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SUMMER 2021

WE LOVE THE OUTSIDE GUIDE

**We are all looking
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and peace.
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nature, the Earth
gives back to us.**



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Inside Out & Outside In

Alisa Gravitz, President/CEO



ALISA GRAVITZ

We are called to assist the Earth, to heal her wounds, and in the process to heal our own. Wangari Maathai, Kenyan activist and winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, used these words to call people outside, to see how caring for the earth makes the streams run clean again.

Starting in the 1970s, Maathai worked with women across Africa to plant over 30 million trees to provide food, fuel, and medicine. She believed that the deeper the connection with nature, the deeper the healing—of ourselves, our communities, and the environment all around us.

So, with summer beckoning us, we celebrate all the ways to get outside. Turn the pages for ideas to heal, enjoy, and take action for a better world—from sustainable foraging in the wild to supporting regenerative agriculture. Learn more about action you can take for environmental justice, creating access to green space in our cities and decolonizing our agriculture systems.

While we take you outside, let me also take you behind the scenes here—since so many of the people we tell you about in this issue are part of the Green America community.

For example, regenerative farmers Seth Watkins and Antoinette Lewis (p. 14), are part of our Soil and Climate Alliance, which brings together food system leaders to collaborate on regenerating soil, restoring the climate, and rebuilding farm prosperity. At a recent (virtual) Alliance meeting, Seth told us about his journey to heal his land and his family on their large farm in rural Iowa, while Antoinette told us about serving her urban, African American community from her small urban farm just outside of Chicago. I was struck by how much their stories had in common across these different places and communities.

Kelsey Duchenaux-Scott, a regenerative rancher and the director of programs at the Intertribal Agriculture Council, an honored ally, shared the story of her work to restore Indigenous farming and food practices (p. 17). Her father, Zach Duchenaux, inspires us with his brilliant financial programs for Native American farmers that could make a difference in farming communities everywhere. And we aren't the only ones recognizing this—the Biden Administration recently appointed him as the Administrator of the Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Administration, making him the first Native American to hold that role.

And then there's the inspiring words of wisdom from our Climate Victory Gardeners (p. 28) on taking care of the soil, on letting go of stress, on listening to nature.

May summer bring you outside in many ways – perhaps to plant a garden or to plant a tree. As Wangari Maathai said, “When we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and the seeds of hope.”

For the future,

Alisa Gravitz, President and CEO





A Civilian Climate Corps to Build a Green Economy

In January, President Biden signed an executive order to create a Civilian Climate Corps (CCC), an initiative to employ Americans in careers around tackling the climate crisis, restoring public lands, and rebuilding public infrastructure. It is inspired by the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New-Deal-era program put in place by Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression that put three million unemployed Americans to work.

Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has put the US in a deep recession that many industries are still struggling to recover from—there are an estimated 9.8 million unemployed Americans as of May 2021, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Congressional Budget Office stated in a February report that the workforce is unlikely to fully recover until 2024.

The CCC could reinvigorate the economy the same way the Civilian

Conservation Corps did in the Great Depression. However, climate activists maintain that the new CCC should differ from the New Deal's version, which developed stolen Indigenous lands as well as applied exclusionary racist and sexist hiring practices.

In March, Biden requested Congress to fund the CCC program with \$10 billion over 10 years as part of the nearly \$3 trillion American Jobs Plan infrastructure bill. However, that amount would only fund about 10-20,000 jobs a year, which is not enough to adequately address the climate crisis. In April, Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced a version of the CCC that would employ 1.5 million workers from historically disenfranchised communities to build sustainable infrastructure projects in clean energy, climate resilience, conservation, and more. It would also provide education and training to

establish long-term careers and stable union jobs.

Contact your representatives using the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 to voice your support for an equitable and just Civilian Climate Corps.

Protests are Being Criminalized Around the World

The conversation around the climate crisis has changed dramatically in recent years with the increase of non-violent protests from environmental and social action groups like Extinction Rebellion, the Sunrise Movement, and Black Lives Matter. However, activists are warning that protesters are being silenced, threatened, and criminalized around the world.

This warning was published in an

open letter in April, signed by 429 scientists and academics from 32 countries and 14 authors from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The letter states that “Those who put their voices and bodies on the line to raise the alarm are being threatened and silenced by the very countries they seek to protect.”

Over 2,000 people who participated in Extinction Rebellion protests in the UK are being taken through the court system in one of the largest crackdowns on protesting in British legal history.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed an anti-riot bill into law in April that increases the power of police to arrest protesters—one of 81 similar bills that have been introduced in 34 states throughout the country after the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. DeSantis called it “the strongest anti-rioting, pro-law enforcement piece of legislation in the country” and it would protect police and private property against rioters.

Under the new law, police could charge anyone involved in a protest with a third-degree felony, up to five years in prison, and the loss of voting rights. People who drive vehicles into protesters on a road, even those who cause injuries, would be granted civil legal immunity and makes blocking a highway a felony offense. It also denies bail to arrested individuals until their first court appearance to prevent people from rejoining protests.

“It captures anybody who is peacefully protesting at a protest that turns violent through no fault of their own,” says Kara Gross, the legislative director at ACLU Florida to the *Orlando Sentinel*. “The whole point of this is to instill fear in Floridians.”

Similar laws have been struck down in other states on First Amendment grounds. In 2019, a federal judge blocked an anti-riot law in South Dakota, and in 2020, a 1968 anti-riot



The Sea grapes (*Caulerpa lentillifera*) is green seaweed that are harvested and consumed fresh from farm. Photo by Arunee Rodloy via Shutterstock.

provision was struck down in Virginia. As of writing, one lawsuit has been filed claiming the Florida anti-riot law violates constitutional rights.

Seaweed as Ocean Pollution Solution

A new study by researchers from UC Santa Barbara proposes cultivating seaweed as a potential strategy for capturing nutrient pollution in marine environments. Nutrient pollution is caused by an excess of nitrogen and phosphorous in water ecosystems, typically in runoff from farms and yards. These nutrients are essential for growing plants, but when they leach into waterways, they result in harmful algal blooms, kill marine life, and worsen water quality.

The researchers located an expanse of 63,000 square kilometers in the Gulf of Mexico suitable for seaweed aquaculture. Over 800 watersheds spanning 32 states carry water to the Gulf, delivering excess nutrients that has resulted in a low-oxygen “dead zone” over 18,000 square kilometers. Cultivating seaweed would produce more oxygen and absorb some of the excess nutrients, potentially alleviating the expansion of the low-oxygen

dead zone. The researchers found that roughly nine percent of US-controlled section of the Gulf could support seaweed aquaculture.

Currently, nutrient pollution is managed through water quality trading programs; regulators set a limit on the amount of pollutants that can be released and then credits can be traded through the market, much like a carbon cap-and-trade system. Water quality trading programs have been criticized for their potential to cause pollution hotspots, since traders can purchase credits instead of meeting pollution requirements. Yet, seaweed aquaculture could work well under such programs, which generally have bipartisan support.

Additionally, seaweed demand is growing in the food, agriculture, and energy sectors in the US. Seaweed products could be used as bio-fuel, fertilizer, animal feed, and in the restaurant industry. The study is the first of several to come from Seaweed Working Group, an interdisciplinary group of researchers investigating and charting the ecosystem services and economic advantages of a seaweed aquaculture industry. The group is examining other potential benefits, such as animal habitats for surrounding fisheries and seaweed’s capacity to act as a carbon sink.



Clothing factory workers in Indonesia, August 2019. Photo by Masruro.

Clothing Companies: Pay Your Workers!

The pandemic has taken a particularly heavy toll on the people who make our clothes worldwide. These are 35 million workers, with an estimated 85 percent being women, who, in the best of times, earn some of the lowest wages in the world, while dealing with toxic chemical exposures, sexual harassment, and unpaid overtime. As demand for clothes plummeted in 2020, many of them lost their jobs. Many workers report skipping meals and struggling to access food for their families as COVID-19's economic effects continue.

Over a year into the pandemic, some laid off workers never received their legally mandated severance or are being forced to accept even lower wages. We need to ensure that workers are not left in such a precarious position going forward. In 2021, Green America joined with over 200 trade unions and NGOs around the world in calling on major

brands and retailers, starting with Amazon, Nike, and Next, to commit to:

- Pay the workers who make their clothes full wages for the duration of the pandemic;
- Make sure workers are never again left penniless if their factory goes bankrupt, by signing onto a negotiated severance guarantee fund; and
- Protect workers' right to organize and bargain collectively.

"Apparel companies have built a business model based on profiting from exploited labor; this must change," says Green America's labor campaigns director Charlotte Tate. "The campaign asks would raise the cost of making a t-shirt by just 10 cents."

Green Americans are responding to the call to #PayYourWorkers, with over 21,000 coalition supporters signing the petition to Amazon, Nike, and Next.

If you haven't taken Green America's action yet, you can do so at: greenamerica.org/payyourworkers.

Financial Stability in a Planetary Emergency

Many of the world's largest banks are heavily invested in fossil fuels, making hundreds of billions of dollars of investments in oil, gas, and coal even after the Paris Climate Accords were signed. To keep global temperature rise to within climate-safe limits (i.e. reach net-zero emissions and keep within the 1.5-degree pathway that the IPCC set out), we need to rapidly shift bank financing from dirty energy to clean energy and climate solutions.

That's the mission of Green America's Climate Safe Lending Network, which works with professionals within banks,

investors, academics, policymakers, and finance experts on both sides of the Atlantic to chart a path for decarbonizing credit. It's a tall order, since in business-as-usual, banks are rewarded in the short term for continuing to finance fossil fuels.

To create the right regulatory environment for banks to shift lending from fossil fuels to climate solutions, the Climate Safe Lending Network is focusing on the role of regulators. In a report issued in April 2021, "Financial Stability in a Planetary Emergency," the authors highlight 10 proposals that regulators could adopt in the next two to three years that tie financial stability to planetary stability.

The proposals would institute systems for accounting for the financial risks of fossil fuel lending and making polluters pay for the risks. Proposals were ranked on the basis of impact on the climate and feasibility to implement. The highest-ranked proposal was to increase the capital charges for loans to fossil fuels and high-carbon assets—a concept which has been picked up in both Europe and the US as an effective driver of bank strategy.

"Bank lending in the next decade will determine the infrastructure and economy that we will have in 2050," says James Vaccaro, Climate Safe Lending Network's executive director. "It's critical that regulation not only addresses how banks keep themselves safe from the world, but also how the world is kept safe from banking."

Our Climate Safe Lending team has been meeting with regulators in the US and Europe on steps to decarbonize lending and will continue its ongoing programs that work directly with bank stakeholders to use their influence to shift bank lending to a pathway of total decarbonization.

Read the report at greenamerica.org/aligning-finance.

Shareholder Votes Needed at Walmart

Investors that own stock in companies directly have a voice in how those companies are run. Every year, resolutions are filed at dozens of US corporations on climate change, labor issues, gender and race issues, and more. When shareholders vote "yes" on these resolutions, it sends a strong message to management that the company needs to take action to address its social or environmental liabilities.

Every year, Green America partners with As You Sow^{GBN}, to highlight the top social and environmental resolutions filed with companies to support with your vote. This year there are important resolutions filed at drug companies (Eli Lilly and Pfizer), big box stores (Home Depot and Lowe's) banks (Citi and Wells Fargo), and many more. If you own shares in these companies, please make sure to vote by the deadline for each company to make sure your voice is heard. See more on page 10.

This year, Green America is calling particular attention to first-ever resolution on refrigerants filed at Walmart. The resolution, co-filed by the Treasurers of Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, asks Walmart to issue a report

on how it plans to limit its impact on climate change by increasing the scale, pace and rigor of its plans to reduce refrigerants leaked from its operations.

Consumer pressure mobilized by Green America's Cool It campaign, including over 100,000 petitions sent to Walmart, got Walmart to take first steps on hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerants last year. The company pledged to transition to "low-impact" refrigerants by 2040, but didn't include details of how Walmart will meet this target. Twenty years is too long to wait when the climate crisis is intensifying every year.

"We need Walmart, as America's largest grocery store chain, to phase out HFCs as fast as possible," says Green America's climate campaigns director Beth Porter. "Other grocery chains, like Aldi and Target, are already making big progress on this issue, but even though HFCs make up almost half of Walmart's direct emissions, the company is not taking action in its stores to move off these climate super pollutants."

To support the shareholder resolution, Green America partnered with Environmental Investigation Agency to write an investor brief, highlighting the risks of Walmart's lack of action for the company and its shareholders.

Read about the resolution and brief at greenamerica.org/walmart-shareholders.



REAL GREEN LIVING

CHOOSE GREEN, NOT THAT: NATURAL SKINCARE FOR SUMMER

When you're out in the garden or park this summer, skip the toxic chemicals—choose natural skincare options instead.

By Sytonia Reid

For those who have spent the past year staying safe at home, the chance to get outside is more alluring than ever. While we continue to practice COVID-19 precautions even as vaccinations roll out, the good news is you can get out and stay safe at the same time. We put together this list of natural sunscreen, bug spray, and hand sanitizer to help prepare for play days in the sun that draw near. For more skin-safe, green products for this summer, head to [GreenPages.org](https://www.greenpages.org).



GREEN: The greenest option is to forgo chemicals altogether if you can. The organic bug spray from Brittanie's Thyme{GBN} (\$10) is made with white vinegar and a blend of essential oils. It repels over 50 species of mosquitoes and other insects.

NOT THAT: Though the EPA does not warn of any major threats DEET poses to health, the ingredient is linked to skin irritation when left on for too long, according to the National Pesticides Information Center. It has also been tested in studies that found toxic effects from ingestion or skin application with >30 percent concentrations of DEET as the active ingredient. Cyfluthrin and permethrin are other chemicals commonly found in bug sprays and have been linked to neurotoxicity according to the National Library of Medicine. Aerosol versions release compressed gases and volatile organic compounds that can be avoided by buying a spritz version.





◀ **GREEN:** All Good{GBN} Sport Sunscreen Lotion (\$13) contains zinc oxide, a mineral that cannot be absorbed into the skin, reflects UV rays, and is not associated with coral bleaching. Because it is not absorbed into skin, it is considered a physical barrier form of sun protection, a true sun "block," rather than a chemical barrier, which is more common today.

NOT THAT: Some conventional chemical sunscreens contain toxic ingredients that are proven to adversely affect human and environmental health. For example, oxybenzone is a common ingredient found in 40 percent of sunscreens according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and is also linked to estrogen disruption and cause skin irritation. ▶



▶ **GREEN:** Max Green Alchemy's{GBN} hand sanitizer spray (\$16) is 80 percent alcohol-based antiseptic with glycerin, hydrogen peroxide, and purified water—a formula approved by the World Health Organization (WHO).



▶ **NOT THAT:** Hand sanitizers made with harsh chemicals like fragrance can cause skin irritation and may contain retinyl palmitate which is associated with cancer risks and reproductive toxicity. Bath and Body Works hand sanitizer products received the lowest scores on the EWG's 2020 Skin Deep database for these reasons.

REAL GREEN INVESTING



How to Support Anti-Racist Corporate Policies

Stock market information for Johnson & Johnson on February 21, 2021. Photo from Shutterstock.

Companies are promising to do right by people of color. In turning those promises into action, shareholders have a big part to play.

by Meaghan McElroy

The increased national attention to racial justice movements following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020 sparked a flurry of pledges from companies promising to do better on racial justice issues. Now, shareholders are increasingly asking for reports on how racism affects company proceedings—and making sure last year’s pledges weren’t empty promises.

When a person owns stock directly in a company, rather than through a mutual fund, they have specific shareholder rights. Shareholders are entitled to vote on issues brought up at a company’s annual meeting, or they can submit resolutions to propose issues to vote on. Over the past few decades, groups like union pension funds, endowments held by universities, religious organizations,

nonprofits, foundations, and other socially responsible investing groups have become more involved in putting together and filing resolutions.

According to the 2021 Proxy Preview report (proxypreview.org), 46 shareholder resolutions have been filed in the 2021 proxy season asking companies to address a human rights issue in their operations. Of those 46 proposals, 18 of them are new resolutions asking for reports on how racism affects a company’s operations and how they plan to address these problems.

Changing Company Cultures

Olivia Knight, the racial justice initiative manager for As You Sow {GBN}, an organization that educates and advocates on shareholder issues and that files resolutions, says that resolutions have been

filed to make sure that companies are following up on their promises for racial justice measures. It has filed resolutions with four companies on this matter.

“These companies did come out last summer and make all of these very broad promises, all these sweeping statements about how equitable and transparent they are, and how they want to do better on issues of racial justice,” Knight says. “Honestly, most of them have not been following up with their promises.”

Resolutions are making a variety of requests to ensure that companies are keeping their promises. As You Sow filed resolutions with Charles Schwab, Monster Beverage, Abbott Laboratories, and Foot Locker to ask each company to prepare racial equity audits to analyze each company’s “adverse impacts

on nonwhite stakeholders and communities of color,” according to the text of the resolutions.

Knight says that, simply put, the resolutions are asking companies to report what measures they have taken to make their operations more racially equitable and to disclose data around hiring, promotion, and retention rates with regards to employee demographic data.

“We’re hoping to see more education in these companies around anti-racism and around building a more equitable framework, but to do so, you really need to start off with disclosure and transparency,” Knight says.

Addressing Long-Term Problems

Trillium Asset Management{GBN} has filed two resolutions with Johnson & Johnson, one of which asks for a racial equity audit. Johnson & Johnson’s influence in pharmaceuticals and consumer health, combined with the racial disparity that is already present in healthcare, is the driving force behind this resolution, according to Susan Baker, the director of shareholder advocacy for Trillium Asset Management.

There is also the hope that, after this proxy season, racial justice resolutions will continue.

Ivy Jack, the head of equity research for NorthStar Asset Management{GBN}, has been working in the field of socially responsible investing for about five years; before that, she worked on traditional Wall Street. The issues of race and diversity in the workplace aren’t new issues—but she does hope that the current public interest in the issue is sustained.

“At NorthStar, we believe that diverse representation is just the first step. Ultimately, companies need to understand how systemic racism shows up in everyday work culture,” Jack says. “This is a huge undertaking, akin to running a marathon; interestingly, some corporations have signed up to run this marathon without really understanding what’s required.”

So far, Amazon, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, and Johnson & Johnson have all appealed to the Securities and Exchange Commission to have resolutions filed by shareholders omitted, saying that the proposals were either too vague or

asking for initiatives that have already been put in place. The SEC has so far disagreed with these arguments.

Out of the 46 racial equity resolutions filed this year, there has been one vote, five withdrawals, and 14 outstanding Securities and Exchange Commission challenges as of mid-February.

What Companies *Should* Do

Many Green Americans will be wondering—“how can you tell if a company is doing enough? What does a truly antiracist company look like? How do we want companies to react to these shareholder resolutions?”



Some corporate reports have teeth, but some don’t—we know they’re PR pieces. The same will go for racial justice reporting.

—Fran Teplitz, Green America



These are crucial questions about real change and shareholders can play a role in getting the answers. Fran Teplitz, Green America’s executive co-director for business, investing, and policy, explains that to start, transparency is often the goal.

“Over the decades in the green movement, we went from no sustainability reporting to tons of it, but that doesn’t mean there’s more sustainability at every company,” Teplitz says. “Some corporate reports have teeth, but some

don’t—we know they’re PR pieces. The same will go for racial justice reporting.”

She also points out that the wording of the resolutions is broad—while some may ask for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data, others (like those in this article) ask for racial justice impacts or reports on racism within the companies.

“The immediate benchmark in the resolutions isn’t to end racism, it’s to show us data, reports and plans that can help lead to fundamental change,” Teplitz says. “Shareholder action is an important form of pressure and signaling of what needs to change in society, and often works best when it reflects broader social movement, as we are seeing today for racial justice.”

If You Own Stocks

Vote your proxies: Investors can expect to see these resolutions reflected on their proxy statements in the coming year at companies where resolutions have been filed. Companies may see the benefit to making requested changes or developing reports, even if only a small percent of shareholders vote in support. Check if companies where you own stock have social or environmental resolutions on the ballot at greenamerica.org/shareholder-resolutions-vote.

Call your mutual funds: Individuals with their money in mutual funds can call fund managers or check online to see how these funds vote on sustainable investing resolutions. Most mutual funds vote as directed by corporate management, which too often opposes social and environmental resolutions. It is therefore important to contact your mutual fund company to say how you want it to vote.

Keep up the momentum: Jack says that, while it’s important to recognize the good that can come from these resolutions, it’s even more important to give credit to the activists and communities that first started pushing for change.

“Corporations are taking a stand because they’re being pushed,” Jack says. “Change happens at the margins, but oftentimes, the people who get credited with the change are the people in power.” 🌱

WE LOVE THE OUTSIDE GUIDE



We're all yearning to get outside. After a year indoors, the sun coming out as hundreds of millions American receive COVID-19 vaccines holds promise of reuniting with loved ones and feels unbelievably hopeful. We are getting outside, too.

In the past year, gardening became a national pastime. Green America saw Climate Victory Gardens swell to 9,170 across the country—which is no wonder, since gardeners spent 42 percent more time in the dirt last year, according to a November survey from Axios. National Parks Service reported that 15 parks set visitation records in 2020 and hiking and nature walking soothed our souls in state and local parks too.

Being outside, whether that's sitting on a bench in a public park or foraging for wild edibles in the forest, has healing power. Year after year, studies show that

being around nature in any form can improve mental health and even physical health by lowering blood pressure and stress hormones. This summer, we want to celebrate everyone embracing that healing for themselves and for the Earth.

We can start by getting personal—there are so many ways we can learn more about the Earth and take care of it better, without going very far past our front doors. If you have a yard, start by checking if there's anything you can do to make it work better for the earth—swap out elements that might be climate hazards in “5 Steps to a More Sustainable Backyard” (p. 22).

If you've started to think about starting or expanding gardening but have felt overwhelmed. Every journey begins with one step—you can get inspired by reading what gardeners, farmers, and foragers wish they knew when they started (p. 28). Maybe you've tried gardening, or even just letting your lawn get wild, and gotten pushback from a homeowners' association or your neighbors. Readers ask us about this from time to time so we got answers from two seriously impressive Climate Victory Gardeners who fought for their gardens, in “Lawn vs. Garden: Stand Up to Your HOA for a Healthier Yard” (p. 24).

Not all of us can afford or want our own green space to care for, but we can all appreciate a park picnic or stroll in the shade. For urban populations, a necessary escape to a park may not be right down the street, especially in Black and Brown communities. Environmental justice advocates are working to bring parks to parts of cities that need them most in “Access to Green Space is an Environmental Justice Issue” (p. 20).

People in urban areas and rural ones have both turned to foraging edibles in nature. The practice has a foundation that goes deep in human history to the first gatherers, all the way to today. Modern foragers are picking up the practice thanks to experts like the ones in “Forage to Fork: Eat Local with Wild Foods” (p. 26).

Growing food can be the most gratifying connection with the Earth, when something starts from seed, grows

out of the dirt, and ends up nourishing ourselves and our families. Toxic, synthetic pesticides and fertilizers became popular for their ability to increase yields and shrink losses, but at a cost to the health of the soil and the organisms who come in contact with the chemicals. Farmers in “The Toxic Problem with Pesticides and Fertilizers” (p. 14) turned to regenerative practices and found their soil, crops, animals, and selves were happier because of it.

Regenerative agriculture has gained popularity in recent years, but its roots are very old. The practices farmers are taking on to mitigate the climate crisis are the same that Indigenous growers have been using for millennia to steward the Earth. In “Native Growers Decolonize Regenerative Agriculture” (p. 17), Native American growers from across Turtle Island (North America) share their perspectives on what regenerative means to them and where they hope the movement will go, and how they are working towards food sovereignty for Native peoples in their own communities.

What ties these stories together is that what's natural is healing—as people move closer to respecting and restoring natural ecosystems, the health of the people, plants, and planet improves. What's healthy isn't always what's easy, but Climate Victory Gardener Aja Yasir has had her share of fighting for what's green (see p. 24) and the fight was worth it. When she goes to her garden, she feels empowered and works toward healing.

“I [can] go into my garden. I could look at all these flowers. I can be amongst all this fruit, all these vegetables. I can just touch the soil, I can gather rainwater, and I just felt so at peace.”

Let's join Aja in creating that healing and finding that peace for ourselves and for the Earth. 🌱

By Eleanor Greene

Opposite page: Illustrator Yunyi Dai was inspired by regeneration practices to portray the landscape as a phoenix being reborn. Yunyi Dai for Green America.





THE TOXIC PROBLEM WITH PESTICIDES & FERTILIZERS

It seems like putting something on the ground to help plants grow would be a good thing. But synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are actually detrimental to the Earth and human health.

by *Mary Meade*

In 2018, Dewayne Johnson, a groundskeeper for a school district in the San Francisco Bay Area, filed a lawsuit against Monsanto, claiming that exposure to the common weed killer caused him to develop non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The jury ruled in Johnson's favor in the first of many trials filed against Monsanto for failing to inform the public of carcinogens in Roundup, costing the company more than \$11 billion in settlements.

These lawsuits are a symptom of the bigger controversies of conventional agriculture, which relies on synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Compared to natural alternatives, synthetic versions are often formulated in a lab to be super-potent concentrations. Glyphosate, the synthetic weed- and pest-killing component in Roundup, is credited as the cause of cancer in Monsanto's costly litigations.

Synthetic herbicides are one of several chemical additives sprayed on crop fields, gardens, and green public spaces across the nation. These chemicals are used in tandem with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides—and such strong concoctions have considerable consequences for the environment and human health.

The Toxic Reality of Synthetics

Nitrogen is a foundational nutrient that plants need and is the most abundant element in Earth's atmosphere. Yet nitrogen in the soil, known

as nitrate, has become scarce because of industrial agriculture practices. Replenishing nitrate was a constant challenge for farmers until the invention of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer at the turn of the 20th century, which provides nutrients to the plants almost immediately.

Seth Watkins of Pinhook Farms raises beef cattle in Iowa using regenerative farming practices. He spent years as an industrial livestock farmer before transitioning to methods more in sync with nature.

"When you're trying to increase yield, nitrogen is pretty cheap insurance, and there's no question when you dump it on, you're going to raise a bunch of crop," Watkins says. "I think that the problem with it is that it makes us almost overlook the negative. What we don't take into consideration is the number of impacts it has."

Those negative impacts have considerable consequences for environmental and human health. Nitrate-rich fertilizers that leach into groundwater result in nutrient pollution that cause massive algal growth in waterways. Once the algae die, its decomposition consumes oxygen, thereby suffocating and killing other

aquatic life. Additionally, synthetic fertilizers release nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that is 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Nitrate that finds its way into human drinking water by leaching into groundwater or running off into reservoirs can have significant negative health effects.

Watkins understands this firsthand. His son Spencer was born in 2001 with a rare syndrome called 49XY, which results in cognitive and physical disabilities. Though 49XY is not heritable, when Watkins and his wife went through genetic testing, they were told that Spencer's birth defect may have been a fluke. When their daughter Tatum was born a few years later with an abdominal wall defect, doctors knew something wasn't right.

"The team was reviewing our records, and they're saying, 'you guys have done everything right, you're a healthy family,'" Watkins recalls. "This shouldn't happen twice. The nurse just looked at me, and said, 'Mr. Watkins, we see that you farm for a living—where do you get your water?'"

Watkins' drinking water came from a public municipality. He found out that it contained elevated levels of nitrate, which is related to health complications in babies. The water also contained atrazine, a chemical component in herbicide, which can cause developmental defects in fetuses when the mother is exposed. Watkins didn't use these chemicals on his own farm, but they were in his water, nonetheless.

"I can't change the farming practices that led to this, but now we know better," says Watkins. "Tatum's doing great, and Spencer and I are going to get a chicken tractor next week. He's going to raise some chickens and sell some eggs, and Tatum is an incredibly talented young woman that wants to study medicine."

Regenerating Relationships with the Earth

In the 1940s, the organic food movement started as a counter to the increased reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. At the turn of the 21st century, a regenerative movement started in response to the development of genetically engineered crops designed to work in tandem with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Antoinette Lewis grows and sells produce from her suburban home in the Chicago suburbs, which she calls Lewis Farms, and educates others about the benefits of farming. She felt a pull to start growing her own food when she learned about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the problems with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Initially, Lewis would regrow kitchen scraps like lettuce and spring onions, and participated in her apartment's community garden and at her mother's house. Eventually she saved up to buy a home on 1.8 acres to be able to farm at the scale she wanted.

Lewis did not have a background in agriculture when she started, and as an African American person, she had her Southern



Seth Watkins with his children Spencer and Tatum, on their family farm, in 2010. Photo by Christy Watkins.

grandparents in her ear telling her not to return to farming. Yet as an Army veteran, Lewis found gardening therapeutic and preferred growing food she knew was genetically unaltered and free of synthetics.

Lewis and Watkins are both part of Green America's Soil and Climate Alliance, a network that brings together farmers, food companies, retailers, soil scientists, NGOs, policy experts, and investors to scale equitable solutions for soil health, biodiversity, water, climate, and rural prosperity.

"Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are poisoning the planet and our bodies," Lewis says. "They work together in tearing things down in a way where you need the other one."

Lewis incorporates organic and regenerative practices into her farm, with her focus on managing the land without harsh chemicals to prioritize the health of microbes in the soil. She also works with local nonprofits to introduce people to growing food with limited space. Lewis believes that one of the solutions to climate change is having more urban farmers in the general population.

“The nurse just looked at me and said, ‘Mr. Watkins, we see that you farm for a living—where do you get your water?’”

—Seth Watkins, Pinhook Farms



Antoinette Lewis tending to her chickens in her backyard farm in Chicago, Illinois.

“It takes a change in mindset, especially from my demographic being from up north with grandparents who feel like they escaped the South,” Lewis says. “That created a mentality where farming isn’t really an option—and I’m trying to change that. Because while there’s a palpable connection to slavery that a lot of Black people have relayed to me, you don’t have to relate it to that.”

Growing Healthy Roots

Studies show that gardening improves mental health by reducing depression and anxiety alongside improving physical health by consuming nutritious produce and exercising. Lewis and Watkins agree that when home gardeners avoid synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, they are growing food that is healthier for people and the environment.

Synthetic fertilizers and weed and pest killers are found in more places than the food system—they are sold in stores to be sprayed on lawns, school grounds, and more—but we can take back control by growing our own food without toxic chemicals or purchasing foods that are certified organic.

Creating a home garden without synthetics and with regenerative practices such as keeping the soil covered, cultivating diverse plants, and using compost as fertilizer can combat climate change. Called Climate Victory Gardens, these gardens prioritize soil health and the essential microbes within sequester carbon to cool the atmosphere.

Watkins is working to bring the regenerative solutions to scale on Pinhook Farms. Against industry norms, Watkins timed his farm to function in tune with the seasons for the betterment of the cows and the health of the land.

“I just wanted to do right by the cows,” Watkins says. “My productivity actually increased, and my costs greatly decreased. That’s the beauty of letting mother nature take the lead. Mother knows best.” 🌱

Natural pest control for your garden



Despite best efforts to cultivate a balanced ecosystem, pests are a natural part of the environment and may find their way into your garden or organic, regenerative farm. Organic pesticides derived from plants and bacteria can help in such situations. Be mindful of pollinators and know which moths, beetles, and wasps are beneficial.

Neem oil is made from the neem tree and its active ingredient, azadirachtin, makes insects lose interest in reproducing. It works gradually, so spray when you spot the first adult bug. Most neem oil is sold as a concentrate, so read the label for dilution measurements and safety instructions.

Insecticidal soaps contain fatty acids that dehydrate soft-bodied bugs like caterpillars and aphids. Insecticidal soaps only kill pests when sprayed directly. Avoid spraying beneficial critters like bees and spiders (which may be hunting down some of your pests). You can make your own with a tablespoon of dishwashing soap in a quart of water or you can purchase a concentrate from a gardening store.

Diatomaceous earth is a fine dust made from the fossils of tiny aquatic organisms whose skeletons were made of naturally occurring silica. Use on plant leaves or powder a layer around the base of your plants to discourage slugs. The dust works best in dry conditions, so be sure to reapply after a rain. Be sure to read the label for safety instructions.

Find more tips on [Green America.org](https://www.greenamerica.org) when you search “Climate Victory Gardens,” where you can learn all about organic fertilizers and other natural pesticides.

NATIVE GROWERS DECOLONIZE REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



Native American producers have long been left out of the agricultural conversation. Now that regenerative agriculture is trending, these growers show that caring for full ecosystems isn't a new idea, it's deeply traditional.

Photo from Kelsey Ducheneaux-Scott
of DX Beef.

by *Eleanor Greene*

Jessika Greendeer says the key to farming is getting along with her coworkers. She's not talking about people. She means the animals, the living soils, and the plants that coexist on the land she works. As a farmer, she doesn't see herself as in charge of the land, just as a steward of it. The way she manages her farm—regenerative agriculture—is gaining popularity but for Greendeer and other Native Americans, its practices are traditional.

Greendeer, who is a Ho-Chunk Nation tribal member from Baraboo, Wisconsin, currently works as a farm manager and seed-keeper on the Native-led Dream of Wild Health Farm in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and grows in her micro-farm in Hudson, Wisconsin, named “Little Sky's Farm.” Though Greendeer uses the word “regenerative” when describing her farming practices, she and other Native growers are using it as a buzzword while practicing

farming from an Indigenous perspective. That perspective comes from a history of not using heavy equipment and the humans in the system recognize they are stewards, not controllers, of the land.

The regenerative agriculture movement has been growing quickly for about a decade as scientists realized soil health is critical to climate change mitigation. But climate change has been largely perpetuated by the wasteful emissions of white Westerners, with the US historically creating the most emissions in the world, despite making up only about four percent of the world's population.

Decolonizing Means Including All Beings

In the same way white people came to North America and seized control of the land, forcing Indigenous people to assimilate or die, colonization also affected agriculture practices.

The opposite of regenerative

agriculture is conventional agriculture—which involves fields of only one crop, spraying pesticides, and separating animals into crowded feed lots. These conditions became the norm with the industrialization of agriculture—which happened in waves, the first when humankind shifted from hunter-gatherers to agricultural society, the second during the mechanization of agriculture, and the third during the “green revolution” of the 1950s and 60s when chemical pesticides and fertilizers were introduced.

Every revolution, including the fourth and current wave of regenerative agriculture, has left out Indigenous communities, according to A-dae Romero-Briones (Cochiti/Kiowa), the director of programs for Native agriculture and food systems at the First Nations Development Institute.

Decolonizing regenerative agriculture means recognizing and restoring Indigenous food practices, which focus



As part of a 2012 project, seniors at Sipaulovi Development Corporation in Arizona restore the terrace gardens and a spring, which had been used in the past by Hopi family members, for planting squash, mint, tobacco, and other herbs on the mesa. Photo from Sipaulovi Development Corporation and First Nations Development Institute.

on the health of the entire ecosystem, instead of using regenerative practices to mitigate negative outcomes of conventional agriculture.

“We’re expecting so much of our producers, but we’re forgetting that our producers are a part of the system. Nature shows us that the more stress an animal or a being experiences in a system, the less ability they have to fight off those external pressures whether it be disease, or in this case when we’re talking about humans; depression, suicide, foreclosure, or bankruptcy,” says Kelsey Ducheneaux-Scott (Itazipco Lakota of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe), who is a regenerative rancher and the director of programs at the Intertribal Agriculture Council. “These are all things that most producers in our industry currently are facing and that’s an indication of the system not being healthy.”

Romero-Briones explains that agriculture was used to suppress and “civilize” Native people, because Indigenous people had their own way of stewarding their lands. These practices included stewarding bison for Native Nations

in the Great Plains, and planting seeds along commonly traveled routes for other nomadic tribes, to be able to harvest upon returning months or years later. There is also a great reliance and reverence for versatile and hardy species of corn, beans, and squash. But at some point, the systems blended, which she explains as “syncretism,” an amalgamation of two different things that become more than the sum of their parts.

“There’s so many Indigenous people who are both practicing Indigenous identity and agriculture, but creating these whole new ways of existing, growing, and producing foods. That’s really quite dynamic,” says Romero-Briones. “And that’s the idea behind whatever I’m hoping ‘regenerative agriculture’ will become.”

Food Sovereignty and the Pandemic

Sovereignty means having your own power to govern—Native Americans have been advocating for sovereignty of their own people since it was taken from them by colonists and the US government.

Food sovereignty is another goal of many Native Americans. While Native

people fed themselves for thousands of years before the US was colonized, because of genocide, displacement, and continued lack of financial support, Native foodways have been suppressed. This means Native people living on reservations or in urban communities too often experience food insecurity or food apartheid.

True regenerative farming enhances food sovereignty because it gives back to the same communities it uses resources from, according to Ducheneaux-Scott, who owns DX Beef, located on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota.

At the start of the US COVID-19 outbreak, even when there had been no reported cases of COVID-19 in South Dakota, grocery store shelves on the reservation were already empty because of reliance on grocery store goods being shipped largely from the coasts. Other grocers, off the reservation, still had food on the shelves at that time, Ducheneaux-Scott says.

For food sovereignty to exist on the reservation in South Dakota, Ducheneaux-Scott says, it will take

farmers who want to educate as well as customers who want to learn, or who already know, the benefits of buying local regenerative food.

“I can exploit that I have a Native-owned, female-owned food business and I can be exporting 100 percent of my product to the cities and be making three times what current beef prices locally are, because there’s demand from that informed consumer group,” says Ducheneaux-Scott. “But is that really being regenerative and giving back to my local community whose resources I am using in order to derive this profit or is it exploiting it just the same as our conventional row crop production?”

For that reason, she sells 90 percent of DX Beef products on the reservation, but says customers are often forced to buy what has the longest shelf life because access to local and fresh foods is limited.

“I feel like as a regenerative operator, I’m contributing to enhancing access to local healthy, quality food to the humans of the system that I work to serve.”

Building Resources from the Ground, Up

In Portland, Oregon, Roberta Eaglehorse-Ortiz (Oglala Lakota/Yomba Shoshone) saw an offer to use a small outdoor space owned by the Portland Food Bank and developed the idea of a garden teeming with traditional and medicinal plants. Though she had no gardening experience, as a doula and lactation specialist who had directed the Oregon Inter-Tribal Breastfeeding Coalition, she was eager to build resources for Indigenous families in the area. Portland is home to over 50,000 Native American people due to Oregon reservation lands being “terminated” by

Congress in the 1950s.

Since its start in 2015, the Wombyn’s Wellness Garden is thriving with a wide variety of different plants and with the help of community volunteers and students from Oregon State University. Breastfeeding support for Native communities is also related to the movement for food sovereignty.

“Our first food is breast milk for all human babies. That’s what we need,” says Eaglehorse-Ortiz. “We also have to nourish the families to grow healthy babies to have healthy recovery. And what better foods is that then traditional foods, Native foods? So that’s what guided me there. And then the seeds just started coming.”

Passing on Seeds and Practices

Seeds are particularly important to Indigenous people as a symbol of life. A-dae Romero-Briones explains that seeds are revered—because entire civilizations depended on a single crop, like corn, for many Native nations on the North and South American continents.

In commercial agriculture, seeds are a commodity that can be manipulated, and they have greater value when made infertile, she explains.

“[Commercial seed] has the most value when it’s infertile and can be completely controlled by man,” says Romero-Briones. “That should be the prime example of the two different perspectives on food. You can’t commodify this [seed], the giver of life. But in [industrial] agriculture, everything is commodified, which sucks the life out of the whole system.”

Eaglehorse-Ortiz and Greendeer also have inherited or been gifted seeds, and those seeds serve as a connection to past generations.

“What motivates me is not only reconnecting with my ancestral seeds, but also helping other people do the same. Everything that I do grow, I’ve been gifted, or I have a relationship with it,” says Greendeer. “It’s not just a winter squash, it’s this tribal squash with this type of story. It’s not just an item, but it’s more, it’s something that we can all get deeply connected to.”

Apply Decolonizing to Your Life:

Learn about whose land you’re on. If you’re a US reader, most likely you’re on the land of one or more tribes who stewarded the soil, plants, and animals before they were violently pushed out by colonists and settlers. Learn about whose land you’re on at native-land.ca.

Support Native growers. After identifying whose land you’re on, find Native communities that are likely still there tending to the Earth. Support local Indigenous growers by seeking them out or buying from them at the farmer’s market. You can also find a national map of Native producers in the American Indian Foods Program at Indianag.org/americanindianfoods.

Learn about your own food history. Greendeer emphasizes that with so many commercial crops, we are all likely to be removed from the seeds that nourished our ancestors. She recommends doing some research on what your grandmother’s grandmother may have eaten and to find those seeds and grow them. “Make sure future generations can be nourished by the same food,” she says. 🌱

“You can’t commodify this [seed],



the giver of life. But in [industrial] agriculture, everything is commodified, which sucks the life out of the whole system.



—A-dae Romero-Briones, First Nations Development Institute



Runners at Buffalo Baou Park in Houston, Texas. From City Parks Alliance.

Being in nature is a health activity, even if it's just sitting on a park bench. Urban populations, especially Black and Brown communities, don't often get equal access to green space. These organizations are working to change that.

by Sytonia Reid

Whether it is a beach, mountain trail, campsite, or local park, being in a natural space has the power to nurture human health. Spending at least 120 minutes per week in nature can lower risks for cardiovascular disease, mental distress, and myopia among children according to an article published in the 2019 issue of *Nature*. Simply, living near green spaces reduces the risk for mortality, according to a 2019 *Lancet Planetary Health* study. But for those who live in urban and industrialized environments, finding these spaces isn't easy.

Parks for Environmental Justice

Parks serving majority low-income households are four times more crowded than parks in wealthy neighborhoods, according to a 2020 study by the Trust for Public Land. Communities of color are three times as likely to live in nature-deprived areas as white Americans, according to a 2020 study by the Center for American Progress and Hispanic Access Foundation. In pursuit of greater access to urban green spaces, groups across the country are leading transformative green space projects that will allow everyone to reap the benefits of being in nature.

"The environmental justice, systemic racism, and socioeconomic issues that come with this work are so big that the way we feel that we're most effective is to work with one community group at a time and address those pressing needs," says Cindy Chang, executive director of the nonprofit organization Groundwork Denver.

Founded in 2002, the organization specializes in neighborhood-based projects that improve Denver's urban environment. One of its most recent is the creation of Platte Farm Open Space. Completed in August 2020, the 5.5 acre park is a brownfield-to-green space remediation project featuring native plants, walking trails, and playgrounds. The park

is located in the city's northern Globeville neighborhood—an area where 24 percent of families were living in poverty in 2017 according to the Piton Foundation.

A brownfield is defined by the EPA as a previously developed land not currently in use that may potentially be contaminated. In this case, in the 1880s, the mining company Asarco moved in and opened a plant which contaminated the land with chemicals. In 1983, Colorado filed a Natural Resources Damages suit under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as the federal Superfund law, that designates sites that are hazardous to human and environmental health. Now that it has been remediated, replete with clean soil, prairie grass, and a retention pond to help with frequent flooding in the area, the park is promoting both human and environmental health.

Healthy Parks, Healthier People

Platte Farm Open Space is a project promoting both sustainability and justice as nature begins to thrive again in the area.

The same is true for the Browns Mill Food Forest in Atlanta; with seven acres of land, it boasts the largest food forest in the country. Food forests are gardens designed to mimic nature by including a wide variety of edible plants that grow in a layered design. Through partnerships with the city of Atlanta and nonprofits the Conservation Fund and Trees Atlanta, the project started in 2016 in pursuit of the mayor office's goal of having 85 percent of residents being within a half mile of fresh affordable food by 2022. Browns Mill, the neighborhood where the park is located is USDA-identified food desert and its surrounding forest was at risk for development.

To meet community needs, Atlanta's office of resilience, which handles environmental issues, and Conservation Fund created a steering committee which included residents, high school volunteers, and local organizations like Trees Atlanta which provides community education through park tours and Park Pride, which leads the community garden within the food forest.

"One of the biggest concerns we heard from the community was about displacement. At the earliest phase, we wanted to acknowledge the possibility that having something like a food forest could raise rents, or increase property values," says Shelby Buso, chief sustainability officer for Atlanta's office of resilience. "By selecting a site where most of the houses were owner occupied, the

hope was that if property values rise, those that actually live there would receive that benefit."

The land where Browns Mill Food Forest is located was once a family farm and with Atlanta being aptly called the "city in the forest," organizers are intentionally using the space for both growing food and local environmental education.

"It's wonderful to have a site that has a connection to an agrarian legacy, and we want to continue it. The forest is a seven-layer permaculture design that includes a canopy level, mushrooms, shrubs, vines, perennial plants, herbs, soil amendments, and many layers within each level," says J. Olu Baiyewu, urban agriculture director at Atlanta's office of resilience.

The park also has an on-site composting system for gardeners and a community collection program where families can bring fresh food scraps to be made into compost that further enriches Browns Mill Food Forest.

An Urban Parks Movement

With such projects, cities like Denver and Atlanta are helping citizens create new connections to the natural world, but there's still much work to be done around the country. Almost 80 percent Americans live in urban areas, according to City Park Alliance (CPA), and the nonprofit is advocating for the growth of more parks to meet the health needs of both communities and the planet.

CPA aims to harness the power of public officials, research institutions, design professionals, and recreational experts by creating a network of civic leaders working together to create park access, explains Catherine Nagel, CPA's executive director. During the summer, the organization will host a virtual conference and workshop series focusing on collaborative models for park creation.

"Parks and recreation departments have stepped into the role of emergency service providers using green spaces for hospital sites, vaccinations, and food distribution," says Nagel. "When it comes to the planet, the potential for urban parks to fight climate change is enormous because they provide flexible and multi-functional infrastructure that cities can rely on." 🌻



Community residents, City of Denver staff, and Groundwork Denver staff view the native plants and wildflowers during the opening of Platte Farm Open Space. Photo by Groundwork Denver.

5 STEPS TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE BACKYARD

1.

2.

Avoid lurking climate hazards in your backyard with these Earth-friendly swaps.

by Sytonia Reid and Beth Porter

Backyards are patches of green space that have the potential to promote clean air, carbon sequestration, and pollinator havens but only when we abstain from unsustainable products and practices. As yours beckons to you this summer, watch out for these everyday climate culprits.

Lawnmowers

Lawnmowers are mini tractors packing powerful polluting potential. A gas-powered lawn mower emits 11 times more pollution in an hour than driving a new car for the same amount of time, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). According to reports from the EPA, running a gas-powered mower for just an hour would be equal to driving a Toyota Camry for five hours. For a leaf blower, an hour of use is equal to a 15-hour drive. Both of these machines run on dirty two-stroke engines.

Swap it:

Whenever possible, it's best to use people-power over mechanization because of greenhouse gas emissions, and this goes for other machines like aerators, weed whackers, leaf blowers, and the like. Try a low-maintenance push mower for around \$100. Plug in electric mowers can be found for under \$200—or share the cost and use of a more decked-out style with a neighbor.

An even better option is to let your backyard grow into a Climate Victory Garden or meadow (see p. 25).

Peat

Peat is partially decomposed organic plant material clumped together in spongy form. Peat is the earliest stage of coal formation and when burned it releases energy, which technically makes it a fossil fuel. Peat is a common component in store-bought soil mixes, for use in gardens and with potted plants.

“Peat bogs are one of the largest carbon sinks we have on this planet and harvesting peat moss from century-old bogs releases carbon back into the atmosphere. Recapturing that released carbon, even with re-seeding efforts, won't happen in our lifetime,” says Charis Smith, Green America's climate and agriculture networks program manager.

Swap it:

While some gardeners and indoor plant enthusiasts to struggle to quit peat because of how well it absorbs water, Smith notes that peat does not do anything critical for plant life. Instead, use alternatives like coconut coir and recycled paper fibers. Compost also builds soil organic matter which vastly improves soil's ability to retain water.



Fire Pits

You can have a cozy fire to gather around without the problems of burning wood, which releases carbon into atmosphere and it can have severely negative health effects. Burning wood releases pollution in the forms of CO₂, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and toxic volatile organic compounds. Older adults, and those with heart or lung diseases can be particularly sensitive to that pollution, according to the EPA.

The EPA recommends natural gas or propane burners, but those are not truly green, as the drilling and infrastructure to extract them creates methane emissions, which is 28 times more potent of a greenhouse gas than CO₂.

Swap it:

Educated consumers have increased demand for eco-friendly burning options, which have led to alternatives made from compressed sawdust waste, compressed cardboard, and even coffee grounds. These options are dryer than wood and burn hotter and longer. They are greener than burning a log in that they are reducing landfill waste, but the wood-based options still emit the same air pollutants as burning a log. Be sure to check that the alternative fuel you buy is recommended for fire pits, as some are only recommended for wood-burning or multi-fuel stoves.

Artificial Grass

For anyone with friends or family still clinging to their artificial turf, this is the summer to help them go green. Sellers of artificial turf often laud its eco-benefits like the elimination of over-watering, fertilizers, and pesticides, but these would not be in a healthy yard anyway. Turfs are made out of plastic like polypropylene, which is non-biodegradable. That means, at the end of its “life,” turf will end up in a landfill. Turf may seem desirable for people in hot climates, but it can get hot, too—30-50 degrees hotter than air temperature, so it might feel more like hot concrete or beach sand under your toes. Artificial grass used at the 2015 Women’s World Cup in Canada was even measured to be too hot for athletic use, even with shoes.

Artificial turfs rob insects and pollinators of a natural ecosystem and perhaps most concerning, there is no room for soil underneath layers of plastic to breathe. That means there are few, if any, living insects, bacteria, and other organisms maintaining the soil’s structure, meaning there’s also no carbon sequestration. As long as people, animals, and other living things need to eat, soil will be the foundation for our livelihood, and it must be protected.

Swap it:

See baby steps, big steps, and giant steps you can take to create a more sustainable outdoor space at your home on p. 25.

Impermeable Surfaces

Impervious surfaces like sidewalks, patios, paved roads, rooftops, and even some very compacted soils can pose serious problems for the environment. These tough surfaces prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground and slowly flowing into local waterways. Instead, water flows rapidly into storm drains and streams, often bringing sediment and pollutants like fertilizers and oil with it into aquatic ecosystems. Heavier storms, which are increasing as a result of the climate crisis, can cause dangerous levels of flooding in communities with poor stormwater management.

Flooding and erosion of stream banks can damage hundreds of miles of habitat. A sudden increase in volume mixed with pollutants can drive down water quality and displace organisms in the water. The EPA reports that polluted runoff is one of the greatest threats to clean water across the country.

Swap it:

Use porous surfaces like gravel and explore installing a rain garden or rain barrel to help stormwater flow. If you’re doing a patio or driveway, ask your contractor about permeable pavers, which have a similar look to paved surfaces but let water reach the ground below. Also, make sure your gutter spouts are directed to grass or gravel instead of impervious surfaces.



LAWN VS. GARDEN:

HOW TO STAND UP TO YOUR HOA FOR A HEALTHIER YARD

When your HOA or neighborhood puts pressure on residents to have lawns, you can become an advocate for your climate victory garden.

by *Eleanor Greene*

Nicky Schauder and her children working on the garden in their front yard in Herndon, Virginia. Photo by Danielle Lussier Photography.

The American dream is a house with a white picket fence and between that fence and the house lies a lush green lawn for playing fetch with the dog and seeing baby's first steps.

Except today's American dream is green—and having a large expanse of lawn just isn't. Across the country, people are realizing that a traditional grass lawn isn't sustainable. The EPA estimates that 9 billion gallons of water a day are used on lawns and 17 million gallons of gas are used in mowers every year; these practices simply aren't sustainable.

But not everyone is ready to make the switch. Green America frequently fields letters from our members about what to do if your HOA or neighborhood pushes back when you make the switch to a greener green space. We talked to Climate Victory Gardeners who had first-hand experience.

Gary, Indiana v. Aja Yasir

In 2019, Climate Victory Gardener Aja Yasir made headlines when she converted her Gary, Indiana, front yard into a small victory garden. For some, this simply appeared as a new homeowner

moving into their property, but to Yasir's city it was seen as a visual burden. She was cited for having woodchips on her yard as part of converting the lawn to a small regenerative farm. Her house had sat vacant for years before she purchased it and she was doing her best to renew the property.

"I have no problem with my neighbor complaining because they didn't know what was going on. They're not a gardener, they don't do urban farming," Yasir says. "But for me, for a government to come against people who are growing food, trying to restore the environment and the soil and water, and the pollinator habitats—for a government to come against that, is criminal."

Yasir's case was in legal limbo for six months in 2019. It finally settled out of court in October 2019 and she was free to garden, with some restrictions agreed upon in the settlement, in 2020.

Then the world shut down. Yasir, whose garden is called "A Rose for Yaminah" in honor of her daughter who died in 2016, uses her garden for grief and anxiety relief. The pandemic also created its own level of grief and

anxiety, so she was glad to be allowed to garden freely again.

"I could go into my garden. I could look at all these flowers. I can be amongst all this fruit, all this these vegetables. I can just touch the soil, I can gather rainwater, and I just felt so at peace," Yasir says. "And that's actually what I was looking for."

HOA v. The Schauders

Nicky Schauder owns Permaculture Gardens{GBN} with her husband in Sterling, Virginia. There they have a garden in the front- and backyard of their townhouse, where the family of eight has lived for 15 years. Schauder says about every year she gets a letter from her Homeowners' Association (HOA) saying that some part of her front garden is not allowed—be it vegetables, fruited vines, or moss. It can be incredibly frustrating, she says.

She recommends keeping communication lines open between you and your HOA and cultivating relationships with neighbors who support you.

She wrote a letter to her HOA [available on her website at growmyownfood.com/hoa-bans-

vegetable-gardens] explaining why a garden was good for her family and the community, citing many neighbors who interacted with it and supported it. She also recommends and hosts classes on “edible landscaping,” which means gardening with subtle plants that look more like ornamental landscaping.

Yasir agrees that disguising her garden as an ornamental one has been the tactic that ultimately worked. She recommends flowering herbs and edible flowers, like hibiscus, artichokes, berry bushes, turmeric, and multi-colored tomato varieties.

Both Schauder and Yasir are gardeners who were loyal to their gardens and were able to leverage support from community members to be able to have the food to feed their families.

“If you find yourself in the middle of that fight, if you have the energy, because self-care is number one, please keep fighting because this is very serious work. Gardeners are very serious workers,” Yasir says. “Like Ron Finley has said, this is not a hobby. This is real work, so just keep up the fight.”

[Editor’s note: See Ron Finley talk more about gardening in a video at greenamerica.org/cvg]

Join the Movement, Step by Step

If you’re not ready to fully jump into a life without somewhere green to put your feet, that’s ok. Here are some steps to take that probably won’t cause a stir.

Baby Steps:

Grow a freedom lawn: Stop using pesticides or fertilizers on your lawn and see what grows. What sticks will likely be more suited to the precipitation and climate in your region.

Mow only where you need: Mow a walking path or an area around lawn furniture, but is there a place you mow but don’t go? Let nature thrive there or do an intentional planting there.

Swap your mower: Are you still mowing with a dirty gas-powered mower? Their two-stroke engines contribute an alarming amount to air pollution, as well as noise pollution in your neighborhood. See p. 22 for more.



Aja Yasir checking on her plants in her garden in Gary, Indiana. Photo by Aja’s son, Heru.

Big Steps:

Plant a tree: Trees give more bang for your climate buck, as it lives longer, sequesters carbon for longer, and provides more habitat for birds and insects.

“You always start with one plant. And if you can plant a tree, that’s the most powerful thing you can do,” Heather McCargo, founder and executive director of The Wild Seed Project, says. “Then you can put a native ground cover underneath it.”

Swap your ground cover: Once you have a tree in the ground, it’s still just a tree surrounded by grass. Consider swapping ground cover for part of your yard to further reduce the mowable section. Search the web for “native ground cover” and your state to find species that will thrive in your climate, will attract native pollinators, and are not invasive. Be patient, as gardeners say about groundcover plants, “the first year they sleep, the second year they

creep, and the third year they leap.”

Giant steps:

Plant a climate victory garden in part of your yard. See steps for beginners and expert gardeners at greenamerica.org/cvg.

Make it a meadow: The Wild Seed Project promotes turning your lawn into a native wildflower meadow but McCargo says it’s not as easy as growing food or a tree.

The hottest months of the year (when you’re most likely reading this) would be a great time to lay black plastic over your yard to kill grass and be able to have a clean slate next growing season, McCargo says. Or if you’re planning a garden next season, smother that part of the lawn with cardboard and mulch now. Read more about those methods at wildseedproject.net/return-of-the-meadow. 🌱

Forage to Fork: Eat Local with Wild Foods

Foraging for food in nature is an ancient concept that lives on in the 21st century. Today's foragers share their knowledge through social media and hands-on trainings.

by Mary Meade

As the last of the snow thaws in western Michigan, cherry trees herald the return of spring with a bold display of pink and white blossoms. Some see this spectacle as a unique photo opportunity, but Gabrielle Cerberville sees a seasonal vegan treat.

Cerberville is a graduate student at Western Michigan University on the weekdays and a forager on the weekends. Foraging is the process of finding, identifying, and collecting edible flora and other food resources in the wild. It requires a proficiency in recognizing plant species to determine what discoveries are suitable to eat and what are inedible.

Foraging Together While Apart

Cerberville is one of several foragers that have grown a community on TikTok, where she shares quick videos about hunting morels, brewing lemonade from sumac berries, and making ramp salt. In one of her videos, she picks a handful of petals from pink cherry blossoms and turns them into a traditional Japanese candy called kohakuto, taking viewers with her from harvesting, to cooking, and eating.

Cerberville started the account under the username @chaoticforager in the spring of 2020 and has since grown a following of 270 thousand and growing. Initially, the account acted as a fun video journal, but soon followers started asking about how to find wild food themselves.

"I think foraging connects you to a place and time in a way that few other things do," says Cerberville. "I wanted other people to experience the joy of walking outside and being surrounded by familiar plant and fungal friends. I also think that the foraging community often looks very white and very male, and as a queer Latina woman I wanted to show more representation."

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the



Linda Black Elk teaching a foraging class in September 2019.
Photo by Jaida Grey Eagle.

UN Food and Agriculture Organization warned that protectionist measures by national governments could lead to food shortages worldwide. While many people turned to gardening to supplement their food supply and keep busy during the first rounds of lockdown, some turned to wild food. In a July 2020 *Civil Eats* survey, ten foraging educators and advocates observed between a 25 percent and 500 percent increase in traffic to their websites and classes.

The newfound excitement for foraging is a reason for celebration as more people reconnect with their natural environment. And as more people venture outdoors, harvesting sustainably must be emphasized to avoid overextraction.

Connecting with the Earth

Linda Black Elk is a lifelong forager and teaches foraging and other lessons in food as the food sovereignty coordinator at the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota. Her experience is informed by learnings from her grandmother, a descendant of several Indigenous tribes in the eastern US, her mother, whose central and east Asian perspectives have taught her about plants as medicine, and her husband and children from the Cheyenne River Reservation and the Standing Rock Reservation. Harvesting sustainably is important to Black Elk because Indigenous peoples have a deep and storied relationship with the land.

“It’s not just a fun hobby to us. This is literally our life,” says Black Elk. “This is the stuff that sustains us and has sustained our ancestors. We look at this stuff as the food that feeds us spiritually as well as physically. So, if people are going to go out there, all we ask is that they do it in a respectful way.”

Black Elk says that before anyone gets started in foraging, they should build a relationship with the natural world. She uses stinging nettles as an analogy for maintaining friendships with other people.

“You have to harvest them in a way that is respectful, otherwise they’re going to sting you pretty badly,” she says. “Once you start thinking of plants as your relatives, as your friends and your allies, you really gain a new respect for them, and it just wouldn’t occur to you to overharvest.”

Black Elk recommends learning only five plants at first and learning them well enough to identify by season. Otherwise, newbie foragers can overwhelm themselves and make mistakes that could hurt themselves and the plants.

Yet, foraging is more than just finding delicious things to eat. Casual foragers can learn the survival skills to handle persistent issues like food insecurity in the US. Cerberville started foraging more often during college when money was tight and the Black Elk family gets up to 40 to 50 percent of their food from wild sources, gardening and by trading with others.

Black Elk is most excited for potential foragers to build a stronger relationship with the natural world. Understanding the interconnectedness of plants, animals, and humans is a large part of the practice.

“My grandmother said to me once that you’re not home if you don’t know the plants,” says Black Elk. “Getting to know them and really feeling at home, feeling connected to a place, is really important.” ☀



Gabrielle Cerberville forages in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Photo by Rudy Colantonio.

HOW TO FORAGE SUSTAINABLY

- **Abundance does not equal sustainability.** Just because there is a lot of something, does not mean it should be gathered. It is best to pick a little so that the plant can repopulate next year. A rule of thumb is to harvest no more than 25 percent, but it is often better to do much less—as more foragers and animals eat from the same plant, the less likely it is for the plant to come back next year.
- **Know what dish you are preparing** before foraging. Having this information beforehand will prevent accidental overharvesting or gathering the wrong parts of the plant.
- **Collaborate with foraging friends.** Sharing and trading with others reduces waste and the likelihood of overharvesting from the same foraging spots.
- **Study which invasive plants are edible.** Invasive plants can be picked in abundance because they have no trouble repopulating and often choke out native plant species.
- **Study the plants you intend to forage**—understand how they repopulate, the purpose of each part of the plant in its lifecycle and in your recipes, and its natural history. The deeper your knowledge, the less likely you will be to gather more than you intended.



WHAT I WISH I KNEW AS A BEGINNER GARDENER

Yasir Allah, Aja Yasir's husband (p. 24), sits in front of their house and climate victory garden in Gary, Indiana. Photo by Aja Yasir.

Starting a garden can seem like a daunting prospect, but like anything, you start with just one step. We asked Climate Victory Gardeners to share what they wish they knew when they started to inspire your journey—their answers are surprisingly simple.

On Taking Care of Soil:

"It's all about the soil, not just the soil, but the life in the soil. So we're always cultivating the life in the soil because **there's an ecosystem below ground that supports the ecosystem above ground.**"

—Nicky Schauder, Permaculture Gardens {GBN}

"I wish I had known that **keeping the soil covered** with dead stuff, especially tree leaves or grass clippings, **would feed the earthworms** who would drag the material underground to feed the myriad other soil creatures: mites, bacteria, fungi, and more. My organic layer was only four inches deep when I started. Now, 28 years later, it's more than a foot deep!"

—Ah-li Monahan, Climate Victory Gardener

"I wish I would have known that the whole city was built on sand. The city of Gary is built on the sand. **I wish I would have known what I was dealing with** before."

—Aja Yasir, Climate Victory Gardener

"I wish I had understood **just how important good soil is!** For the last two years, 80 percent of my garden budget is being spent on compost, soil conditioner, beneficial nematodes, etc. It's making ALL the difference!"

—Holly Chesley Annibale, Climate Victory Gardener

On Listening to Nature:

"I started gardening a while back, so I only learned about the **need to preserve heirloom vegetables** and **plant native plants over the years.** It would have saved me from false starts if I had known that at the beginning."

—Chuck Quigley, Climate Victory Gardener

"I wish I'd known how important it is to **track the sun in your garden spot at different times of the year,** not just in the day one plants the garden. Also, gauge how the trees grow around your garden area. I had a perfect spot for my greenhouse. Five years later, it's in the shadow of my neighbors' growing trees."

—Kim Kundi Arellano, Climate Victory Gardener

"I wish I would have **taken the personal limitation** of [having or not having] a green thumb **out of the equation.** Food is incredibly easy to grow. And you just have to be patient. The seeds know what it needs to do without us who over-complicate things."

—Jessika Greendeer, Little Sky's Farm

On Letting Go of Stress:

"I wish I knew **how therapeutic it was.** It was surprisingly relieving to be able to work outside and look up at the sun and down at the green grass or the green vegetables that are growing and to touch dirt. It was really good for me mental health-wise."

—Antoinette Lewis, Lewis Farms

"**Have faith in the process.** Just plant the seed, give it some water and sun, and watch it grow and see what happens. And then correct yourself the next year."

—Linda Black Elk, ethnobotanist



GREEN ECONOMY NEWS

THE LATEST FROM OUR GREEN BUSINESS NETWORK*

GreenBusinessNetwork.org + Find green products and services at GreenPages.org

GREEN BUSINESS NETWORK CREATES NEW CERTIFICATION FOR HEMP/CBD BUSINESSES

We are excited to announce a new certification that will fill a void when it comes to validating social and environmental claims in a newly popular sector—businesses with hemp-derived CBD (cannabidiol) products.

Chances are that you have seen a big increase in CBD products at your local drug store, health food store, online shops, or even at cafes. These products include topicals, tinctures, and edibles that are increasingly being used to address a wide range of ailments, such as arthritis, bug bites, sore muscles, chronic pain, skin conditions, and more. More research is needed to better understand the health-related role of hemp-CBD products, especially as more and more consumers turn to CBD products for relief.

The business certification has a range of criteria that address issues such as the hemp cultivation practices used, including those that promote soil health; product packaging; employment practices; consumer education; and the business' transparency when it comes to its commitment to supporting social and environmental issues.

The new Green Business Network® certification applies to businesses that are legally compliant, i.e., they are licensed in accordance with federal, state, and local requirements. In accordance with the Federal Food, Drug & Cosmetics Act, this certification does not address products that contain more than 0.3 percent THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol), a psychoactive component of cannabis.

"We researched best practices, consulted with industry experts, and identified appropriate requirements for



Various CBD products on the market today. Photo by Kimberly Boyles via Shutterstock.

small to mid-sized businesses within this industry," says Megan Stansell, the certification manager for the Green Business Network. "We're pleased to provide hemp/CBD businesses and their customers the benchmarks and seal of approval for being a truly green, sustainable business."

For decades, our green business certification has identified leaders in the green economy, whose ways of doing business are grounded in strong social and environmental commitments. Our certification covers 37 sectors and

focuses on small companies and eco-entrepreneurs. Find businesses awarded our certification at GreenPages.org and align your purchasing, banking, and investing with your support for social justice and environmental sustainability.

For more information on all our certification standards visit greenamerica.org/gbn/green-business-certification/green-business-standards.

To find certified green products and service providers in your neighborhood and online, visit GreenPages.org.

The Cost of the Economy

As we witness the COVID-19 disaster play out in India and other countries in Africa, the Middle East, and South America, so many people around the world are still woefully under-vaccinated. We know what has to be done—ramping up vaccine manufacturing, including waiving vaccine patents, and getting oxygen supplies to people right now. Putting profits over people is the real barrier and that toxic mindset must be dismantled.

It's the same problem that we have created in the climate crisis, economies being favored over people's lives. While the climate crisis threatens people who live in hot regions, in low-lying regions, people who live in polluted regions, women, and people of color, economies are often favored over the safety of those humans.

When addressing the United Nations in 2019, Greta Thunberg said "We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth." Researchers and scientists agree with this compelling teen activist. Environmentalist and author Bill McKibben suggests in his book *Deep Economy*, that instead of just pursuing "growth" as an economic ideal, we have to create local prosperity, with cities, suburbs, and regions to generate more of their own energy and produce more of their own food, for the good of the people and planet.

This approach is underscored by some of the stories told in this issue—for example Kelsey Ducheneaux-Scott of DX Ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, spoke of the importance of selling the beef she produces in the same community where the cattle is raised.

The economic growth of where we might be now—in a place with clean air, in a safe home, vaccinated, if we are lucky, should not come at the cost of depriving others of that. People and the planet are compatible with a green economy, which is why we continue to work for that present and future.

—Eleanor Greene, editor-in-chief



ELEANOR GREENE

GREEN LIVING ADVICE

I'm a single working mother that has a full time job and farm.

The sample letter from the Winter 2020 issue [greenamerica.org/effectivecompanyletter] is helpful but my problem is not having the time to do the research portion. I, like millions of others, shop with Chewy.com for about 98 percent of my pets needs, with several items on auto-ship. It is very upsetting to me to have to throw away their perfect boxes when Chewy could be reusing them. Unfortunately, while I know that it takes water to recycle cardboard, I don't know any statistics to quote to them.

—Liz, via email

Eleanor: You're not alone—over-packaging can be very frustrating to all of us, but a big part of staying out of stores during the pandemic and after. In February, our climate team finished working on this wonderful resource with the Environmental Paper Network: solvingpackaging.org. It gives examples of the many types of packaging that aren't truly green, as well as examples of how companies can create greener packaging options. Feel free to share with Chewy and any other companies you wish.

Is dental floss bad for the environment? - Carla L., Florida

Mary, associate editor: Hi Carla, thanks for your question! Most dental floss is made from nylon, a synthetic fiber made from petroleum. Nylon does not biodegrade, nor can it be recycled in curbside recycling programs. This means the only place it can go once it has been used is the trash—but as a tiny piece of plastic, it can easily end up as litter in the ocean, which can cause serious health problems for marine life. Additionally, conventional dental floss is coated in toxic PFAS, which have been linked to decreased fertility, hormone suppression, thyroid disease, and liver damage, among other health issues.


All this is not to say you shouldn't floss—dentists recommend flossing as a part of a healthy routine. There are alternatives, such as floss made from silk or bamboo fiber and coated in plant-based wax. These options can decompose in a house compost system, too! Companies like Lucky Teeth and Etee sell floss in refillable glass or stain less steel containers, so you can reuse the original packaging for much longer than conventional dental floss.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION


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