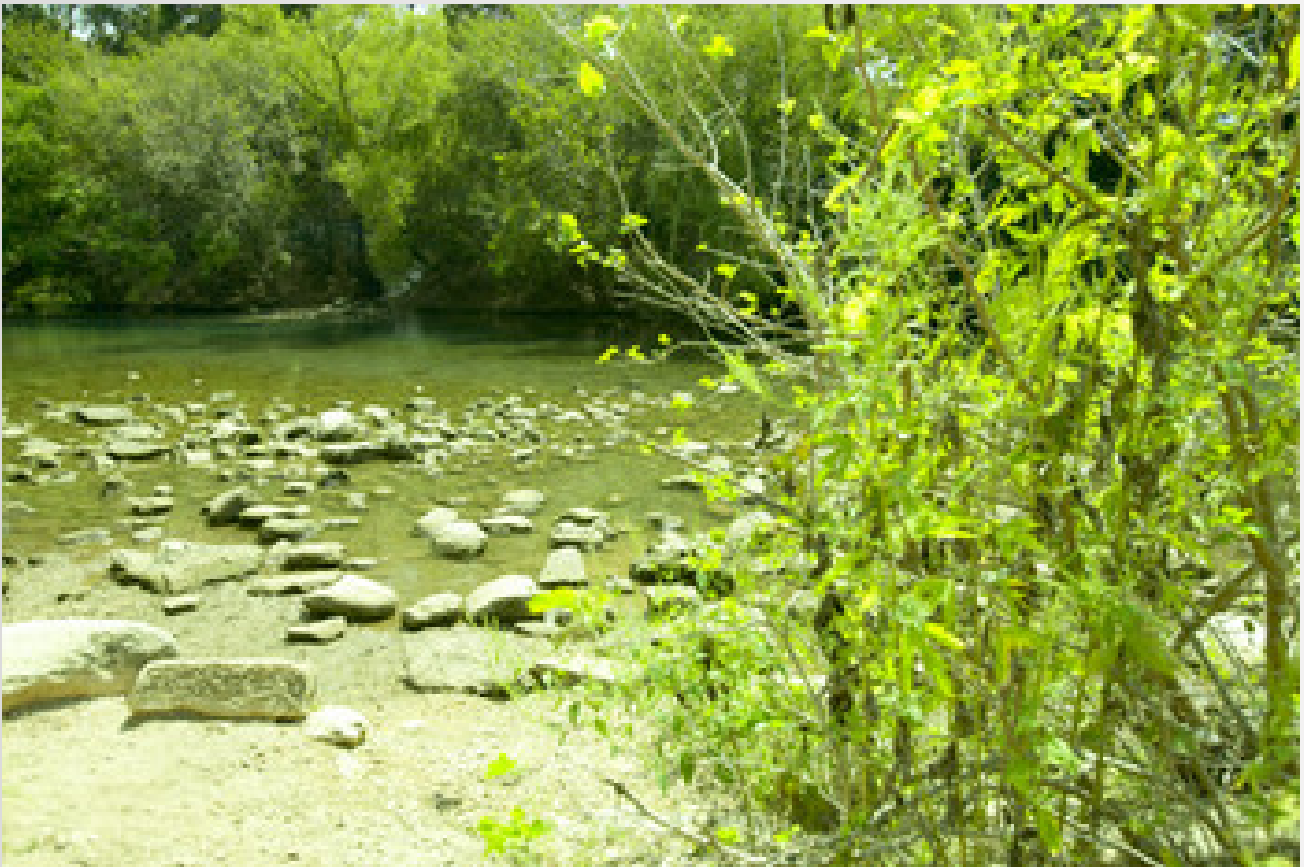


# LIVING GREEN IN 2014

SAVING MONEY AND THE WORLD THE CHEAPSKATES WAY: REDUCING, REUSING, RECYCLING

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# Living Green in 2014

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*Going Green in 2014:*

Saving Money and the World

by

Reducing, Reusing and Recycling

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# Introduction

It's a new year, and many of us want to dispel with the old and usher in the new. Have you made resolutions in the past? Did they last? When you make green New Year resolutions, there may be more incentive to continue in your promises. This is because green resolutions have positive effects that are both immediate and long-term. When you implement some of these green resolutions (or some of your own), you will save money. That's quite motivating in this economy! You will be bolstered by the notion that you are part of a global movement to make a difference. You will also enjoy more time with your family and community, which can be very rewarding. And finally, green resolutions are enhanced by the long-term nature of their positive effects - you know you are making the world a better place for future generations.

There are other ways to set you up for success with your resolutions. Before we get to specific resolution ideas, here are some suggestions for keeping those resolutions all year.

## Involve Others

The more people who know about your resolutions, the more people you have to hold you accountable. Maybe you could make your resolutions at a New Year's party, or with your family. It's only fair for the people you are with to make their own resolutions, too. If you are hosting your own party, make the resolutions part of the festivities. Get a big chalk board or dry erase board and have guests brainstorm about resolution ideas. When everyone has settled on an idea, have each guest write down his or her resolution on a piece of durable cardboard (from your recycling bin of course).

Guests can take these home as-is, or you can provide frames or mats for them to place their resolution somewhere in their home where they will see it. Remember to use recycled paper and cardboard whenever possible. Maybe even used gift wrap from the holidays can be used to make pretty backing for the keepsake resolutions.

To get the resolutions off to a friendly start, have a time set aside for sharing resolutions. There are multiple ways to do this. Here are some ideas:

Use a chalk board or dry erase board rather than paper. Have guests sit in front of it and go up to write their resolutions. Then everyone can discuss it.

In the spirit of the board game "Pictionary" and game shows of the past, you could also have your guests go up to the chalk board and draw their resolutions. The seated guests can guess what it is.

Purchase small frames for party favours. Magnetic frames that go on the refrigerator are good options. Pass out paper that is cut to size to fit inside the frames (go for recycled paper or attractive scrap paper such as used Christmas cards or wrapping). Each guest can write his or her green resolution on the paper and slip it into the frame. You have provided a keepsake, party favour, and resolution reminder all in one.

So what should those eco-friendly resolutions be? What kinds of commitments can you and, if applicable, your party guests make toward a greener new year? Here are some suggestions and ideas for such resolutions.



# Neighbourhood Clean-up Day

Resolve to organize a clean-up day for your neighbourhood or community. Or, if your area already has one, commit to participating. January is actually a good month to begin planning such an event. It gives you plenty of time to get things organized before holding the clean-up at the end of the summer. Don't wait until autumn; clean-ups go much more smoothly if they are held before the rain, bugs and colder weather get serious. If you go with this resolution, here are some things to keep in mind.

Identify what specific area you would like to clean up.

Check with local authorities to make sure the area is permissible. If it's private property, check with the owner. Most property owners would be glad to have their property cleaned up for free - they may even join in the clean-up day.

Section off the area to be cleaned up, and identify what specific tasks need to be done in each area. Write down each task and be ready to assign them to your volunteers.

Organize where you are going to dispose of the rubbish and mess you collect as you clean-up and make sure you have enough cars and trailers to take the rubbish straight to the recycling depot and tip.

Make a day of it. Send out electronic invitations, have snacks and beverages available that are appropriate for the time of day, and make sure everyone has bags, gloves and litter-grabbers.

# Volunteer

Agree to volunteer at least once in the coming year. Ideally, you will resolve to volunteer regularly, such as every month or even each week. You could volunteer at a clean-up day that someone else organizes. You could also volunteer at your local soup kitchen, food pantry or other charitable organization. Nursing homes also welcome volunteers. If you love animals, check with your local vet or the RSPCA. They nearly always need volunteers to walk dogs, clean the enclosures, and help with adoption events. Wherever you choose to give your time, you'll find it's an eco-friendly, community-minded thing to do.

## Start a Recycling Program

Does your workplace lack recycling bins? Do you get frustrated on walks through your neighbourhood because there are no recycling receptacles on curbs, roadsides, and footpaths? Does your school or your child's school not have a recycling program for its copious waste paper? Take it upon yourself to get that done this year. If you start a recycling program at your workplace, make sure you talk to your boss and go through the proper steps. Speak with your local solid waste authorities to head start a neighbourhood recycling scheme. And go through the principal and school council for school recycling programs. Making sure you respect the people in charge gets your recycling project off to a good start.

## **Donate**

Resolve to donate your used items that you no longer really need. Be honest with yourself about the scanner sitting in your basement, the dress you haven't worn in 2 years, the table and bookshelves in the garage that you were going to refinish or paint and so on. Even old eyeglasses can be donated, as well as cell phones and other electronics. Check with local schools, neighbourhood houses and even prisons to see if they will accept electronic donations such as computers and printers. And go through your wardrobe and donate old clothes. Try to get your kids in on this, too, and donate some of their toys. Getting those items back out into circulation means they will be used again, which is so much less wasteful than throwing them out and buying new items.

## **Fine-tune Your Recycling**

If you are making green New Year's resolutions, you are probably already engaged in recycling in your own home. But you can resolve to do it better. Here are some ways to ramp up your own recycling.

Get creative with your recyclables. You can do so many things with bottles, cardboard boxes and tubes, newspaper, and so forth. Let your imagination run.

Use old cereal boxes for gift boxes. Cut them up to use as backings for pictures, to make flashcards, or any craft that requires cardboard.

Plastic bottles can be made into birdfeeders. Cut off the bottoms to make candle holders.

Glass bottles can be used as candle holders as they are, no need to buy vintage candle holders. An inexpensive glass cutter can be purchased and the top of glass bottles cut off and the edges polished to make drinking glasses.

Newspaper can be used to make papier-mâché, fire starters, wrapping paper and to pack items tightly into boxes.

Scrap paper (even junk mail) can be used to make bookmarks, origami and grocery lists. The thin pages of catalogues and magazines are especially good for origami.

Get books from the library or search the Internet for ideas on recyclables. There are whole books and websites dedicated to the creative use of recyclable materials. There are even whole books dedicated to just one recyclable, such as cardboard tubes!

Get organized at home. Make sure your recycling bins are easily reached and clearly marked. They should be categorized according to your local recycling centre's requirements. If floor space is hard to come by, bolt them to doors or walls. Stacked bins also save floor space. If possible, use bins that can be transported to the recycling centre or put out at the curb as they are. This avoids the use of even more "go-between" containers as you haul items to the centre or curb.

## **Commit to Eating Local, Organic, Seasonal Food**

Learn what local produce is available in your area. Look online for various charts and guides to local, seasonal, organic foods. It's a growing movement, so the information is plentiful.

While you're making resolutions on the subject of food, consider your meat-eating habits. Resolve to cut back on meat - that means different things to different people. For example, one vegetarian meal a week might be a big step for you. For someone else, eating meat only once a week would be more their style. Whatever takes you a step in the right direction is valid.

When and if you do eat meat this year, make it free-range and organic if it's poultry or pork, and grass-fed if it's beef. If possible, eat meat that is locally raised on small farms.

## **Resolve to Generate Less Waste in Your Home**

This is a multi-faceted commitment. You don't have to do all of these things, but maybe choose one or two things off of the following list of energy-saving tips to implement this year.

- Turn down the thermostat, especially when you are not home.
- Make sure your attic is properly insulated.
- See that windows and doors are sealed. Use weather stripping if necessary.

# Detoxify Your Home

In the upcoming year, vow to replace all your chemical cleaners with natural ones. You can purchase natural, biodegradable cleaners, or make your own. Chemical-based cleaners to consider removing from around your home include:

- Dish soap
- Laundry soap
- Glass cleaner
- "All-purpose" cleaner (for countertops, tables, and so forth)
- Shampoo (1 tablespoon of baking soda in 1 1/2 cups of warm water makes a cleanser for your hair. A tablespoon of apple cider vinegar in 2 cups of warm water makes an effective conditioning rinse)
- Bath soap (switch to natural, vegetable-based soaps.)
- Dryer sheets or liquid fabric softener (consider dryer balls or other natural softeners.)
- Carpet cleaner
- Powder cleaners or gritty scrubbers (mix 2 cups bicarb soda, 1/2 cup borax, a tablespoon of biodegradable liquid soap, 1-2 cups of water and 10 drops of peppermint essential oil to make a creamy scrub for sinks and tubs.)

- Toilet bowl cleaner (vinegar and bicarb soda cleans toilet bowls very well.)

## **Save Energy around the Home**

This is a biggie. Start with your home's use of electricity. Then move on to other resolutions if you like. Just pick what you think is doable from this list. Here are some things to consider as you resolve to use less electricity this year.

Turn down the temperature of the thermostat in winter and turn it up in the summer. Resolve to use fans and open windows on all but the very hottest days in the summer. Consider augmenting your winter heating with space heaters. If possible, get an insert for your fireplace if you have one and burn wood.

Turn off the lights when you leave a room. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) instead of traditional incandescent light bulbs.

Close vents in rooms that do not get much use during the day. This includes the bathroom and any spare bedrooms. Even your regular bedroom may not see much activity until bedtime; keep the vent closed during the day.

Invest in a pressure cooker to reduce energy. Pressure cookers cook food faster at a low stovetop temperature.

## **Other Ways to Save Energy around Your Home**

Insulate your attic/roof space. So much heat escapes through the roof, because heat rises. Make sure there is a winter "hat" on your home.

Use weather stripping around your doors and windows. This is inexpensive stuff to buy, but it will save a lot of energy and money.

For the bottom of your door, use a beanbag-type "draft dodger" or install a "skirt" on your door. These skirts or flaps are typically less than \$5 and adhere to the bottom of your door. They create a barrier between the door and the floor, reducing drafts. You can also make your own draft dodger by sewing a long tube and filling it with beans or other stuffing. If you don't sew, stuff an old cardboard tube (wrapping paper tubes work well and are generally the right size) with towels or rags and lay it across the bottom of the door. You can leave it as-is or decorate it however you like - maybe leave some of the wrapping paper on it!

Insulate your water pipes. This may seem a little over the top as Australian winters don't often get to below freezing, but the saving is noticeable. The foam sleeves used to insulate water pipes are very inexpensive and easy to install. They keep the hot water in the pipes hotter longer, and the sleeves also prevent freezing.

Wrap your hot water heater in bubble wrap or other insulating material. Your hot water heater uses a lot of energy, and this helps keep the water hot for longer without the heating elements having to be on. Maybe one of your energy upgrades this year could be a solar water heater.

Hang your washing outside when you can. Resolve to air-dry your clothes at least once a week. If the weather is bad or cold, use clotheshorses or just run a length of clothesline in your house and hang up the clothes there. In the winter months, this will greatly improve your home's humidity.



# Appliances

Commit to upgrading at least one appliance this year. You can start saving money now and buy it later in the year if you like. Some ideas include:

- Energy Star stove, refrigerator and microwave
- Energy Star washer and/or dryer (the dryer uses more electricity - you might want to go for upgrading that first)

If money is an issue (and it is for most of us), consider buying a refurbished appliance or one that has a slight visual flaw. Sometimes you can get a good deal on "floor stock" that has been used for display.

## Save Water This Year

Cutting back on water waste is a great New Year's resolution. Here are some things to commit to this year to save water:

Install a rain barrel or a larger water tank. You can use the water to water your garden, lawn, and container plants. Wash your car and hair with it (rain water makes hair very soft). Rain water can also be used to wash your pets (don't give them rain water to drink, however).

Time your showers - 5 minutes should suffice.

Install low-flow aerators on your taps, including the shower. This is cheap and easy to do, but the savings can be significant.

Consider getting a low-flow toilet or upgrading your existing one.

Don't flush the toilet every time you use it. Liquid waste does not have to be flushed away each time. Remember the rhyme “If it’s yellow let it mellow, if it’s brown flush it down”.

## **Green up Your Lawn**

This may be an easy resolution to keep - don't keep a manicured, perfectly-mowed lawn this spring and summer. Instead, let some of the valuable "weeds" and wildflowers grow. This increases diversity and provides sources of food for insects and animals. It may even provide food for you!

## **Start a Garden**

January is a great time to begin planning a garden and ordering seeds. If you are going for flowers, try to plant native species that will benefit local insects and birds. Bees will also appreciate abundant flowers.

A vegetable garden is another way to go green. You can give away your surplus to friends. If a whole vegetable garden seems overwhelming, maybe try growing one thing this year, like tomatoes. You can even grow those in containers. Zucchini and cucumbers are also easy for beginners.

If vegetables aren't possible, try some easy fruit-bearing shrubs and plants. Raspberries are hardy and easy to grow. Strawberries are not too difficult, either and do well in pots and hanging baskets. Blueberries grow well if you are in a high mountain climate.

Growing herbs in a garden or containers is another way to go green in the upcoming year. Many medicinal and culinary herbs do well in pots, or you can cultivate a small piece of ground for your herb garden.

## **Exchange Disposables for Reusables**

From serviettes to water bottles, look around your home and resolve to replace at least half of your disposable items with reusable ones. Some items to consider are:

- Paper serviettes (use cloth serviettes)
- Paper towels (use rags or cloths)
- Plastic water bottles (get a filter for your sink or a water filtering pitcher, and from that fill a reusable water bottle of safe plastic or stainless steel)
- Brown paper bags (replace with reusable lunch boxes or insulated lunch sacks)

## **Borrow Instead of Buy**

This year, see about borrowing things you need rather than buying them, especially if you are only going to be using that item for one project. For example, if you are refurbishing a piece of furniture you bought at an op shop or garage sale, it's probably a one-time deal. See if you can borrow an electric sander and some of the other tools you will need to refinish the piece.

You can trade work with neighbours, too. Maybe your neighbour needs someone to watch his or her pets while he or she goes on holiday. Then that neighbour can help you out by doing yard work or something else you need. Trading work in this old-fashioned way not only saves money and energy, but it forges community connections and fosters friendships.

## **Fix, Don't Throw Away**

Resolve to try to at least salvage items before throwing them out. From appliances to kids' toys to furniture, we are often too quick to throw things away to make room for the latest and the best. If something gets scratched or damaged, see about creative fixes for the problem. Sometimes, even getting a professional to fix something is more economical than throwing it out and buying new.

## **Donate, Don't Throw Away**

Whether it's your old computer, eyeglasses in a prescription you no longer use or clothing you no longer wear, donating used items to your local charity is a great way to start the New Year. Maybe promise you'll clean out a wardrobe and donate anything you haven't worn within the last 2 years. Or perhaps you could resolve to clean out your garage or garden shed and donate unused items.

## **Reduce Your Use of Paper**

For a supposedly paperless society we still use a lot of paper. Make 2014 your year for reducing the amount of paper that not only comes into your home but that goes out too.

Commit to paying at least some of your bills online this year. This avoids the hassle of mailing a payment, and it also saves an envelope, printed bill, stamp, and check - all paper items.

Send e-cards and e-invitations rather than paper ones.

Put a “no junk mail” sticker on the letterbox.

Recycle your newspapers and magazines and read online as much as you can.

Use handkerchiefs instead of tissues.

Use a travel mug instead of paper coffee cups.

## **Transportation**

If you have been driving yourself everywhere in your car, alone, make some changes this year. Carpool at least once a week, and take public transport at least that often. Walk more, ride a bike (it's great exercise too), lower your fuel budget by 20% so you have to make changes.

## **Green Gift-Giving**

When it comes to giving gifts, resolve to give the people on your list items that are used, refurbished or homemade. Used gifts do not have to be shoddy; think antique stores. Antiques have a lot of character and are often very affordable. Table linens, interesting china, collectibles and various odds and ends are plentiful in antique stores. Second-hand stores and op shops are also great places to pick up gifts. And if that isn't your style, make

gifts this year. All kinds of things can be made from recyclables around the home, or you can give the gift of dried flowers or herbs from your garden. Make your own tea blend and give it in pretty containers along with a tea infuser. Sweets and baked goods are also popular homemade gifts. Other ideas for homemade gifts include:

Handmade pillows: you can just sew buttons or a felt cut-out design onto a used pillow for a quick, unique gift.

Candle holders: use decoupage medium to stick pieces of coloured tissue paper to inexpensive, bulk glass holders.

Hand painted glass or china: use paint that is made for ceramics and glass that can be baked in the oven to make it permanent. These types of paints are a good investment; they will last for years. Paint glasses, cups, bowls, and so forth that you pick up at yard sales and flea markets.

Handmade soaps, moisturizers and "misters" (spray scents)

## **Plant a Tree**

Perhaps the simplest of green acts, promising to plant a tree - or plant several - is a great New Year's resolution. Plant species that are native to the area where you are planting.

## **Put Away the Power Tools**

Why not resolve to do more things by hand this year? Rake instead of using a leaf blower; sweep paths rather than use the blower (its good exercise!); invest in a reel mower instead of a petrol- or electric-powered one. Sweep

the floor with a broom to reduce the time and frequency of electric vacuum use.

In the kitchen bring out the grater and put away the food processor. Use a whisk or wooden spoon instead of the mixer. Use a steamer saucepan instead of the electric steamer.

## **Turn It Off**

Consider committing yourself to one night per week where you are not partaking of visual media. Turn off the computer, television and anything with a screen. Spend time with your family and/or outdoors. Read books from the library. You and your family may come to look forward to your night "off."

Another green resolution along these lines is to spend some time each week electricity-free. Act as if there is a power outage.

## **Feed the Birds**

In June, the birds will be glad you chose this resolution! Put out seed in various containers to create a feeding station. A non-freezing water source is also essential, even in an Australian winter. In the spring, consider planting shrubs and plants that birds enjoy for shelter and food. Research the birds in your area and see what sorts of plants and birds are native. Then plant accordingly. This is a very green resolution, because you are contributing to the health of the local ecosystem and habitat. Song birds, butterflies and bees are decreasing in numbers in many places; planting more trees and flowering shrubs will help to bring them back.

## **Support Local Businesses**

If you have a habit of going to the "big box store" or "everything-mart" when you need something, resolve to try to meet that need via local businesses first. From food to clothes to furniture, it's likely that there is a local business selling just what you need. Supporting local business reduces the use of fossil fuels; items do not have to be shipped so far. It also supports your local community.