



The Daily Gleaner

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Grow your Family Green

The snow is receding, the days are lengthening, and Spring appears to be at hand. Just as sure as the Earth travels around the sun each year and one season moves into the next, springtime provides us with the annual opportunity for renewal in some key areas of our life – such as getting fit, going green, or both.

But why go it alone? We all know it is much easier and more motivating to get into a regular exercise routine when you have a partner or are part of a likeminded group. Well, the same is true of making and adhering to some new environmental commitments in our lives. In particular, parents with children at home have a world of green opportunity stretching out before them! Call it what you will, but I call it child development and building family commitment and responsibility.

There are many household and lifestyle spring greening actions you can give your kids responsibility for. One of the best stories I've heard is from a parent whose teenager fully introduced composting into the household and takes personal responsibility for it. This included 'disciplining' the parents for purchasing excess food that ends up in the compost: "Mom, I think you are buying too much bread, I've noticed it ending up in the compost every week." This is the same family who many think are not at home in the evening because of their teenager-controlled light reduction program!

On the backyard composting front, if you purchase a new one this Spring, be aware that the twist top composters are more difficult for children to operate than the flip top ones. Get one for each kid and give them alternate weeks to take out the compost; with the end product being rich black earth for your yard and garden! They'll need some 'browns' to get the compost actively decomposing, so raking up dead leaves and grass is a good way to get the yard cleaned up in the process. You will be amazed at how much backyard composting will reduce your weekly curbside waste, and your kids can take all the credit.

Another green chore for your offspring is to get them to run around the house before school to turn out lights, turn down heat, and make sure faucets are not dripping. A household stopwatch can be a valuable motivational tool! And it is never too early to teach kids how to hang clothes on the line or bring them in. Just make sure they have a safe stool or chair, and then all you have to do is let go of some 'quality control'.

Now back to getting fit. Just like a stopwatch, inexpensive pedometers for your family can be very motivating. I know a family who sets a goal to 'walk to' a certain city (e.g. Halifax or Montreal) in a specific timeframe. They let their feet do the walking (to school, to work, walk the dog, etc.) and the pedometers do the rest. Then they reward themselves with a family fun event when they achieve the goal. Of course, the environmental benefit of their increased fitness is reduced vehicle use, gas consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Have some fun with it and get your young 'green police' motivated with this entertaining video on youtube.com – search 'Green Police Audi' (yes, it is a car commercial but you'll love the fun in it just the same).

Perhaps after watching the video your kids will get inspired to dream some big green dreams. If so, make sure they enter the 3rd Annual Green Matters Essay Contest (deadline April 1st), open to students from K to 12 in Fredericton. They may be interested to know that there are cash and school prizes. To find out more go to www.greenmattersfredericton.com.

Being active caretakers of our Earth begins at home, at school, in our neighbourhood, in our city - so there really are no barriers to participation. Reducing humanity's environmental impact is not larger than us; in fact it requires us - just us. The sum of our individual actions always forms a collective to be reckoned with.

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