

special feature

You're the first person to argue for a more sustainable lifestyle for the sake of the planet and also for your own health, but where do you start?

And will it really make a difference to the big picture?

Forget trying to change the big picture — that can appear impossible.

The key is in understanding that the big picture is actually made up of billions of little pictures, and you are one of them!

Increasingly we are seeing that the lifestyle choices we are making and the products we are buying directly affect not only the health of our family but also the health of the planet. Products laced with carcinogenic ingredients, packaged in layers of non-recyclable materials and made in overseas sweatshops have huge environmental, social and health implications. Thinking globally means knowing the big picture consequences of all our daily choices and habits. But the very thought of going green can seem daunting. So how do you easily make the switch into a more eco-friendly and therefore healthier, happier lifestyle?

Making the Switch:

The thinking family's guide to sustainable living

By Jannine Barron



Photo by Lisa Engeman

special feature

The best way you can *think globally and act locally*, is to start with your own cupboard and lifestyle habits. Unless you have already made your home and lifestyle chemical free, you are an unwilling generator of hazardous waste and energy consuming habits. This is a fact rather than a judgment of course and throughout this whole process, taking responsibility is important — but understanding your role as an unwilling participant is also reassuring that there is no need for guilt. Life was handed on a platter to you this way as a result of about 100 years of collective bad consumer habits. We are simply the generation that needs to change them.

The whole product picture

Most people base their decision to go chemical-free upon learning that many product ingredients are harmful on our skin, such as sodium laurel sulfates (SLS) in our shampoos; however, there is much more to the total product picture, that has personal and environmental consequences than just the ingredients. To look at a product or lifestyle choice wholistically, we must look at the seven aspects that go into the production and consumption. They are:

production
packaging
ethos
ingredients
effectiveness
transport
disposal



Shopping alternatives

Mail order is a quick, efficient, convenient and often cheaper alternative to shopping. Mail order companies excel over supermarkets for the following reasons:

1. They want the product to use less packaging: it is also better for their bottom line.
2. They understand you only want to shop occasionally, not every week, so you have the option to purchase in bulk, with refill options too.
3. They want your business so you usually get personal, well-informed staff.

1. Production: The product imprint onto the environment, community and consumer health begins with the first point of production. How is the product made and what kind of wastes are created in the manufacturing process? Is the product made in a sweatshop, using cheap overseas labour? Some companies pride themselves not only the ingredients they put into their product, but also the consciousness behind each and every step of the creation process.

2. Packaging: How is the product packaged, i.e. recyclable, reusable and what kind of material? We have only just begun to see the links between health risks and exposure to plastics and other non-biodegradable packaging. We know that non-biodegradable, man-made compounds have widespread negative impacts on people and other living systems. Just how, we are not so sure of, as it can take years for measurable effects and changes to occur. When shopping, take your own bag, say no to plastics where you can and support companies using biodegradable packaging. This will influence other companies to change.

3. Ethos: Where was the product made, is it tested on animals, are rainforest timbers used, does the company have a social and environmental ethos? Sustainability is about community and caring, not just recycling and biodegradable packaging. Check the company out that you are purchasing from. Do their practices and products match their philanthropy, if they have that at all? Be aware: the trend in the corporate 'philanthropic' eco-charade requires a discerning mind!

4. Ingredients: Are they safe, are they certified organic? Become educated and understand the ingredients that are written on the packaging of all food and health care products you buy. Funky packaging may attract you to buy, but ask yourself, 'What is in the product?' Even if it is from

Mail order is cost effective, easy and efficient

Shopping like this will seem like it costs more the first time. But compare this to shopping for what seems to be a cheaper product every week at a supermarket that actually requires you to throw a plastic container away every week. This is the deception factor that keeps us bound in our old habits. It actually costs you more in time, transport and product cost to shop every week. Remember, when products consume little in their production, transport, overhead and packaging cycles, the savings are passed on to you. What is good for your health is ultimately not only good for the planet, but also for your pocketbook and your time!

To find a company that sells the product you are looking for, you may need to look beyond local. While local shopping is always the most sustainable approach from one viewpoint, specialised products are not in every town so you need to look further afield. Look in the classifieds of free health magazines, your local paper, and use the internet search engines to narrow down what you want.

Caring *for your family and the environment...*

...Safe and gentle *products for the home and for you*



Tri Nature is a company of the highest integrity when it comes to producing products that are safe for the environment and the health of Australian families.

HOW SAFE?

Citrus Machine Dishwashing Concentrate powder is Tri Nature's greatest ever safety breakthrough within its range of household products. It has the lowest pH of any powdered washing product and contains none of the caustic substances, alkaline or chlorinated compounds that have caused so much harm to children around the world.



HOW GENTLE?

One of Tri Nature's first products was **Alpha Plus Laundry Powder**, a highly effective formula without nitrates, phosphates or other pollutants. It was the first of its kind in Australia is still probably the most effective, economical, environmentally responsible laundry detergent powder available.

Tri Nature's Alpha Plus Laundry Liquid or Gentle Wash are great alternatives to the laundry powder. They are considerably lower in sodium content and therefore contribute far less sodium or electrolytes to the wash water – **perfect for grey water usage!**

OUR PHILOSOPHY GUIDES US

Tri Nature has replaced the harsh and aggressive chemicals, petroleum solvents, phosphates and other environmental pollutants found in most cleaning products with gentle, naturally based high performance ingredients.

No animal products, by-products or testing.



For products that you can trust from a 100% Australian owned company that has been giving Australians peace of mind for over 15 years, contact:

VIC & TAS: Jo 03 9532 2349 (Bayside Suburbs) - Vicki 03 9568 5569 (Sth East suburbs)
Anne 03 9435 6376 (CBD, Nth Suburbs, Nth / East Vic & Tas) - Janita 03 5282 8575 (Sth West Vic) - Mary 03 5981 0021 (Morrington Pen)
Nicole 03 5368 9218 (Ballarat, Nth / West Vic)

SA: All Areas Sue 08 8270 3658 - Benita 08 8346 4044

NSW: Rob 02 9489 6012 (Syd N/Shore, East/Sth & West Suburbs)
Patsy 02 9918 7943 (Syd Nth Beaches, Lwr Nth & City)
Di 02 4954 4055 (Newcastle & Hunter Reg, Nth NSW)

QLD & WA: Wendy 07 3264 4885 (Qld & WA) - Kaye 07 5455 4187 (Sunshine Coast)
For any areas throughout Australia not included call 03 5282 8575



TRI Nature

The byronchild Sustainability Switchlist

Post this switch list in a visible place in your home like your fridge or by the phone. Tick off the areas where you have accomplished a switch, work towards the ones that you have not yet tackled.

Transport

- Car
- Bicycle
- Holidays
- Maintenance
- Repairs
- Parts
- Commute to work and school

Food

- Lunch snacks for kids
- Toddler snacks on outings
- Daily meals
- Where you shop
- Growing your own garden
- Take away food
- Eating out

Recycling

- Household disposal system
- Community disposal system
- Repairing appliances not replacing them
- Composting system
- Clothing

In the garden

- Gardening methods
- Compost
- Fertiliser
- Herbicides
- Native plant and tree regeneration

Cleaning

- Laundry
- Drains
- Carpets
- Floors
- Bathroom
- Kitchen
- Bedroom

Pest Control

- Cleaning
- Home remedies
- Essential oils
- Limited chemicals

Building and Renovating

- Materials
- Painting
- Recycling
- Flooring
- Electricity
- Water source
- Power source
- Insulation materials

Home

- Green power
- Water restrictions and recycling (grey water system)
- Energy efficiency
- Paper consumption — paper towels, paper napkins, etc.

Work

- Take a look at the industry you are in
- Is the lifestyle sustainable?

Community

- Clean-up campaigns
- Community education courses
- Community monitoring and action
- Landcare and parks
- Working bees

School

- Enviro programs
- Tuckshop rules and packaged foods

Holidays

- Accommodation
- Food facilities
- Kids' activities
- Bush access
- Environmentally friendly
- Camping
- National Parks kids' activities
- Eco-resorts

Parties and entertaining

- Invitation paper
- Catering
- Take home bags
- Party favours



the global magazine for progressive families

byronchild
www.byronchild.com

a well-known brand with a great reputation, you may be surprised what they really put in their product. Grab a *True Food Guide*, it's free from Greenpeace. Use the internet, buy *The Chemical Maze*, just start somewhere so you begin to know what ingredients really are. And be careful of the latest sneaky trend including 'coconut derived' and similar phrases. Yes, it was derived from coconut, but it was mixed with a load of chemicals to create what it really is! Some manufacturers are getting clever by stating this to make the ingredient still

look natural. You need to be cleverer by seeing through this marketing manipulation.

5. Effectiveness: it might be eco, but it must work well too! Word of mouth is often the best way to find out if a product is effective. Talk with friends who have made the switch and find out what they use and don't use and why. Ask the manufacturer if there are samples available, so you don't need to make a big investment while you try out



Don't just throw it away!

Disposal and recycling alternatives

Toxic waste

Many city or county governments operate household hazardous waste collection stations. The collection station may be open one day a year, or year-round, depending on where you live. Call your local council, ask for the waste management section and get the date and collection details for the next collection. If they don't have this service, take the opportunity to encourage them that they should. A warning here: unless you have a really great council that already has this service in place, you may be put on hold and passed around. If you run into a dead end, write to your MP or state health department.

Once you've found out when and where the hazardous waste collection will take place, you can take all your left-over pesticides, solvent-based paints, wood preservatives, and other dangerous items to the collection agency to be safely disposed or recycled in special hazardous waste facilities. Even the empty cans that once contained these materials contain hazardous residues, so even empty cans should also be taken in for collection.

Mobile phones

Dumping mobile phones creates long-term pollution risk to the environment and our health. Please, don't dump it, donate it!

While one of life's conveniences, mobile phones contain a cocktail of highly toxic elements that can cause a variety of serious health issues in humans.

These toxic ingredients include metals and chemicals such as arsenic, antimony, beryllium, cadmium, copper, lead, nickel, zinc and flame retardant. Metals are persistent — they don't degrade in the

environment; and bioaccumulative — they build up in fatty tissue so they can reach toxic levels over time. Flame retardants can react to form highly toxic dioxins and furans.

These toxins have been associated with a range of adverse health effects, including respiratory problems, damage to the nervous system, reproductive, genetic abnormality, developmental problems and cancers.

Poisonous substances which leach from decomposing waste in landfills can seep into groundwater, contaminate the soil and enter the food chain.

Participating in the program Clean Up Mobile Phones www.cleanup.com.au is really simple and will cost you nothing!

Post your mobile phone using a specially designed pre-paid envelope. Call 1800 024 890 for an envelope. If you organise a collection at your work, with your friends, or in your community or social group, they'll send you a collection bag.

Mobile phone recycling – call (02) 9552 6177

What to do with your old TV, computer and monitor

Don't send them to the tip! Electronic equipment is full of material that can leach in the ground and harm the earth if not disposed of properly.

Call HMR on 9642 8242 in Sydney to deal with the waste. Please write to us if you know of anyone in your state providing this service.

Tyre recycling

Call 07 4633 7249

Recycle your Christmas cards

Send them to:

Cards for Planet Ark
Reply Paid 9849
in your capital city

Or pick up one of their replied paid envelopes from your local post office.



special feature

How sustainably are you living?

Take the test and get a snapshot of where you are at with your sustainable living practices.

Cyclic — creating no waste

We have triple bins in our home to recycle all waste

Yes No

We re-use or recycle all waste including organic material

Yes No

We select products with recycled and organic contents as a first preference

Yes No

We collect storm water or roof water for our garden

Yes No

We reject plastic bags when shopping

Yes No

Solar — using clean energy

We buy products made with clean, natural energy such as solar

Yes No

Our home has design features that absorb winter sun and deflect summer peak heat

Yes No

We buy green power for running our home and/or office

Yes No

We power our home using natural energy such as solar or wind electricity

Yes No

We favour sun-grown materials over metallics and plastics

Yes No

Social — caring for people

We shop in an environment that fosters community and cultural interaction

Yes No

We have our investments and superannuation entitlements in an ethical fund or other screened fund

Yes No

Our staff/neighbours meet informally on a social basis

Yes No

We donate time or money to community projects that promote sustainable living, regeneration and clean environments

Yes No

Our local school has a participation enviro program for our kids

Yes No

Safe — ensuring it is harmless

We focus on habits, services and products that protect habitats, waterways and air quality

Yes No

We minimise/have eliminated the use of petro-chemical products in our home

Yes No

We use 100% recycled paper

Yes No

We choose non-hazardous paints, varnishes and cleaning fluids

Yes No

We choose 100% certified organic products or chemical-free products in our home

Yes No

Efficient — running with less

We ride a bicycle for transport at least once a week

Yes No

We use local suppliers and support local businesses

Yes No

We have a paperless communication system

Yes No

We reduce water consumption by using low flow shower heads

Yes No

We reduce fuel consumption by switching off unused appliances

Yes No

Smart — adapting to change

We research and seek out new products with strong social and environmental benefits

Yes No

We have a home garden and grow some of our own food

Yes No

We participate in community or personal development classes that help set a clear vision for a healthy lifestyle

Yes No

We are an active member of a community or sports club

Yes No

I exercise regularly

Yes No

Add up your 'yes' answers and check the results.

0 - 10 Looks like you got some work to do but don't worry, there are plenty of places to get you on the road.

11 - 15 Sounds like you have made a start. Continue with the little things and work up.

16 - 20 Not bad. You are in a perfect position to move ahead.

21 - 25 Well done, you know your stuff.

26 - 30 You are serious about sustainability and you are powering on. Great work!

Developed by the **Sustainable Living Foundation** to highlight the positive sustainability features of your home or organisation. This survey has been adapted for home use from a business survey for **byronchild** readers.

different products and different lines. Be wary of hard-sell pyramid schemes that sign you on for larger weekly investments than you had budgeted for, as in vitamin supplements.

6. Transport: how far did it have to travel to get to your home? The energy cost to transport a non-local product weighs heavily on the environmental and social balance sheet. When you next purchase any product, take a look at where it was made and consider the energy and transport costs in getting it to you. When you buy from local producers, the nutrition, energy and health value of a product increases dramatically. Governments all over the world have a tangled web of subsidised industries to make food look cheaper from a country 10,000 miles away than from your farmer next door. This makes no long-term economic sense. Your choice to buy locally means you are contributing to strengthening your regional economy, supporting your local family farm, preserving the local landscape and fostering a sense of community. Start the trend to buy local and watch the reliance on oil drop 95% and watch your health and community wellbeing improve.

7. Disposal: what sort of impact does the product have when disposing of it? Manufacturing waste and disposal is partially regulated in business and industry with strict laws, but millions of gallons of hazardous chemicals are still being dumped into Australia's surface water and ground water systems every year, by us, in our own homes! It is made up of a large number of everyday household items containing dangerous levels of toxic ingredients, from the shampoos we

use, to oven cleaner, drain cleaner, mobile phones, computers and batteries.

The only reason you are not being fined for flushing bleach down your toilet is because federal hazardous waste laws contain exemptions for household wastes. Now we have to ask, who does this actually protect, us or the companies making them?

Use these seven points as your own 'Eco-checklist' to evaluate a product before it is purchased. Not all products will satisfy all points, but the checklist will bring you closer to the right decision for you and your situation. For example: perhaps the meat at your local farmers' market is not certified organic, but it comes from humanely-raised animals at a local farm that uses no hormone injections. This local option might be a better choice than a pre-packaged certified organic meat from the large chain grocer that was shipped from Tasmania.

Purchase power — our contribution towards global sustainability

Thousands of chemically made products in plastic containers are legally sold off the shelves of reputable stores every day. Further, they have really nice labels, and some of them have words like 'organic' or 'enviro' written on them *without any certification*. And finally, they are easy and cheap to buy. The good news is that greener alternatives are now easy to find and affordable to buy too! All it takes is a little research in the beginning and then it just becomes a new habit.



Make yourself climate neutral!

What does this mean?

Climate Friendly™ has a goal of enabling you to understand and lighten your climate impact. They actually calculate your climate footprint, based on the lifestyle information you provide. You can then opt to trade this impact for clean energy and shares in other climate friendly projects which neutralise your impact – making you 'climate neutral'.

Visit www.climatefriendly.com and use the electricity and travel calculators to find out how much unfriendly energy you use. Then you can add projects which slow global warming to your shopping basket: wind energy, solar energy, and energy saving projects. The result is that you can be 'climate neutral'. If you are a business, tell your customers by proudly wearing the climate neutral logo. Visit the website and try it yourself.

Example: Driving a car + running a typical house using an average amount of electricity, for one year = 13.6 tonnes in greenhouse pollution into the atmosphere.

A gift certificate for two tonnes of greenhouse gas



While I sometimes wonder why it is legal to package, sell and consume most products on the market, banning these products overnight would be an economic and administrative disaster so the change has to be slow. But to date, no government or business is setting the rate of change, that task is left to us. We are the ones who must make the switch.

Until we take our dollar to the businesses that sell only chemical-free products, or get ourselves into the kitchen to make our own products, change will not happen. The power is in our hands and the power is where we put our dollars. It is up to you to do it, one purchase at a time.

With any change, the motivation has to be there. If you have a general knowledge about which ingredients are toxic, and the cycle of manufacturing, packaging and disposal and their effect on the environment, your choices become clearer. Once this happens, it is easier to act and you become a pro-active participant of change.



Photo by Lisa Engeman

Switch life habits too!

Sustainable lifestyles are not only about product purchases, they are about life habits. Choosing different transport or car pooling, buying green energy, walking instead of driving, making your own party favours that are fun but totally recyclable are just some of the ways to rethink our choices. Once you start having a sustainable view on life, you will find that there are many areas that you can start applying these ideas. The first changes will be the big ones; after that, you won't even know you are doing it. And this is the goal: that sustainable living is not an effort, is not always a conscious choice, but the only way forward. Imagine if we could show the next generation how easy it could be.

Five simple steps to get chemical-free and start living sustainably

1. Education

Reading articles like this, searching the web (see our resources section below), borrowing books and talking to local

Resources and support

Websites

- EnviroJobs: A weekly employment service for positions in the environmental field www.envirojobs.com.au
- Sustainable Living Foundation www.slf.org.au
- Environment Business Australia: The peak body representing the environment and sustainability industry in Australia www.environmentbusiness.com.au
- The Boomerang Alliance: Made up of Australia's leading environment groups, is committed to work for zero waste in Australia www.boomerangalliance.org.

- Clean up Australia www.cleanup.com.au
- Greenpeace www.greenpeace.org.au
- Future Australia — the Australian library of information and links for creating positive change in our society and environment. www.futureaus.net
- Landcare Australia www.landcareaustralia.com.au
- Envirotalk: Australian environmental discussion forum www.envirotalk.com.au
- Earthshare Australia — A national initiative of leading environment groups www.earthshare.org.au
- Australian On-line Farmers Market: a 'living' public nationwide directory of small to medium sized farms, farmers markets, restaurants and other local food sources. www.farmersonlinemarket.com
- GreenPeople: World's largest directory of eco-friendly products www.greenpeople.org
- Good Environmental Choice Australia: Hosts the National Sustainability Network community,

a free web-based community of individuals that seek to live more sustainable lifestyles and who want to share their experiences, attitudes, lifestyles and ambitions in making this happen. www.goodenvironmentalchoice.org.au

- Organic Consumers Association: Food and consumer news tidbits with an edge! www.organicconsumers.org

Fun and Educational Flash Films

- The Meatrix www.themeatrix.com
- Store Wars www.StoreWars.org

Books

- *True Food Guide*, from Greenpeace at www.greenpeace.org.au
- *Parecon — Life after Capitalism* by Michael Albert, Verso Books
- *The Little Green Handbook*, by Ron Nielson, Scribe Publications
- *Beyond Organics: gardening for the future*, by Helen Cushing, ABC
- *The Chemical Maze*, by Bill Statham, Possibility.com

environment groups and your friends is a great start. Learn about ingredients that are safe, think about packaging that is a renewable resource and understand what genetic engineering really means. Once you are educated, you will be easily motivated and charged with a whole new perspective on your role in the cycle of life.

2. Commitment

Most resistance comes from the concern that earth-friendly might not be easy, effective or affordable. You may need to demonstrate that indeed it is, first. Talk to everyone in your house and explain what you want to do. Get consensus so that the support and purchasing will be consistent. If you don't get immediate consensus, you will need a different approach to introduce things slowly for everyone.

3. Make a 'Switch list'

Make your own list of changes you want to make in your home or use the *byronchild switch list* (page 18) in this article. Put everything on the list that is relevant to your life, possible to change or you would like to change. Even put things on the list that may not be possible to change for a long time. Keep the vision strong and the rest will follow. And if this is sounding a bit like a personal development seminar — it is! So enjoy yourself. This is not a serious exercise; it is fun, enjoyable and will open your eyes to new ways of shopping, buying, living and consciousness.

4. Choose a realistic time frame

Use this switchlist to help you decide on a time frame that is realistic for you and your family/household. If you are starting from scratch, you may need to factor in a period of time for family education. Whatever your time frame, you certainly can begin to make small changes right away.

5. Work through the list step by step

Do the easy ones first and the hard ones later. Keep your list in a highly visual part of the house. This will keep you motivated and visitors interested. You may just affect many more people than you realise with your habits. In marketing circles, companies pay thousands of dollars to get an 'idea virus' started. You can start your own idea virus by being an example of how going chemical-free is easy and often cheaper than your previous choices.

Living sustainably is done step by step, one choice at a time. Becoming a part of the cure instead of part of the problem is empowering and even transformative. Actually learning what the right questions are, and getting in the habit of asking them before you purchase anything, will set you well on your way. ☺

Jannine Barron is a freelance writer and regular contributor to byronchild, mother, and owner of Nature's Child, www.natureschild.com.au

Product resource listing

Climate friendly (02) 6680 8596 www.climatefriendly.com

Nature's Child 1300 555 632 www.natureschild.com.au

Planet Ark (02) 9251 3444 www.planet.ark.com

Tri Nature (03) 5282 8575 www.trinature.com