

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Green Your Home Office



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Office of Sustainability
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Thank You for Your Interest in Making Your Home More Sustainable!

As many offices are currently working virtually, the Green Office team at UW-Madison has created this guide to help individuals be more sustainable in their home office. This guide is designed to offer helpful information that could be applied to home offices during the pandemic, but also includes useful tips to green your home in general.

The Green Office team is composed of student interns at the UW-Madison Office of Sustainability. We assist in running the Green Office Certification Program on campus which strives to educate offices on ways their work environment can be more sustainable. If you would like to learn more about our program, or if you have any questions, please contact us at greenoffice@g-groups.wisc.edu.

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Social Sustainability and Environmental Justice

Historically, the mainstream environmental movement has not recognized social and environmental inequalities. In response, the term environmental justice was coined to include concerns not only limited to outdoor nature, but also for human habitat, such as threats that low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities often face from environmental hazards. Through this section, you will learn about tools to help make your communities more inclusive. One of the first steps you can take to better understand your position in justice movements is to educate yourself and reflect on your identities. Here at the Office of Sustainability, we are not experts on social justice, but we encourage you to look at the resources we've compiled and reach out to those who are experts in these areas.

- ❑ It is critical to be aware of the intersections of racism and the environmental movement. According to the [NAACP](#), climate change has a “disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities in the United States and around the world”.
 - ❑ UW-Madison library provides a useful [guide](#) for researching crucial topics including climate change and Black Lives Matter Movement.
 - ❑ If you would like to learn more about Environmental (in)Justice at home and abroad, consider checking out a presentation made by our Green Allies team. You can view the presentation [here](#).
 - ❑ Also, consider taking some time and researching on your own to educate yourself on environmental racism.
- ❑ Another way to learn more about social sustainability is by listening to podcasts and reading books from people with perspectives that differ from your own. See the resources below that our office has enjoyed as a starting point.
 - ❑ **Podcasts:**
 - ❑ [Environmental Racism: It's a Thing](#)
 - ❑ [Outside Voices Podcast](#)
 - ❑ [Yikes Podcast](#)
 - ❑ **Books:**
 - ❑ [Black Faces, White Spaces](#)
 - ❑ [Environmental Racism and Classism](#)
 - ❑ [Other Environmental Justice Books](#)

- ❑ Your workplace is another area where it can be important to know how to have a productive conversation and gain deeper understanding about important social issues.
 - ❑ Before reaching out to your coworkers, we recommend you to do the basic research on complex social issues to understand the context of the problem. The resources we shared above are great places to start.
 - ❑ When having a conversation on social issues with your co-workers, it is important to keep in mind that no member of a BIPOC community has the responsibility to teach you.
- ❑ Understand and acknowledge your own implicit biases. You may not be aware of some of the unconscious prejudices that you hold, but now is a time for self-reflection.
 - ❑ One way to understand your implicit biases is to [Take Online Implicit Bias Tests](#).
- ❑ For more information check out resources offered at UW-Madison:
 - ❑ Multicultural Student Center
 - ❑ [Hate and Bias Resources](#)
 - ❑ The Social Justice Hub
 - ❑ [Social Justice Books and Documentaries](#)
 - ❑ [Education program](#)

Environmental Sustainability

Although we emphasized the importance of recognizing the need for social justice and sustainability, it is also critical to protect our environment. Many of you have probably heard the three Rs of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. In this section, we delve deeper into some of the possible changes you can incorporate into your lifestyle that can improve your treatment of the environment.

Preventing Water Pollution

- ❑ Home wastewater is mostly sent to a septic tank to seep into the ground or to a local wastewater treatment plant. Preventing contaminants from entering the plant is an effective way to protect clean water as the removal process is both energy-intensive and costly. The following are specific pollutants that the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District is working to reduce:
 - ❑ Salt (chloride): Use ONLY the necessary amounts of salt for water softener and ice melting can protect our lakes and streams.
 - ❑ Pharmaceuticals: Most wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove pharmaceuticals or hormones. **Do not** flush medications down the toilet. They are released into the environment and may have harmful effects to aquatic organisms.
 - ❑ To properly dispose of pharmaceuticals, drop them off at a drug take-back site.
 - ❑ For more general information, visit [this resource](#) created by the FDA. If you are looking for more information specific to Madison and the Wisconsin area, please drop-off locations [here](#).
 - ❑ Non-flushables: Except for human waste and toilet paper, all other items (wipes, menstrual care items) can potentially disrupt the water flow in pipes. Fats, oils, and greases can form clogs and disruptions as well.
 - ❑ Phosphorous: Avoid using phosphorous fertilizer for gardens.
 - ❑ The three numbers on the package for fertilizer refer to the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Be sure to pay attention to the middle number as excess phosphorus washed off in runoffs may lead to algae blooms in local aquatic environments.

Reducing Water Consumption

While clean water may seem like an abundant and accessible resource in Madison, WI, more than 2,000,000 Americans live without basic access to safe drinking

water and sanitation. Developing habits to reduce your water consumption is beneficial for the sustainability of our watershed.

- ❑ Turn off the sink water while brushing your teeth and washing your hands.
- ❑ Dishwashing:
 - ❑ Run your dishwasher only when it is completely full - a half empty dishwasher and a full dishwasher use the same amount of water and energy!
 - ❑ If you have a lot of dishes, it is better to use the dishwasher than to wash by hand.
- ❑ Take shorter and colder showers to reduce water and energy consumption.
 - ❑ Turn off the water when shaving.
- ❑ Check the Water Heater setting if you have access.
 - ❑ It is often set too high which wastes energy.
 - ❑ Your water heater only needs to be set at normal which is usually between medium and low (around 120°F), this will not compromise anyone's ability to have hot water.
- ❑ Report leaks:
 - ❑ Contact your housing manager, landlord, plumber, etc. to report a leaky shower head, sink, or toilet.
 - ❑ At one drip per second, a leaky faucet wastes 3,000 gallons of water a year. A running toilet can waste 200 gallons of water every *day*.

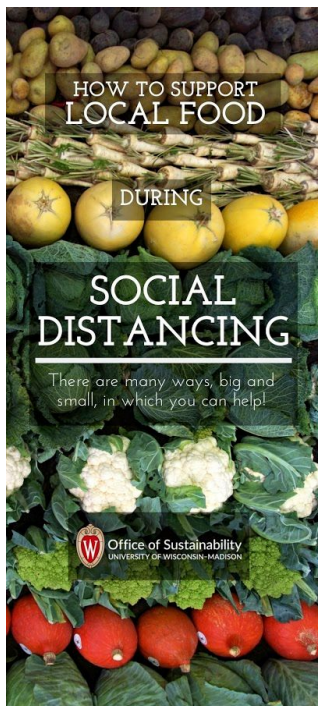
Reducing Food Waste

Food waste is a tremendous global problem. According to the USDA, 30-40% of all food produced ends up wasted in the United States (to learn more click [here](#)).

Many people do not have the privilege to waste food. However, if the package of strawberries in your fridge always starts to grow mold before you can eat them then these tips are for you.

- ❑ Instead of throwing out citrus peels, consider adding them to your water to give your water flavor.
- ❑ Use leftover parts of vegetables (like the stem, tops, or stalks) to create your own vegetable broth.
- ❑ Freeze any food that might be close to going bad to use at a later date, like too soft greens for smoothies. Another great tip is to freeze your bread as soon as you buy it if it can take you a while to finish a loaf. So when you want a piece, all you have to do is pop a piece of bread in your toaster.
- ❑ Read this recent student intern column that specifically addresses [food waste during COVID-19](#).

- ❑ Meal planning can also be a great way to ensure that you purchase the right amount of food and know when you are going to use it. Before going grocery shopping, make a list and plan out your meals.
 - ❑ Making a grocery list helps you avoid buying too much food, make sure you only buy what you're sure you'll eat so that no food is wasted.
 - ❑ Reducing food waste reduces the environmental impact because rotting food in landfills releases methane gas.
 - ❑ If you have the ability to do so, consider purchasing locally grown food, like at the Madison Farmer's Market or at local co-ops.
 - ❑ Purchasing locally grown food decreases the energy used in transportation and storage.
 - ❑ Buying local also helps support local farmers and the Madison community.
 - ❑ Please use this [link](#) to view an interactive guide for more information on supporting local food during COVID-19:



1 BUY FROM LOCAL FARMERS & RESTAURANTS

Purchase produce from the Dane County Farmers Market [local food pick-up](#), occurring twice-weekly at the Alliant Energy Center.

Buy [directly](#) from Dane County Farmers Market Farmers.

Find more farms and CSAs in REAP Food Group's "[Safer at Home Food and Farm Guide](#)" (which also contains information about local restaurants).

Purchase [local plants](#) and grow your own food.

Find local restaurants to support [in Madison](#), or anywhere else [in the state](#).

Read about [more ways to support restaurants](#) during the pandemic (like buying gift cards).

2 DONATE TO FOOD-RELATED INITIATIVES

Donate to the Dane County Farmers Market [Farmers Emergency Fund](#).

Donate to REAP Food Group's [Farm to Families Emergency Initiative](#).

Donate to [REAP Food Group](#) itself.

Donate to a [Sierra Club fund](#) that is split between organizations distributing food and helping farmers.

Support restaurant workers directly by contributing to the [Madison Virtual Tip Jar](#).

[Find a local food bank](#), and see how you can donate or volunteer.

3 KNOW AND SHARE FOOD RESOURCES

Know where to find [free meals in Madison](#).

Explore [food access resources](#) from UW Extension.

Read about [food resources for students](#) on the UW-Madison campus.

Don't waste food! Read about strategies for [food waste reduction](#) during social distancing.

Find statewide information about [food, housing, and wifi assistance](#).

Practice better cooking at [home](#). Learning to use [less meat](#) and more [non-perishables](#) is important due to current limitations in our food supply (and helps out the [environment](#)).

Reducing Home Office Waste

Working from home can have benefits for some people, but it also can cut back on your use of fossil fuels for transportation. However, there are still some practices you can implement in your home to reduce waste.

Sustainable Printing

- ❑ If you can't go totally paperless, try buying recycled or partially recycled paper for printing.
 - ❑ Make sure to set your printer to "Double-Sided" to save paper.
 - ❑ Have your printer plugged into a power strip so you can easily turn it off when not in use.

Digital Carbon Footprint

- ❑ Many of the devices you use are likely still powered using non-renewable energy sources. For instance, charging your phone and computer has a carbon footprint that is not as easy to see as driving a car. We're not suggesting that you stop using all of your technology, but consider reading [this article](#) by BBC that discusses the uncertain footprint of our digital habits.

Reducing Energy Consumption

Working from home already reduces your carbon footprint substantially by eliminating the need for transportation. However, it may increase your energy bill due to the increased amount of time spent at home. Here are some tips to reduce your energy consumption at home:

- ❑ Implement powerstrips for your appliances
 - ❑ Certain devices and appliances still draw power while turned off! This is called **ghost power**, and accounts for almost 10% of residential electricity use.
 - ❑ Consider using a power strip that allows you to turn off all of your appliances at once and reduces ghost power
 - ❑ Biggest culprits of **ghost power**: toasters, egg cookers, microwaves, keurigs, straighteners/curlers.
 - ❑ Don't worry about phone and computer chargers as they draw minimal ghost power.
- ❑ Look to buy [EnergyStar](#) appliances when you need a replacement.
- ❑ Turn off/unplug fans when not in use.
- ❑ Reduce the usage of lights.
 - ❑ Open blinds instead of turning on lights when you can.
 - ❑ Turn lights off when leaving the room.
 - ❑ Identify spaces that are rarely occupied yet well lit and install motion sensors.
 - ❑ Switch to LED lights wherever possible
 - ❑ They use a fifth of the power and last 5 times as long as CFLs.

- ❑ Wasted heat generated from lightings requires additional HVAC cooling loads to counterbalance the high temperature.

Heating and Cooling

Although working at home seems more sustainable than commuting, it may not be true when it comes to heating and cooling. Heating and cooling each individual house could be more energy intensive than one office building especially during the winter and summer. The efficiency may also differ by where the energy is sourced. Conserving energy from heating and cooling not only reduces your impact on the environment, but it also cuts down your utility costs since they are one of the top energy consumers in average households.

- ❑ Set your thermostat at suggested levels:
 - ❑ During warmer months, set your thermostat at 78°F and during cooler months, set your thermostat at 68°F.
 - ❑ If you do decide to use your air conditioner, make sure all of your windows are closed and use a timer so your air conditioner doesn't run all night.
- ❑ If your HVAC system is more than 10 years old, it may be consuming more energy than needed. Upgrading will be environmentally and economically beneficial in the long run.

Sustainable Cleaning

Most commercial cleaning products are hazardous to human health and the environment. Some of the chemicals used in cleaning products can cause acute respiratory problems, skin irritation, headaches, and cancer among other health problems. These chemicals can also contaminate drinking water when they are disposed of down the drain or in the trash.

- ❑ Use non-hazardous and low VOC content cleaners
 - ❑ To find non toxic cleaning products, look for the [Safer Choice Label](#).
 - ❑ Some companies to look into are Method, Seventh Generation, Ecos, and Mrs. Meyers.
 - ❑ Learn how to make your own sustainable cleaners in this [seven-minute video](#) from our intern team!
 - ❑ Making your own cleaners by reusing containers and buying ingredients in bulk will reduce your plastic consumption and save you money.

Economic Sustainability

Protecting the people and the planet is not the job of one person, but rather something that many people need to address in their day to day lives. One way you can live more sustainably is by addressing your ecological footprint.

Conscious Consumerism

- ❑ If you have the resources to evaluate and change your habits, purchasing is an area where you may want to focus your energy to make an impact.
 - ❑ Conscious consumerism is a way for you to encourage ethical and sustainable business practices. Voting with your dollar is the idea that the purchases you make to support sustainability initiatives tell corporations that you are committed and passionate about protecting people and the planet. Here are some ways you can practice conscious consumerism:
 - ❑ 'Fair Trade' products are certified products made in safe working conditions, by workers who make a sustainable wage, and are made with sustainable practices.
 - ❑ 'B-Corp' certified companies are certified by a third party organization that ensures businesses meet standards for social, environmental and economic sustainability. Learn more about B-Corps [here](#).
 - ❑ '1% for the Planet' members are businesses or individuals that promise to donate 1% of their annual sales or earnings to a vetted list of non-profit organizations. To see a list of companies committed to giving back or to learn more about the 1% for the Planet mission see [here](#).
 - ❑ Also, consider buying second hand items to stretch the life of a product.
 - ❑ Or, consider renting items that you may only need once like clothing for a formal event.
 - ❑ If you live in Madison, check out the [Madison Black Chamber of Commerce](#) for a directory on Black businesses in the area.
 - ❑ There are also Wisconsin directories for [Hmong-Owned](#) businesses and [Latinx-owned](#) businesses.

Carbon Footprint

- ❑ Another way to decrease your economic impact is by looking at your carbon footprint.
 - ❑ A carbon footprint is a reflection of how much carbon and other greenhouse gases are emitted due to one's actions.
 - ❑ If you would like to calculate your own carbon footprint, visit the [EPA's calculator](#).
 - ❑ You could also use this calculator to compare your carbon footprint before and during COVID to see how your fossil fuel consumption through energy and transportation changed.

Virtual Work Wellness

Working from home can make it difficult to separate yourself from work and other daily activities when you are physically in the same space. The added screen-time of virtual meetings can also lead you to feel more exhausted. Below you will find some tips to mitigate added work stress from a virtual environment:

- ❑ If possible, try to take small screen-free breaks throughout the day to give your eyes a break (now might be the perfect time to start that book you've been meaning to read!). Try incorporating different stretching routines as it can be difficult to maintain good posture when you're sitting all day.
- ❑ Drink lots of water! This is simple and well-known advice, however, the reason you see it everywhere is because it is effective. So, consider this your reminder to fill up a glass of water and keep hydrated. In general, adults should aim to drink between 4 and 6 cups daily. To learn more click [here](#).
- ❑ Try to create a separate area to serve as your home office. For example, have a specific place where you take all of your virtual meetings. This can provide privacy and now you have a place that you associate being at with being productive.

Body Wellness:

- ❑ Create a home office that supports well-being and increase productivity
 - ❑ Incorporate simple biophilic designs to the office (for example: plants, natural light, ventilation)
 - ❑ To minimize the negative impact of working long hours with a computer, consider using a blue light filter, a bigger screen, ergonomic keyboard and mouse, and taking regular breaks from the computer screen. Also, consider a good office chair with back support to avoid tensing neck, shoulder, and back muscles.

- ❑ Working from home body wellness: check out these videos if you want stretches that are good for your body and mind.
 - ❑ [15 min yoga for a break at the \(home\) office](#)
 - ❑ [6 min yoga at your desk](#)
 - ❑ [19 min lunch break yoga](#)
 - ❑ [3 min yoga for healthy wrists](#)
- ❑ To keep your body and mind right, it is beneficial to step away from your screen and move (stand, stretch, walk)

Accessibility:

- ❑ In the virtual office room, be aware of digital accessibility when conducting online meetings and creating contents. It is best practice to provide an agenda before a meeting and enable closed captioning if possible.
 - ❑ Please see our [Virtual Communications Guide](#) for more information and resources about online accessibility.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to utilize this resource! If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the Green Office team at greenoffice@g-groups.wisc.edu or the UW-Madison Office of Sustainability at info@sustainability.wisc.edu. We are more than happy to help you in your sustainability journey or to connect you with other resources that best fit your needs. Making sustainable choices can seem like a daunting task, but remember that small steps can add up to a large impact.