

OPC's Earth Care 2022 Challenge

About every two months starting with March 6, 2022, the Earth Care Team will be announcing our 2022 Earth Care challenge for one of four categories (below) of actions/changes your family might commit to doing, that you're not already doing, to move toward a more sustainable lifestyle. Some are small, some are large, and we ask that you read through and consider them all. You may have heard "If we each do one small thing..." but we know that would not be enough to achieve all the needed changes across all households soon enough. In the long term, most of us will likely need to embrace the large ones too, and those are ones that may save us a lot of money as well. Questions? Email us at opcearthcareteam@gmail.com.

Reducing our carbon footprint (conserving energy)

- a. Schedule a free [ComEd Home Energy Assessment](#) which includes free/discounted products for your home.
- b. Consider switching to [a renewable energy option with ComEd](#) .
- c. Consider getting an assessment of roof-top solar potential for electric cost savings (and carbon reduction).
- d. Consider purchase of an electric or hybrid car/truck.
- e. Carpool or combine trips and errands. Walk or bike to school or work.
- f. Keep your heating system running efficiently – replace the furnace filter regularly, vacuum dust from registers regularly, and schedule a qualified heating contractor for cleaning and maintenance.
- g. Invest in [a smart \(programmable\) thermostat](#) to help save energy. In winter, set it for a cooler temperature when everyone is gone or at night when sleeping. Do the reverse in summer.
- h. Save energy by using a ceiling fan, clockwise in winter and counterclockwise in summer. When using air conditioning, a ceiling fan will allow you to raise the thermostat setting about 4 degrees with no reduction in comfort.
- i. Turn down your water heater's thermostat to 120 degrees to save energy and likely not notice the difference.
- j. Consider adding attic insulation – insulation 'settles' over time.
- k. Recycle and reduce purchases of plastics (they have a large carbon footprint, and they end up polluting the environment):
 - i. avoid plastic water bottles, use your own refillable one,
 - ii. use your own reusable shopping bags or at least recycle those single-use plastic bags (see 4.h. below),

- iii. buy products in cardboard or recycled packaging (cardboard is more easily recycled than plastic),
 - iv. instead of plastic straws and 'plasticware', use your own reusable or biodegradable versions (plasticware is not recyclable, and many alternatives will biodegrade in just 100 days).
- l. Go meatless one day (or more) per week. Greenhouse gas emissions from producing a pound of beef are about 50 times those for a pound of beans.
- m. **Other energy savers:** Wash clothes in cold water to reduce energy use. When using the dishwasher, don't use the 'dry' setting - when done, open the washer door 4" to let dishes air dry. In summer, close curtains on windows receiving direct sunlight. Hang clothes outside to dry naturally. Unplug electronic devices when not in use. Turn off lights when leaving a room. Place the lid on a pan to save energy as well as time when cooking. Add caulk or weather-stripping to seal air leaks around windows and doors. Check the air pressure in your tires regularly to help your car ride efficiently.

Restoring nature and the environment

- a. Plant-a-tree – plant one or more trees native to northern Illinois. [Email us](#) to receive free oak seedlings in May.
- b. Plant-a-milkweed - provide a nursery for Monarch Butterflies' larvae (babies). [Email us](#) to request free milkweed plugs in May.
- c. [Email us to volunteer](#) to help maintain OPC's two native butterfly gardens.
- d. Plant native flowers, trees and shrubs in your yard (in pesticide-free area). Perhaps convert part of your lawn into native habitat (read "[Bringing Nature Home](#)" by Douglas Tallamy). Consider developing an [all-native rain garden with rain barrels](#) for very effective use of rain water before it flows downhill. Native plants require less fertilizer and water and provide valuable nectar for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Natives are often the unique 'hosts' for specific insect larvae that birds need to feed their young. [Email us](#) for help in planning a native garden and finding native plant and rain barrel suppliers.
- e. Start your own organic vegetable garden (perhaps using your own compost) and 'shop local' at Yorkville or Oswego market days.
- f. Adopt a box in OPC's Community Garden (just north of the manse). Interested? [Email us](#).
- g. Use [nontoxic pest control solutions](#) to get rid of pests such as ants, mosquitoes and roaches.

- h. [Email us to volunteer](#) to help in OPC's Adopt-a-Highway litter pickup, and the Fox River Cleanup. Pick up litter on your walks or hikes.
- i. Reduce purchases of plastics (especially single-use items) and recycle plastics to avoid long-term pollution from plastic microparticles.
- j. Go electronic to reduce paper use/waste. Receive bills and statements from banks, utility companies and other services by email and make payments online. Save receipts/documents on your computer rather than printing and saving in a paper file. When printing on paper is necessary, use recycled printer paper.
- k. Use your own reusable shopping bags or at least recycle those single-use plastic bags. These bags often end up in farmers' fields and clog their machinery or end up in waterways and oceans killing sea turtles and other marine life. Almost all grocery stores in our area (Jewel, Meijer, Target, Walmart) provide collection bins for plastic bag recycling.
- l. Use natural products rather than harsh chemicals when possible. Borax, baking soda and vinegar all do a great job cleaning and disinfecting, ex. use equal amounts of vinegar and water to get clear, streak-free windows without chemicals. [Find more natural cleaning recipes online](#). Use an [alternative to rock salt for deicing](#) your sidewalk or driveway to reduce salt going into soils and waterways.
- m. Don't put unused medicines in the trash. Take them to Walgreen's in Montgomery (1799 Douglas Rd) for safe disposal in their special kiosk next to the pharmacy.
- n. If you maintain your own car, take [old motor oil and filters to a recycling collector near you](#) and take [old tires and rims to a collection point near you](#).

Reducing our landfill waste

- a. Recycle (or reuse) as much as possible. Recycle qualified glass, metal, paper and plastic items in your regular recycle pick up (check your service's website).
- b. Recycle Styrofoam® - bring it to OPC's collection boxes or take it to [Dart Container Corporation's 24/7 foam recycling center](#) at 310 Evergreen Drive, North Aurora. [Email us to volunteer](#) to help in OPC's community Styrofoam recycle event on July 23rd.
- c. Bring plastic lids and other small plastics to OPC's collection box for recycling.
- d. Reuse gift package ribbon and keep non-recyclable wrapping paper out of landfills by using recyclable Kraft paper, reusable gift bags, decorative boxes, or fabric wrap.
- e. Reuse liners inside boxes of cereal or crackers - rinse out, let dry and use them instead of Ziplock baggies to store foods.

- f. Instead of paper napkins and paper towels, use cloth napkins and old towels or tee shirts,
- g. Decrease the number of coffee cups in landfills by bringing your own cup to the coffee shop.
- h. Create a backward compost pile [a backward compost bin](#) to make rich garden soil while keeping food out of the landfill.
- i. Sell or donate no longer wanted clothes and textiles. Keep them out of the landfill.

Reducing our water usage

- a. Consider installing a smart sprinkling system for your lawn to reduce water usage.
- b. Consider converting part of your lawn into an all-native garden (or rain garden) requiring much less water than lawn grass (see 4.d. below).
- c. Wait until you have a full load to do laundry. One large load uses less water than 2 small loads. Same for dishwasher.
- d. Install tap aerators and low-flow shower heads to save water.
- e. Shorten your shower by 2 minutes to save more than 10 gallons of water.
- f. Save several gallons of water each time you brush your teeth by turning off the water while you brush.

[Email us](#) if you have questions or if you have other suggestions for the lists.