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Going, Going, Green
From Composting to Clubbing, Innovations to Expand Your Eco-Vision

By *Eviana Hartman*
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If skyrocketing oil prices, the booming world population and the threat of global warming hadn't already grabbed people's attention, last week's record power demand and air-quality warnings certainly served as a reminder that the world faces pressing questions about its climate and energy use.

While "doing something for the environment" once meant tossing a newspaper in a recycling bin or buying organic lettuce, now nearly every aspect of daily life -- from the toilets we flush to the flowers that decorate our dinner tables -- is being radically rethought. Entrepreneurs, scientists and thinkers are working to transform industry so that it functions more like nature, lessening pollution and inefficiency while propelling the economy forward. Here are 13 ideas -- some far-fetched and far-off, others thriving right here, right now -- that can make the world a greener place.

PLASTIC FROM PLANTS

Plastic is one of the most useful materials, but also one of the most environmentally problematic. While its light weight saves fuel in cars and during shipping of goods, most plastics are produced using petroleum and toxic chemicals. When burned, as some garbage is, more toxic compounds are released.

The new breed of biodegradable and plant-based plastic containers and tools offer almost all of plastic's benefits and few of its ecological drawbacks. They are usually derived from non-genetically modified corn and wheat, which means they can be composted or will biodegrade (though in tightly sealed landfills, they might not). One polymer, developed at the University of Warwick in England, biodegrades into soil in which plants can grow. Biota (<http://www.biotaspringwater.com/>), the first spring water with a biodegradable plastic bottle, launched in the western United States in 2004.

Locally, bioplastics are available

5 Things to Do With This Newspaper

Sure, you can always pop the paper in the recycling bin, but why not use yesterday's news to . . .

Fix a flat tire. If you get a tear in your bike tire while riding, fold a quarter page of newspaper into a square big enough (and thick enough) to cover the hole. Slip the paper between tube and tire. Inflate the tube enough to hold the paper in place, then put the tire back on its rim and inflate the tube fully. This quick fix should keep you going for several miles.

Keep weeds out of your garden. Layer three to four sheets of newspaper next to your plants (at least two inches away from the stems to prevent rotting). Water the entire area. Add a top layer of mulch, grass clippings or straw. The newspaper blocks sunlight -- which weeds need to grow -- and will help keep the soil moist.

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at Future Green (1469 Church St. NW, 202-234-7110) and Java Green (1020 19th St. NW, 202-775-8899, <http://www.javagreen.net/>), a cafe that serves organic coffee, runs on wind energy and uses biodegradable takeout dishware.

SUSTAINABLE NIGHTCLUB

Energy can be harvested from just about anywhere: rivers, the sun, wind . . . and hyperactive club kids. The latter is the rationale behind Club Double Dee, which dubs itself the world's first sustainable dance club.

Scheduled to open in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, the club is a cooperative project between Enviu, an international organization promoting sustainable entrepreneurship; Doll Lab, a Dutch architecture firm; and Off Corso, a local dance club. Not only is Double Dee considering serving organic beer and using a rainwater collection system for toilets, but it may actually be powered by dancing: Springs beneath the floor would capture motion energy to be converted into electricity. Enviu is remaining tight-lipped about the specifics of the project until its public presentation on Oct. 7, an event that the organization's Web site, <http://www.enviu.org/>, touts as "the beginning of a new era; an era in which sustainability will be hip and trendy."

CLOTHING SWAPS

The EPA estimates that more than 10 million tons of textile waste went to U.S. landfills in 2003. Why contribute to the problem? Swaporamarama, the brainchild of Wendy Tremayne, is an innovative series of events designed to bring people together and reuse unwanted clothing. Show up with a bag of old clothes and \$10. Then, you can roam around, pick as many items as you can carry, and take them to sewing stations, where designers and artists will customize or tailor them -- or teach you to do it yourself. A fashion runway, open to all, only adds to the fun.

Swaporamarama hit D.C. on April 22 (Earth Day), but another one is in the works for Baltimore (go to <http://www.swaporamarama.com/> to join the mailing list). Or, if you can't wait, visit Clotheswap.meetup.com to connect with like-minded swappers in the area.

"The thousands of pounds of free clothing demonstrate the fantastic surplus that we live amongst," says Tremayne. "And once we imbue our objects with meaning, the byproduct of adding our creative energy to it, these objects are far less likely to wind up in the trash."

BIOFUELS

Biodiesel -- one of the green movement's biggest buzzwords -- is diesel fuel derived from a combination of alcohol and animal or vegetable fats, instead of petroleum. Diesel cars and trucks can run on it without any conversions, and while burning biofuels still produces carbon dioxide, the levels released are much lower, the exhaust contains fewer carcinogens and growing the crops to produce it actually absorbs carbon dioxide.

Commercial biodiesel may be more expensive than regular diesel or gasoline, but the fuel economy is significantly better. In smog-choked Los Angeles, there's a new full-service biofuel center, Lovecraft Biofuels (Mandy Moore is a customer). Unfortunately, there's no one-stop shop yet in the D.C. area; for fuel stations that sell biodiesel in Maryland and Virginia, go to <http://www.biodiesel.org/buyingbiodiesel/retailfuelingsites>.

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