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Green Reading:

Resources for the Sustainability-Minded

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Are you still trying to figure out what it means to be “green”? Do you want your library to be more environmentally friendly but wonder how to do it and what it will cost? Your questions and confusion about the answers are to be expected. For many years the literature focused on making the case that humans were harming the environment: the most recent messenger being Al Gore with his *An Inconvenient Truth*. Now, a flood of sources offers strategies to help alleviate the environmental impact of living in a high consumption society. Yet, we are still in the infancy of a movement that is just gaining traction with these complicated problems. Some of us even feel that the future of life as we know it depends on answering these questions correctly and as soon as possible.

What resources might a library want to offer to support efforts to take action at the individual level or to help guide efforts at the institutional level? Below is a selection of books, articles, and Web sites to help us understand how we, and our organizations, can approach the concept of “being green.” As you peruse them, keep in mind that some may offer solutions easily done with little start-up costs, such as using paper with more recycled content in the printer, to bigger

projects like completely redoing existing landscaping. In addition to budget, there are also vastly different scales to consider: from bikes instead of cars to entire new buildings. Be sure to update this subject area in your collections regularly, as the field is growing rapidly.

Last, before diving into the bibliography portion, remember that “sustainability” subsumes a wide range of topics, so it can be a challenge to find consistent terminology to use in searching for sources. For example, some Library of Congress Subject Headings addressing climate change and energy use solutions are:

- Global environmental change
- Greenhouse gas mitigation
- Carbon dioxide mitigation
- Biomass energy (UF biofuels)
- Alternative fuel vehicles
- Renewable energy sources

In the Web 2.0 sphere, descriptive tags applied by users of social networking sites, like del.icio.us or Flickr, reveal another way to describe and find Web resources on this topic. The “tag cloud” below illustrates end-user terminology for solutions to climate change. The larger the font, the more frequently a tag has been used.

recycling auto **green** footprint **carbon** biodegradable **energy** bioenergy smartgrowth
future climatechange **climate** automobile calculator biofuel biodiesel activism
globalwarming environment organic **sustainability** howto sustainable co2



Buildings and Landscapes

Cascadia Region Green Building Council. (2006-2007). Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://www.cascadiagbc.org/>

Has links to the national site, which developed the LEED rating system used for the "... design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings." The regional site for the Pacific Northwest is chock full of information and links to other useful resources.

Dunnett, N., & Hitchmough, J. (Eds.). (2004). *The dynamic landscape: design, ecology and management of naturalistic urban planting*. New York: Spon Press. (ISBN: 0415256208)

Extensively referenced with lovely photos, this is more about the theories and histories of landscaping than a step-by-step guide. Chapter 5, by the well-known Darrel Morrison, discusses the history of using native plants and how to use them ecologically. There are nice examples of how to put theory into practice, but the specifics aren't necessarily applicable for different regions—in fact his point is that each region should have plants best suited to that area.

Harvey, L. D. D. (2006). *A handbook on low-energy buildings and district-energy systems: fundamentals, techniques and examples*. Sterling, VA: Earthscan. (ISBN: 1844072436)

This book was highly recommended by Choice. Extensively researched, although not well indexed, it has wonderfully detailed chapter headings. It is especially useful for considering the specific aspects involved for either a new building or for retrofitting an existing building.

Melby, P., & Cathcart, T. (2002). *Regenerative design techniques: practical applications in landscape design*. New York: J. Wiley & Sons. (ISBN: 0471414727)

This book has a nice mix of detail and overview, with examples of specific projects. The chapter on rainwater harvesting discusses outdoor use versus indoor/outdoor use systems, provides formulas for calculating the volume of water that a catchment's system might use in a storm, explains different storage devices, and discusses filtration and maintenance – among other things. Although many of the examples are for single family homes, some are scalable for larger projects. Overall, the myriad details involved make a compelling case that hiring someone with extensive knowledge of how to design and install an environmentally sustainable landscape would be a wise investment for a library.

Alternative Fuels

Jaeger, W. K., Cross, R., & Egelkraut, T. M. (2007). *Biofuel potential in Oregon: Background and evaluation of options* (Oregon State University Agricultural Experiment Station Special Report No. 1078). Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/sr/sr1078.pdf>

This report examines the use of corn ethanol, canola biodiesel and wood-based ethanol as fuel. The authors looked at cost, production and the contribution to greenhouse gases. They found that while these biofuels might reduce Oregon's fossil fuel use, they aren't as productive as raising taxes on gas or mandating higher fuel economy standards. This was true for all regions, not just the Pacific Northwest. They also recognize that this model is for large commercial productions and could change with new technology and/or costs of the current system.

The National Biodiesel Board. (2007). Biodiesel. Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://biodiesel.org/>

As the official Web site of the National Biodiesel Board, this provides a guide to



using biodiesel along with retailer maps, factsheets, reports, and news supporting biodiesel. However, the Craigslist Web site <http://www.craigslist.org> is one of the best sources for finding biodiesel cars and fuel, as well as other sustainable products—choose a region and then search for biodiesel.

Equipment and Products

Center for the New American Dream. (n.d.). New American Dream. Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://www.new-dream.org/>

Under “buy wisely” it has a section for institutional purchasing. There are links to resources for buying environmentally friendly products, electronics and more. There are also a series of green purchasing guides you can order for a fee. Not particularly well organized, as you have to navigate from the cryptic headings on the left side of the Web page.

Hawken, P., Lovins, A., & Lovins, L. H. (1999). *Natural capitalism: creating the next industrial revolution*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co. (ISBN: 0316353167)

This book is useful for understanding why we would want to make changes, but the content is not as applied. Chapters do have some practical suggestions (e.g., make cars hyperlight to save energy), lists and diagrams. Far reaching and well documented; this a compelling read.

Milling, H. (2007, May 15). Green Picks. *Library Journal*, 32, 16-23. Retrieved August 24, 2007, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Offers good ideas for reused and reusable furniture, upholstery, desk surfaces, floors and wall coverings from an interior designer who has worked on “more than a dozen libraries” of different sizes.

McDonough, W., & Braungart, M. (2002). *Cradle to cradle: remaking the way we make*

things. New York: North Point Press. (ISBN: 0865475873)

From leaders in the field, this helps to conceptualize why we bother with green building and manufacturing. The authors explain how products, such as shoes, and buildings, like a Ford Motor Company factory, pollute at each stage of their lifecycles. They maintain that all waste is simply a design flaw that can—and should—be fixed. Has examples from around the globe and from their work. No index and poorly edited, but still inspirational and fun to read.

Treehugger. (2007). *How to go green*. Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://www.treehugger.com/gogreen.php>

The “How to Go Green” section offers a set of “how-to” guides that will help you green your furniture, your lighting, your work, even your recycling! The rest of the site includes eco-centric gossip and other resources such as a job search function. There is even a post on ways to reuse your Swiffer without all the waste and chemicals. The site also has an RSS feed so you can keep up on this exciting stuff. A word of caution though, the site is a dot com, with somewhat annoying ads. Remember that even a green organization might have financial motives for suggesting some products over others.

Mobility

Balish, C. (2006). *How to live well without owning a car: save money, breathe easier, and get more mileage out of life*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press. (ISBN: 1580087574)

This book will help you transition to living either “car-free” (although you can still catch rides, join car sharing programs, and rent cars), or “car-lite”: keep the car, but use it less. Sprinkled with inspirational testimonials from around the country, chapters also offer practical advice on utilizing alternative modes of transportation. The author suggests a trial, car-free week to start.



Hurst, R. J. (2004). *The art of urban cycling: lessons from the street*. Guilford, CT: Falcon. (ISBN: 0762727837)

Written by a veteran bike messenger, every urban bike commuter should read this book—especially new commuters! It opens with a fascinating and well-footnoted history of the bicycle. Turns out the early bicycle mechanics and manufacturers were major players in developing the automobile. If nothing else read Chapter 3, “In Traffic,” for insightful tips and strategies. Other chapters cover repairs and equipment.

Living Green

Merkel, J. (2003). *Radical simplicity: small footprints on a finite earth*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers. (ISBN: 0865714738)

Assess your lifestyle impact and learn how to simplify using ecological footprinting and the YMOYL tool (based on the book *Your Money or Your Life*). Start by taking a quick online quiz to determine your footprint at <http://www.myfootprint.org/>. Appendices have various tables and worksheets that go along with these tools. Be ready though—simplifying isn’t necessarily simple!

A nice companion read that lays out the philosophical and spiritual aspects of simplicity is the classic: *Voluntary simplicity: toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich* (ISBN: 0688121195).

Oregon Environmental Council. (n.d.). *Living Green*. Retrieved October 15, 2007, from <http://www.oeconline.org/livinggreen>

The Web site for this non-profit, formed in 1968, offers unique content for Oregon citizens such as “An Oregon Roadside Guide to Eco-Healthy Eating” and “Eco-Healthy Home Tips.” They also track related legislation and events.

Trask, C. (2006). *It’s easy being green: a handbook for earth-friendly living*. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith. (ISBN: 158685772X)

A fun read on integrating earth-friendly living into everyday life. The longest chapter, titled “Eco-tips for Living Greener,” provides concise, practical tips that will have you thinking, “Hey, I can do that!” Each tip has a series of check boxes for those who like to mark or rate their progress. The “Buying Green” chapter has a guide to eco-labels where you can learn things like Cage Free doesn’t mean those chickens are living outdoors.

For more in-depth discussion of why we should strive to live green, along with more extensive examples, try the forerunner of this emerging genre: *The consumer’s guide to effective environmental choices: practical advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists* (ISBN: 060980281X).

Conclusion

We hope these resources help answer questions about how to make your library, your commute, your workday, and your world more environmentally sustainable. Ultimately, this is an annotated bibliography of hope. We hope that as we learn more about the impacts of how we build, landscape, stock and travel to our libraries, that the utility of these resources will change too. We expect that as we look back from the future on this bibliography, we’ll be pleased to see we were headed in the right direction. We also imagine that a few resources will look hopelessly naive and wrong-headed. But, mostly we hope these resources inspire you to make a difference and that you’ll share what does and doesn’t work with others as we learn to be better stewards of the earth. 🌿

