

GREEN SCENE

For Earth Day, reduce your impact on planet

by Elaine Golds

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Releasing young chum from the Noons Creek Hatchery is an important part of Port Moody Ecological Society's annual Fingerling Festival. *Brian Wormald photo.*

Earth Day, first celebrated on April 22, 1970, is sometimes considered the beginning of the modern environmental movement. Inspired by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, then U.S. senator Gaylord Nelson was deeply disturbed by a massive oil spill in California in 1969. He felt more public awareness about the state of the environment was needed so he worked to host the first successful Earth Day, which saw demonstrations taking place across the U.S. By 1990, Earth Day had gone global, with 200 million people marking the event in 141 countries.

Today, with the impacts of global warming beginning to be felt and dire predictions of what will happen in the future if we don't change our ways, there is an even more compelling need to be raising environmental consciousness, especially among the decision-makers in government who seem loathe to undertake any measures to curb our greenhouse gas emissions.

Canada has won a number of "awards" at global climate conventions for being the most retrograde country when it comes taking action against climate change. It doesn't have to be this way. For example, Sweden, a country which also has a cold northern climate, has been able to reduce greenhouse gas emission to 20% below 1990 levels while achieving an economic growth rate matching Canada's.

If our leaders fail to take action, they can always be voted out of office. In the meantime, there are a number of actions individuals can take to reduce personal greenhouse gas emissions and limit impacts on the planet. For example, reducing driving and airplane travel can make a huge difference as vehicles account for about 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in the Lower Mainland. If you have no other option but to drive a lot, make your next car purchase an electric vehicle or, at least, one that is highly efficient in gas usage.

Take your holidays closer to home. B.C. is a spectacular place. (I must admit, however, that air travel is creating a dilemma for me right now with a recently-retired partner keen to travel the world.)

Whenever possible, take public transit, walk or cycle; exercise is good for your body, too.

Always remember to turn lights off when leaving a room and use energy efficient light bulbs.

When it's sunny, line-dry your laundry. When it's cold, turn down the thermostat and put on a sweater.

Trees still remain the easiest way we have to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, so plant a tree or two in your yard; their shade will keep your house pleasantly cool in our warming summers. You can also support initiatives to plant trees and protect forests, and always purchase toilet tissue made from recycled paper rather than trees.

Apart from transportation, the biggest impact you can have on your greenhouse gas emissions is to make a change in your diet by eating less meat or, better still, becoming a vegetarian. Agriculture is responsible for about 15% of our greenhouse gas emissions and much of this comes from cattle. Consumption of a kilogram of beef is thought to be equivalent to driving a car 160 km. So, at the very least, reduce your beef consumption and switch to chicken. In a world that may soon be faced with the challenge of feeding nine billion people, we may no longer be able to afford the luxury of growing grain crops which are simply fed to animals.

If you can, choose locally-grown, organic products over those that are grown with fossil-fuel-derived pesticides and transported long distances to markets. Organic agriculture also promotes carbon sequestration in the soil.

Try to consume a little less of everything. Do this by staying out of stores and finding more purposeful activities. Take up volunteering, bird-watching or hiking. Enjoy a cup of tea and conversations with friends. Gardening is good for the soul and the soil. When you do shop, always carry a cloth bag.

Earth Day is all about appreciating nature and the many benefits nature bestows on us such as clean air, clean water and the fertile soils in which we grow our food. Now that spring is truly here, the beautiful weather should be tempting all of us outdoors into parks and other pleasant natural places.