

5 Ways Save the World

When I sat down to write my Blog Action Day post, I tried to figure out what the “environment” has to do with some of the main themes of Zen Habits: simplicity, frugality, health and fitness, happiness. In what way are these ideas related to the environment?



Photo by [angela7dreams](#)

And then I realized: in every way.

When I tried to come up with some of the best ways that people could help the environment, I started to realize that every single one of these things will not only help the environment, but help our lives in so many other ways.

Helping the environment not only saves the planet, but makes us more frugal ... makes our lives simpler ... helps us get fitter ... and helps us to be happier.

Let's take a look at how. Here are some of my favorite ways to help the environment, and how it relates to the main topics of Zen Habits.

1. Get outdoors more. Go outside, take a walk through nature, hike through a forest or park or up a mountain, take a swim in a lake or river or ocean, explore, observe wildlife.

- **How this helps the environment:** The first step in doing something about the environment is getting to know it better. Awareness is crucial — without knowing what we're saving, we won't care much about it. And these days, many of us are so isolated from the outside world that when we hear about the destruction of our environment, it's an abstract concept. Make nature important to you, and you'll do something about it.
- **How this saves money:** Going outside costs very little. It certainly costs less than spending your time at a mall, or a restaurant, or at the movies, or an amusement park.
- **How this gets you fitter:** Well, this one's a little obvious, but I'll say it anyway ... getting outside and walking around is infinitely better for your health than sitting at home watching TV, surfing the Internet, riding in a car, eating at a restaurant. Swimming? Hiking up a mountain? Taking a walk through a park? Doing some yardwork? All great exercise. Do this for a year, and you'll be fitter than ever.
- **How this simplifies your life:** Getting outside and communing with nature is much less stressful than the hustle and bustle of traffic, cities, work places. Finding time to get outside will take you away from stress, and allow you time to think. It will make your life saner, simpler, less complex.
- **How this makes you happier:** Well, this isn't a guarantee, but I've always found myself happier when I get

outside. Watch a sunset with loved ones, have a picnic, go for a hike with your family ... this is just so much better for you, mentally and otherwise, than modern life, that it would be hard not to be happier after getting outdoors.

2. Commute by bike or by walking. I'm not saying you have to do it every single day (although some people do it), but even once a week can add up to saving a lot of fossil fuels and global warming over time. For tips on commuting to work by bike, read [this article](#).

- **How this helps the environment:** You're using cleaner transportation and wasting fewer resources.
- **How this saves money:** You use less gas and there's less wear and tear on your vehicle, meaning reduced maintenance costs. And if you go far enough and can eliminate one of your vehicles, you can save a ton.
- **How this gets you fitter:** This one's obvious. Walking and cycling are great exercises. Do this two or three times a week, and you've got your fitness program all worked out.
- **How this simplifies your life:** Well, it might not seem so at first, but a bike is much simpler than a car. No gas to refill, no oil changes, no spark plugs or transmission or air filters or coolant. If you could replace a car with a bike, your life would be much simpler.
- **How this makes you happier:** I couldn't guarantee this either, but I think that by helping save the environment, living cleaner and healthier, and getting a slimmer waistline, you'd be happier. Try it and see. :)

3. Do a clean-up. Every now and then, you'll see some community organization doing a clean-up — a park, a beach, a road. Join in if you can. Or just do one with family and friends. Or organize your own, getting together a bunch of community groups.

- **How this helps the environment:** Well, it's just a small fraction of the environment, but whatever patch of nature you choose to make clean is better off. And so is your community. And it's more than that: it's a statement, that our world is a better place when it's not polluted, that it's a beautiful place worth saving, that it's all we have, and if we waste it, we're screwed. It's a statement worth making.
- **How this saves money:** Well, it doesn't really. Unless you replace cleaning up with more expensive activities, such as shopping or expensive entertainment. Doing free stuff like this is always better, and the more you work into your schedule, the less you generally spend.
- **How this gets you fitter:** Walking, bending over to pick things up ... it's like aerobics and squats and lunges all put together. That's a pretty good workout. Do that a few times a week, and you can cancel your gym membership. Which also saves money.
- **How this simplifies your life:** It probably doesn't. This is another commitment that you'd add to your schedule, which actually complicates things a bit. But again, if you use a cleanup to replace more complicated and more expensive activities, it can be a simplifier. It all depends on what's important to you — figure that out, and focus on that.
- **How this makes you happier:** Volunteering to do good things, I promise you, is a surefire way to be at least a little happier. You feel good about yourself, and doing something meaningful almost always leads to happiness. Plus you get a sense of community togetherness, which is nothing but good news.

4. Use less energy at home. There are a ton of ways to do this: use compact florescent lightbulbs, set your thermostat lower (for heating) or higher (for cooling), insulate, use less hot water, dry clothes using a clothesline, turn things off when they're not in use, get energy efficient appliances, etc.

- **How this helps the environment:** Using less energy means you contribute less to global warming.
- **How this saves money:** Using less energy means your power bill is lower. And that can be a substantial savings.
- **How this gets you fitter:** It doesn't ... unless you're running around the house more because you turned off all the heating. :)
- **How this simplifies your life:** Using less energy is much simpler in the long run.
- **How this makes you happier:** I think this is one of those times when just playing your part to reduce global warming and doing the right thing makes you happier.

5. Buy less, or buy used. Start reducing the amount of stuff you buy, and when you do buy stuff, look to buy it used if possible. Or get it used, for free, through others in your area who don't want the item anymore. Yard sales,

thrift shops, Craigslist.org, Freecycle.org and friends and family are good ways to do this.

- **How this helps the environment:** When you buy less stuff, or recycle old stuff by buying or getting it used, you reduce the amount of new stuff that needs to be made ... and thus use fewer resources. The impact of buying less stuff can be huge, if enough people do it.
 - **How this saves money:** This is an obvious one, but let me say that I'm a living example. Do I never buy new stuff? Of course not. But I do resist buying new stuff if I can, and always hesitate before buying. And if I can find it used, I'll always go that route. And over the years, I've saved thousands.
 - **How this gets you fitter:** Well, if you spend less time shopping, you can dedicate that extra time to exercise. In fact, make a daily appointment to exercise today, and make it unmissable!
 - **How this simplifies your life:** Your life is greatly simplified if you have less stuff in your life, if you reduce your need for stuff. It becomes uncluttered.
 - **How this makes you happier:** It doesn't sound obvious, but buying less stuff can make you happier. How? Well, if you equate buying stuff to happiness, you'll have a hard time seeing this. But if you change your mindset, so that buying stuff no longer equals happiness, so that you don't need stuff in your life to be happy, but are made happy by people, by doing things, by appreciating what you have ... then you will be vastly happier over the long term.
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Author: Leo Babauta

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