

Speaking of open doors, don't stand in front of the fridge pondering your dinner options. Your refrigerator is the biggest energy guzzler in your kitchen, and keeping the door sealed tight can knock up to $60 a year off your energy bill. Think about what you need before you tug it open and you'll find what you want fast, without losing too much cold air.

17/ BECOME A TUPPERWARE LADY

▶▶ Stop using plastic wrap, zip-top bags, and aluminum foil for leftovers and opt for reusable containers instead. Not only will that reduce the amount of waste you produce, it also can lower your grocery bill by up to $115 a year. Use containers to make your own single-serving snacks too—buy your favorite items in economy sizes (think 32-ounce tubs of yogurt or cottage cheese) and portion them out yourself when you get home.

18/ CONSIDER COMPOSTING

▶▶ A little secret from successful gardeners: Save your food scraps, eggshells, and coffee grounds and put them in a countertop canister, like the Simplehuman stainless-steel compost pail ($60; williams-sonoma.com). Then mix it up every so often to create nutrient-rich mulch that can be sprinkled around trees and shrubs. You'll significantly reduce your landfill

▶▶ REUSABLE CONTAINERS CAN LOWER YOUR GROCERY BILL BY UP TO $115 A YEAR.

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DRINK INSIDE THE BOX

▶▶ Boxed wine has been ridiculed for years, but the quality has risen recently. That's good news, since transporting it produces half as many greenhouse gas emissions as shipping bottled vino, according to the *Journal of Wine Research*. Boxes are lighter and can be stacked more neatly, so you can fit more wine per truck. "Some of the best vineyards are now boxing up their blends," says Giuseppe Falco, the owner of Vesta Trattoria and Wine Bar in Astoria, NY. Falco's favorite red: Alandra Vinho Tinto ($20 for 3 liters; ballsquare finewines.com). "It's perfect with spicy dishes," he says. Prefer white? Try Bandit Pinot Grigio ($9 for 1 liter; banditwines.com).

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STICK WITH IN-SEASON PRODUCE



Just-picked fruits and vegetables not only taste better, they also take less of a toll on the environment. Out-of-season produce is usually imported from other countries, and the ships, planes, and trucks used in transport pump out a lot of planet-choking exhaust. If summer—and its array of flavorful fruits—seems impossibly far away, hit the freezer section for a bag of flash-frozen organic berries, cherries, or peaches, says Geagan. "They're just as healthy as fresh ones, since vitamins and minerals get locked in during the freezing process."

contributions: According to Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority, 11 percent of household and yard waste can be composted rather than thrown in the trash. Or locate a composting center where you can drop off your scraps at findacomposter.com.

20/ NUKE YOUR VEGETABLES

▶▶ Use your microwave instead of the oven and you'll not only save time, you'll also cut the amount of cooking energy you use by up to 80 percent. In fact, authors Elizabeth Rogers and Thomas M. Kostigen report in *The Green Book* that if everyone in North America cooked exclusively with a microwave for one year, we'd conserve as much energy as the entire continent of Africa uses during that same time.

21/ LOAD THE DISHWASHER

▶▶ You'll save 37 percent more water than if you did the dishes by hand with a continuous stream of water, according to the California Energy Commission. To reap the full benefits, skip the pre-rinse and fill your machine to capacity. Don't own a dishwasher? Instead of just letting the tap run when hand-washing items, fill the sink with soapy water and scrub everything first, then drain and rinse.

22/ DINE RESPONSIBLY

▶▶ Make a reservation for your next date night at a spot that's certified by the Green Restaurant Association. Eateries that make the grade practice efficient water management, aim to reduce waste, and offer menus that feature sustainable, organic, and local foods. Go to dinegreen.com to find one in your area.

▶▶ THE AVERAGE AMERICAN USES SOME 2,200 PAPER NAPKINS EACH YEAR.

24/ HOLD THE UTENSILS

▶▶ When you order food for take-out or delivery, ask the restaurant not to include disposable chopsticks, plastic forks, or those little packets of salt and pepper or soy sauce in your bag. You already have silverware, seasoning, and condiments at home, so why bring home stuff you're just going to throw away?

25/ STOCK UP

▶▶ A full refrigerator uses less energy than a bare one because the cold items inside help insulate each other—which, according to the California Energy Commission, allows your fridge to recover more quickly when the door is opened. If yours is looking a little empty, fill it with a couple of pitchers of water. Bonus: You won't waste water by letting the tap run when you want a cold drink.

26/ USE A CLOTH NAPKIN

▶▶ The average American uses some 2,200 paper napkins each year, according to *The Green Book*. That's about six a



23 COOK A WHOLE BIRD

▶▶ Those individually wrapped chicken breasts are convenient, but all that extra packaging adds pounds of waste to landfills. It's more energy-efficient (and wallet-wise) to buy and roast an entire chicken. Once it's cooked, you can eat the meat all week long in sandwiches, salads, and tacos or enchiladas. (The only thing you may want to toss is the crispy skin, which has been shown by Kansas State University scientists to contain harmful compounds called heterocyclic amines.)

The type of poultry you buy also makes a difference: Look for a bird that's labeled "organic"—which means the chicken was given USDA-certified organic feed—or "pasture raised." "That's the term farmers use for livestock that's allowed to roam around and snack on grass and worms, the stuff a chicken would naturally consume," explains Christensen.



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SAY (ARTISANAL) CHEESE

▶▶ These handmade varieties are produced in smaller batches, have fewer preservatives, and use less packaging than the processed kind. "And they tend to taste more complex," says Geagan, "so you just may be satisfied with less." Also look for "farmstead" cheese at your local outdoor market. It's made with milk from a farmer's own flock or herd, so the ingredients require less transportation.

day! A cloth napkin not only cuts down on waste, it also makes every meal feel a little more special. And swap out paper towels in favor of cloth ones for drying dishes and wiping hands.

27/ BOIL PASTA IN LESS WATER

▶▶ Contrary to the advice of Italian grandmothers everywhere, you don't have to use all that H_2O to cook your penne. "All you need is enough cold water to cover the noodles," says Harold McGee, a food scientist and the author of *Keys to Good Cooking*. "It takes less water and energy, and—as long as you stir often—your spaghetti still tastes great." Another power-saving cooking trick: Turn off the stove a few minutes before your scrambled egg and vegetable dishes are done; the pan's residual heat will finish them.

28/ BE A "VEGIVORE"

▶▶ A dinner that stars vegetables and relegates beef, chicken, or pork to a supporting role saves oil. Geophysicists at the University of Chicago have calculated that the average American diet requires the production of an extra ton and a half of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases over the course of a year, compared with a strictly plant-based diet. The next time you dine out, "make a meat dish your appetizer and a vegetable- or grain-based one your entrée," suggests Almy. Some tasty ways to combine produce and non-meat protein: Have an omelet with peppers, onions, and mushrooms for breakfast; load a baked potato with black beans and salsa for lunch; and try a winter squash stew with chickpeas over quinoa for dinner.

30/ PICK THE BEST PAN

▶▶ Glass and ceramic baking dishes conduct heat more quickly than metal ones, so you can reduce the oven temperature by 25°F for the same amount of cooking time, reports the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

On the stove, opt for copper-bottomed stainless-steel or aluminum pans, which conduct heat better than other materials. Also choose a pot that covers the entire burner—you could waste about $36 a year by putting a too-small pan on an electric range's biggest burner.