

# The Climate Crisis

## Here's How YOU Can Help

Loving nature and caring for our planet, Mother Earth, is in my DNA. That's who I am. I grew up in upstate New York where my parents planted and cared for all kinds of native plants and trees, not only for their beauty, but also for their value to sustaining the local wildlife. It was a healthy ecosystem which also included a vast organic vegetable garden.

The early 1970's was a significant time when our country passed three environmental laws — the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. I was proud that our nation was committed to healing the planet from man-made devastation and ensuring sustainability for future generations. It seemed like we were creating a blueprint for a healthy world for all.

Here we are in 2022 and climate change is the single most serious threat we face. We now know the most important thing we can do to address the climate crisis is to drastically reduce our carbon emissions which come from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) to power our heating, cooling, and transportation needs. It is a gigantic energy shift. I haven't lost the hopefulness of the 1970's, but we must act with urgency, NOW, to make a difference!

Here are steps you can take to reduce your carbon emissions:

- Support renewable power sources such as solar and wind power to help us transition away from earth-threatening fossil fuels.
- Make a plan to replace your gasoline-powered vehicle with a hybrid or EV. Hybrid vehicles use both an electric battery and a smaller gasoline tank for fuel. An EV (electric vehicle) relies on battery power only, which is recharged via a plug-in station at your home or at public charging stations.
- Consider using your car less in favor of riding a bicycle, walking, or using public transportation. Fewer cars on the road mean lower carbon emissions.
- Replace your gasoline-powered yard equipment and tools with those using battery power.
- Encourage the creation of efficient public transportation systems in your community.
- Vote for officials who support meaningful climate actions in your community, state, and nationwide.

Some of these action items are lifestyle changes that are not easy to do! But while you begin to make these changes, you can also do something to help remove the carbon from our air.

One of the simplest and effective actions you can take to help Mother Earth is to plant lots of trees and shrubs. Did you know that trees sequester, or capture, carbon? Trees serve as carbon “sinks,” absorbing carbon emissions that cause climate change.

There are other life-giving benefits of trees. Areas where tree canopy is abundant provide shade and reduce outdoor temperatures in the searing heat of summer (lower energy bills), soak up rainwater runoff to prevent flooding, filter and clean our water as it enters rivers and streams, provide habitat and nesting sites for birds and other wildlife, feed the caterpillars needed to grow the baby birds, provide visual beauty and a spiritual place for serenity (priceless).

Here’s how you can help remove carbon from the air:

- Begin in your own back yard, school yard, or faith community spaces.
- Reduce lawns a bit at a time and plant native trees, native shrubs, and colorful pollinator gardens.
- If you live in an apartment and have limited space, like a balcony or patio, plant up pots with native flowers and trees.
- Encourage your community to rethink its green spaces to include native trees, native shrubs, and colorful pollinator gardens.
- Establish a Creation Care Action Team at your place of worship to help develop plans for planting on the faith community grounds or to assist in replanting areas in your community that could use more tree canopy.
- Identify and adopt spaces in your community which may be “heat islands” where native trees, shrubs, or pollinator gardens could be planted.
- If you must take down a tree, replace it by planting two or more new native trees.
- Encourage local governments to adopt replacement tree plans for developers who take down trees and budgets to support a watering plan until the trees are established.

Why are “native” plants and trees important? Native refers to plants that occurred naturally in a particular region or ecosystem before European settlement. They have adapted to soil and climate conditions with other species thriving in their ecosystem. That means native plants need less water and other care than our non-native lawns or

exotic plants. Native plants also support the birds, butterflies, and other wildlife that depend on the native plant ecosystem for survival.

To find plants native to your area and stores which sell them, use the National Wildlife Federation link and enter your zip code: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants>

Read more about the significance of trees from The Nature Conservancy:  
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/build-healthy-cities/cities-stories/benefits-of-trees-forests/>

Now you have a few tools to help the planet. Here's more:

-Read about climate change from the United Nations:  
<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>

-Start talking with people about climate change. Solutions often arise when many people are included in the conversations.

-Listen to what speaks to your heart and work on those actions. You will be most effective there.

Making these lifestyle changes are not convenient, but knowing you are contributing to a solution is empowering. Embracing some of these actions may be among the most important things we do in our lifetimes to save our planet and ourselves.

Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day, said: "When it is asked how much it will cost to protect the environment, one more question should be asked: How much will it cost our civilization if we do not?"

*Denise Freeland*

*Organizer of the Wessynton Tree Project, Member of Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Founder of the EcoVoce Ensemble creating environmental awareness through music performances about nature and ecology, and Producer of Radio Smithsonian featuring Smithsonian scientists and historians sharing the latest news in their disciplines with audiences nationwide.*