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Green Living in a Canadian Whiteout

Living with the environment in mind is a progressive journey at the best of times. But in the winter months many people struggle with maintaining green habits and practices. Kermit the Frog said it first, “it’s not easy being green”. And in the throes of a cold and snowy Canadian winter, it is a challenge and an inconvenience at times. But if you keep to some basic practices soon you will find that inconveniences quickly become habits, no matter the weather.

If you feel guilty because you aren’t walking as much and are using your car more to get around town; or if you’ve had to stop backyard composting because your composter is frozen shut; then ramp up some of your other green habits or start a few new ones. Here are some suggestions to help you along.

1. Curb water use and reduce energy used to heat hot water. Wash your clothes in cold water and do only full loads. Invest in an indoor drying rack and hang what you can to dry in your house to limit dryer use. And each time you use your clothes dryer, clean out the lint trap, and use the ‘less dry’ function on the dryer. Often when we used the timed function we set the dryer for too many minutes of drying time, which uses more energy than required, over dries your clothes and is hard on fabric too. Also to reduce water use, limit bathing and reduce showering times by a minute or two. This not only saves water and energy, but also saves your skin! Cold winter temperatures sap moisture from your skin, and long hot showers and baths dry your skin out even more.
2. Stop idling! Don’t use cold temperatures as an excuse to idle your car, use them as an excuse to dress warm. If you drop your children at school or daycare or are picking them up from lessons and programs, don’t idle your car while you wait or run into the building. Idling creates unnecessary pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and puts a dent in your wallet. These emissions also leak into the building you are parked next to and negatively affect indoor air quality. So when you get in the car, dress as if you are playing outside and wear a warm coat, hat and mitts, and dress your children appropriately too so you can safely turn your car off at each stop. Remember to leave one window open a crack to prevent windows from frosting up.
3. Switch to reusable grocery bags. Many grocery and retail stores have started charging for their plastic bags, so why not change your plastic bag habit now and buy 15 reusable shopping bags from your preferred grocery store. Keep them in the trunk of your car so you won’t be caught without a bag if you make an unplanned stop at the grocery store. And if you walk into the mall, get in the habit of taking a reusable bag under your arm so you can decline plastic for all of your purchases.
4. Buy less and buy good quality. The longer you use something means the longer the time until it will need to be replaced – this not only makes environmental sense, it makes economic sense. So think hard before you purchase something: Do I need it? Is it more useless clutter in my home? Will it

end up in the landfill in a few years? And in this time of economic uncertainty, analyzing purchasing decisions is even more important. So when you buy something try to hold to a few key principles, where possible: 1) Buy from a local store and contribute to the local economy; 2) Buy good quality that stands the test of time; 3) Buy items made from renewable resources, recycled products, or natural fibers/ingredients so they are naturally biodegradable; 4) Choose items with less packaging, or packaging that is recyclable; 5) Consider buying second hand if what you need is available.

The world is changing. Now individuals who strive to lower their environmental footprint are less likely to be pigeonholed as 'environmentalists' and more likely to be identified as smart and savvy consumers who are seeking to live a sustainable lifestyle for both environmental and economic reasons.

Enjoy this snowy Canadian winter – stay warm and green!

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