



Care for Creation Practical Steps/Ideas

1

Beginner

Here are a few practical and easy ideas to begin living more harmoniously with the rest of God's creation. These beginner tips help build virtue, but don't require too much effort. If you're new to these ideas, don't get overwhelmed. And don't try to do everything at once - it's okay to grow gradually.

Daily Outdoor Time

Spend time outdoors daily. This could be as simple as going for a walk near your house, or it could mean going to the local park or nature center for a hike. Go for a bike ride. Sit and relax. Go fishing. There is something in nature that almost everyone enjoys, and spending time outdoors improves our mental, physical, and emotional health.

Practice meatless Friday

Friday is a day of penance that is meant to be observed in a meaningful way. Just like every Sunday is a mini-Easter, every Friday is a mini-Good Friday. Many Catholics don't know that the Church still asks us to abstain from meat every Friday, not just during lent. This penitential practice is not only good for our souls; it's also good for our common home. The animal agriculture industry requires large amounts of land, food, energy, and water. Abstaining from meat on Fridays is a great way to build virtue and care for our common home.

Conserve Water

According to the World Health Organization, more than 700 million people in the world do not have ready access to clean water. That's more than twice the population of the United States. For some Americans, such as those in the Southwest or in places like Flint, Michigan, the water crisis is not something that is foreign. And yet in America, between 1.6 and 5 gallons of clean water are used every time a toilet is flushed, and most shower heads dispense more than 2 gallons of clean water every minute. In the spirit of solidarity, and in an effort to preserve this precious resource, we are called to conserve water.

Here are a few ideas to help you use less water during your daily routine: Turn off the water while you brush your teeth. Take shorter showers. Don't run the dishwasher or

washing machine until you have a full load. Go to the carwash instead of washing your car at home.

Coffee

America's favorite drink is accompanied by a list of practical things that can be done to live more harmoniously:

1. **Bring Your Own Mug.** Buy your own reusable travel mug (you probably already have one), and take it with you every time you buy coffee. Added bonus: most coffee shops offer discounts when people bring their own mug - sometimes up to 50%!
2. Invest in a reusable filter that fits your home coffee maker.
3. Avoid using coffee stirrers - silverware and reusable straws are a great alternative for mixing your coffee.
4. Buy eco-friendly coffee for your home-brewing needs. The United States's caffeine addiction is responsible for the destruction of forests in some foreign countries. Plantations that grow coffee (also referred to as *black gold*) often cut down large swaths of forest to grow coffee beans. Look for coffee that is organic, shade-grown, and Fair Trade Certified™. Shade-grown coffee promotes the conservation of water, soil, forests, and wildlife habitat. Fair Trade Certified™ ensures that your coffee was grown without the use of child labor, unjust wages, or excessive pesticides.

Avoid Single-Use Items

God's creation is worth more than being used once and thrown away. To help you begin to avoid participating in the Throwaway Culture, here are some easy single-use items to start eliminating from your life. Choosing to make these small decisions builds the virtues necessary to make harder decisions later on down the road (see Matthew 16:10).

1. **Plastic water bottles.** Instead, use your reusable water bottle every day. Fill it up before you leave your house, and bring it with you to restaurants that serve drinks in single-use cups. If you don't trust your tap water, buy a filter for your sink. There are many options for this, such as Brita, PUR, and DuPont.
2. **Plastic spoons, forks, and knives.** Instead, use real silverware and traditional plates that will last for years.
3. **Plastic cups.** Instead, use a glass for around the house, and a thermos or reusable water bottle for around town.
4. **Plastic straws.** In general, straws are not a necessary item; you don't need a straw in order to drink from a cup. However, if you are one of those people who loves drinking out of a straw, there are some good options that don't promote the single-use mindset or create

unnecessary waste: to start, there is the stainless steel straw. This use-at-your-own-risk straw gets the job done, but is unforgiving on teeth when you go to take a drink and miss your mouth... Other, perhaps safer options include silicone-tipped metal straws, silicone straws, reusable plastic straws, glass straws, and bamboo straws.

5. **Plastic bags.** Plastic bags cannot be recycled, and generally cannot be reused. Instead, use reusable bags. The hardest part about this is remembering to keep them in your car.
6. **Plastic wrap.** Saran Wrap provides one of the most convenient ways to store food - and as always, convenience comes at a cost. Plastic wrap can't be recycled, so it will always end up in the landfill. Instead, look into other reusable options such as wax paper, Abeego Wrap, Bee's Wrap, or Khala Cloths.

Eat the leftovers

Many American families have fridges full of leftover food that ends up in the trash. In the spirit of solidarity with poor people all over the world, don't waste food: eat the leftovers.

Understand food expiration labels

There are differences between "sell by," "best by," "use by," and "freeze by." The "best by" date has to do with flavor and quality - it has nothing to do with safety. The "sell by" date informs retailers how long the product can be on their shelves. This ensures that customers still have time to consume products after they buy them. Most products last several days (or several weeks) past the "sell by" date. The "use by" date is the last date that ensures the highest quality of a product. The "freeze by" date indicates when a product should be frozen in order to guarantee high quality. All of these dates are generally assigned conservatively, meaning that you can still consume foods if the date has recently passed. The foods to be most careful with are meat and dairy products.

Adopt a Second-Hand Mindset

Buying used items and extending the life of items you own are two of the most responsible things that you can do for the earth. Avoid 'fast fashion.' Donate or sell items that you are getting rid of, and support local thrift shops when in search of new clothes and household items. A common myth is that secondhand items are dirty, broken, and outdated. On the other hand, the emissions output, waste production, and water usage that takes place during the manufacturing process of new items are usually ignored. When you buy things second-hand, you save money, support the local community, keep things out of the landfill, and save resources.

Play With The Thermostat

We live climate-controlled lives. Most people are addicted to comfort in one way or another. Any easy way to begin using less energy is to lower the thermostat one degree when you have the heat on, and raise the thermostat one degree when you have the air conditioning on. You'll save money, and when it's cold you'll get to try out your new second-hand sweater!

Decrease Technology Time

Use less technology. Many people use technology to mediate their experience with nature - instead, just go into nature and experience it as it is.

2

Intermediate

The tips in this section require a little more effort.

Ride Your Bike

Begin by replacing one or two short drives a week with a bike ride, and work up from there. It's healthier, gives you time to think, and gets you outdoors. Who knows, maybe your commute can also be your exercise every day!

Buy Single Bananas

Grocers tend to throw away bananas that have broken away from the bunch because people are less likely to buy them. Buying single bananas helps prevent food from being wasted.

Ditch the Plastic Storage Containers

Once you've started to eliminate single-use plastics from your life, it's time to start getting rid of other plastics as well. An easy place to start is with plastic storage containers like Tupperware. Consider glass or tempered glass containers for food storage. Another option is wide-mouth Mason jars, which have multiple uses, and are cheaper than sets of glass storage

containers (unless you've adopted the second-hand mindset that we talked about in the 'beginner' section).

No More Disposable Sponges

If you hand-wash dishes, use dish rags that can be washed and reused. Sponges are generally home to harmful bacteria, and they always end up in the trash. Dish rags can be used for much longer, and any bacteria that builds up can be killed in the dryer or by air-drying the rags in the sun.

Bamboo Toothbrush

An easy way to reduce your plastic footprint is to buy a bamboo toothbrush. Traditional plastic toothbrushes are non-biodegradable - this means that they don't decompose. Bamboo toothbrushes are proven to work just as well as their plastic alternatives.

Cloth Napkins & Kitchen Towels

An easy way to reduce paper waste in the kitchen is to purchase cloth napkins and towels for your kitchen. Paper towels and napkins cater to a mindset of convenience and generate unnecessary waste. Cotton or linen napkins are nicer,

impress guests, and have a smaller impact on the environment because they can be used for years and usually do not have to be washed after a single use. Cotton or microfiber kitchen towels reduce paper towel waste and can be used to dry hands, dishes, and spills.

Organic Food

It's more important to have a clean soul than it is to eat clean food - but we must recognize the connection between body and soul, and we are called to care for both. Organic food is food that is grown in accordance with God's natural design. Organic produce comes from fields that are free of fertilizers and pesticides, and organic meat comes from animals who have been fed what God designed them to eat. A general rule to follow is that if the growth and production of a certain food is bad for the earth, it's also bad for you, and vice versa.

Dryer Balls

Buy some wool dryer balls. They shorten dryer time, and can be reused for more than 1,000 loads. Dryer sheets contribute to the throwaway culture and generally can't be used more than once.

Avoid Plastic-Packaged Produce

It seems that even produce can't escape endless plastic packaging. Some fruits and vegetables come pre-packed in plastic, while others are meant to be placed in the plastic produce bags that most stores provide. This plastic waste can be easily avoided by not buying pre-packaged fruits and vegetables, and by bringing a cloth bag from home to carry loose produce in (it doesn't have to be fancy - remember, all it's being used for is to bring the produce from the store to your house).

Mobile Food Kit

Create a mobile food kit to keep in your car. A mobile food kit contains everything you need to avoid producing unnecessary waste whenever you eat in the car or take food to-go from restaurants. This "food kit" looks different for everyone, but some ideas include: a set of silverware, a cloth napkin, a tupperware/glass food storage container, a wide-mouth mason jar, and a reusable straw.

Hygiene/Beauty Products

Lots of products that fill our shower and bathroom shelves are filled with unnatural chemicals that are legally allowed to be in personal care products. Find natural or organic hygiene and

(ladies) beauty products that work for you. This includes things like shampoo, conditioner, makeup, deodorant, etc.

Cooking Oil

Use extra virgin olive oil and virgin coconut oil to satisfy your cooking needs. Canola and Palm oil are less healthy, and are connected with the destruction of rainforest and the unjust treatment of indigenous people in Asia.

3

Advanced

This section introduces some more advanced practical ideas to help you care for creation. Many of these ideas require a little more work on your end - like doing a little research, adopting new shopping habits, and doing things that might seem inconvenient.

Go to the Farmers' Market

Most towns have a local Farmers' Market that is guaranteed to be more fun and less stressful than the supermarket. Added bonus: you know exactly where everything is coming from.

Plant a Garden

Food can't get more fresh, local, tasty, and seasonal than when it comes from your own backyard. Taking care of a garden gets you in touch with the seasons and with the earth, and can also be a lot of fun for the whole family.

Make Your Own Compost

If you do decide to plant a garden, making your own compost can be an effective way to make your garden healthier and ensure that you aren't wasting food and other organic material in your home.

Plant Native Plants

Plant a tree or some other type of plant in your yard - pick one that is native to wherever you live so that it lives for a long time. Trees provide shade from the summer sun and act as a shield against the winter winds. They also absorb greenhouse gases, create oxygen, and increase the aesthetic in your yard!

Support Local Businesses

Buying local products and eating locally grown food has a positive effect on both the environment and the local economy. Did you know that the average fruit or vegetable travels over 1,000 miles from the farm where it was grown to your plate? Even worse, some t-shirts travel up to 20,000 miles during their multi-country journey as they transform from cotton to yarn to fabric to t-shirt and then are transported to the store shelf. By buying local, you are able to reduce the pollution caused by shipping these items around the world and back and prevent other negative environmental and economic impacts.

Eat with the Seasons

Not too many years ago, most people only ate foods that were available locally. Today, our food travels as much as we do. Since the introduction of giant global supermarkets and refrigerated trucks, most of us are accustomed to eating whatever we want, whenever we want. Not only are their health advantages to adopting a diet based on local seasonally available foods, it's also better for the earth. Produce that is grown and sold locally generally contains more nutrients, tastes better, and includes a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.

Eco-Friendly Cleaning Products

The chemicals found in many common household products aren't any better for you than they are for the earth. Look into buying healthy, eco-friendly cleaning products, dish soap, and laundry detergent. While this might require a few extra dollars, it will help you from toxic ingredients and ultimately help you become a healthier person.

Establish an Electronic Curfew

Pick a time each day to turn off electronics. This will help you use less energy and wake up more rested each morning. Using

technology at night suppresses your body's natural release of melatonin. This results in increased alertness when your body should be naturally relaxing and becoming sleepy, and shortens the amount of time spent in REM sleep.

Decrease Phantom Power Use

For most of us, our houses are using energy even when we aren't at home. Unplug small kitchen devices (microwave, coffee maker, etc.) and larger devices like TV's and gaming systems when you leave for vacation or work trips. If this is a habit that works for you, you can work up to unplugging things whenever you're not using them.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle... Refuse?

You've probably heard the phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle." Recently, a fourth term has been added: refuse. Reject the materialistic culture, and don't buy things that you don't need.

Keep Forever in Mind

Finally, try to buy things that are designed to last as long as you are. Many of the products in our consumerist society are designed to break so that you have to buy another one.

Sometimes it's better to spend more upfront and purchase a product that will last longer.
