

11 Great Things You can Do in '22!...

(to create a healthier, and more planet-friendly life)

By Merleanne Rampale, SWALCO; Visit swalco.org for more information on programs & resources.

Fight Food Waste: This is one of the best things we can all do. The way you shop, plan meals and store/preserve food can all make a difference. Not only will you reduce food waste, but you'll find it can help you stick to a healthy diet and save on your budget at the same time. 25% of the food that is wasted in the US comes from our very own homes! It ends up in landfills creating methane gas which harms the environment and our health. Use meal planners and shopping apps like these to help you—they can make a huge difference: An average family of four wastes almost \$2,000.00 worth of food each year, so just think what a savings!

- [15 Best Free Grocery Shopping Apps to Simplify Meal Planning, Best Products:](#)
- [Best Grocery Shopping Apps from Tech and Nutrition Experts, Good Housekeeping](#)
- [Busy Budgeter](#)

Just Say No to Balloons & Other Plastics:

Released balloons, including those falsely marketed as “biodegradable latex,” return to Earth as litter. They kill countless animals and cause dangerous power outages. Even balloons used indoors still end up out in nature, waterways, or in the landfill. They are also a waste of Helium, a finite resource critical for MRIs and others. Balloons can travel thousands of miles, polluting the most remote and pristine places. Use other alternatives for celebrating: So from this year on, set out flowers or plants to decorate the table/area. Then plant them outside in your yard later—go native! Or, ribbon dancers, garden spinners and pinwheels can be reused or gifted to party guests. Use beeswax candles, place LED lights in mason jars or vases—create a whole light show! Fabric bunting, paper chains, flowers, origami, garlands or other can be stored and reused, or eventually recycled. Try to keep from using plastics of any kind, especially single-use items like plastic silverware, straws, bags, etc. [Keep a reuse kit in your car/handy](#) when you go shopping or run errands, with reusable bags, straws, water bottle, coffee cup, and utensils, etc.

Give Green Gifts.

Gift the gift of time, attention & experiences. A coupon for an free massage, a hike in someone's favorite natural area or preserve followed by a picnic (Leave No Trace), or an adventure out with a scavenger hunt or geocaching. What about a game night with snacks or escape room experience for family and friends. Or... a pasta making class, a gardening or planting workshop, craft or art/painting. Many adults or kids would love a membership to a garden, a museum or tickets to a special event like a concert, sports, movie, or theatre. [Geogaching sites here.](#)

Replace Household Cleaners, Fragrances with healthier, more eco-friendly ones

Instead of using artificially scented candles, sprays or plug-ins, create a healthy, natural fragrance in your home by creating a simmer pot on the stove (simmer/steam—do not boil) using a variety of ingredients. Create your own “blends” with Sliced Oranges, Lemons, Vanilla, Star Anise, Cinnamon, Cranberries, Bay Leaves, Ginger, Cardamom, Cloves, Rosemary, Pine Sprigs, Vanilla Extract, Almond Extract, Apples or Apple Peels, Nutmeg, Juniper Berries, Peppermint, other citrus and essential oils. Get creative! For cleaning you can make your own products for a healthier home for you and your family, or buy eco-friendly products on the market. When you make your own at home you can save a lot of “pennies” too using simple but effective ingredients like vinegar, baking soda, distilled water, lemon peel/juice, borax, essential oils, olive oil, Castille soap, and more. Keep toxins from your home.

Practic FIFO. FIFO stands for First In, First Out. It's another great way to save waste and your budget. When unpacking groceries, move older products to the front of the fridge/freezer/pantry and put new products in the back. This way, you're much more likely to use up the older stuff before it expires.

Support Local Programs. Support your local community, deter materials from the landfill responsibly, and support the greater environment. Participate in two of SWALCO's sustainability programs: [Clothing & Textile Collection Program](#) and [Reuse-A-Shoe](#). Drop off your new and gently used clothing & textile (clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, etc.) for donation and reuse; Worn, torn, stained items will be recycled. You'll find locations around the region. Drop off shoes at sites listed via link above. These are 2 separate programs. Items should be dropped off separately at provided public drop-offs for each. Perhaps one will come to your neighborhood soon!

11 Great Things you Can do in '22!..(cont.)

Let the Dandelions Be!

Dandelions have been around since ancient times. Some call dandelions weeds, but they are amazing. As a matter of fact, they are a member of the Daisy family and their name means Lion's Tooth. Did you know that back in the 19th and early 20th centuries our ancestors planted dandelions for show? They even exhibited them at county fairs and garden competitions. Dandelions grow in the spots they do because the soil needs their help. They aerate and prevent erosion. Their flowers are some of the first food for insects and pollinators after hibernation and unlike many other plants, they have both nectar **and** pollen. They have a bounty of it. Birds including goldfinches will eat their seeds. Not only are dandelions good for the soil, insects and wildlife, they are good for humans too. The internet is full of [recipes utilizing the flowers and the greens](#). Dandelions contain vitamins K, A, and C, magnesium, potassium, and B vitamins. They are known to aid many health issues. Forego spraying your yard with chemicals. Your pets, kids and you will be healthier. If you get close enough to one of those pretty little, yellow blooms you might just hear them say, "Please let us be. We're here to help."

Grow a Garden.

Grow Veggies (from plants or seeds) and plant native flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees to landscape your home. If you live in an apartment or condo, offer a suggestion to management that they consider planting native and share the benefits with them. Benefits of planting native: Native plants provide shelter and food for wildlife and support pollinators. Native plants promote biodiversity and stewardship of our natural heritage. Native plants use less water than lawns and help prevent erosion. And if you plant native you can help combat climate change. Long living natives, especially trees like oaks and maples, are effective at storing the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide. For you veggie garden consider heirloom, non-GMO seeds from places like: [Seed Savers](#), [Baker Creek Heirlooms](#), [Territorial Seed Co.](#), [MIGardener](#), and others. Look for terms like heirloom, organic, and open pollinated. SWALCO will offer a Garden Learning Series in 2022 with U of I E. New virtual program each month/no cost to attend, begins Feb. 2022.

Compost at Home & Mulch.

The Earth's oldest form of recycling...Composting is one of the easiest and greenest things we can do and the rewards are tremendous. 1) Our landfills won't fill up as fast, 2) Composting turns food scraps into healthy soil that can be utilized in many ways and 3) Compost helps prevent plant diseases 4) It reduces the need for fertilizers and chemicals 5) Conserves water and 6) (*a big one*) It reduces greenhouse gas emissions/prevents pollution that contribute to climate change. When food decomposes in a landfill with no oxygen, it produces methane, a greenhouse gas that traps 84% more heat than carbon dioxide. Keeping foods and landscape waste from the landfills reduces methane. Scientists attribute the rise in temperatures to the increase in greenhouse gas emissions over the last 100 years. Participate in your curbside composting program or practice backyard, bokashi or vermicomposting. Learn more at [swalco.org](#). You can also learn about mulching and other [healthy, backyard practices](#) there.

Replace Paper Towels and Napkins with Reusable Cloths and Fabric Napkins you can use over and over again.

You can find them in a variety of places. Try Etsy and support an artist. There are a variety of colors and patterns and although there are some higher priced items, some artisans charge very economical prices for their handmade goods. Considering the price of purchasing paper products over and over again, you'll have already saved a bunch in no time anyway. Or, you can make your own! Here's are a couple of great videos with instructions for fabric napkins. Make them reversible and you can change it up whenever you feel like it. Napkins 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvsWCrB9zmY>; Napkins 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmON8HDR6c8>.

Rethink Consumption: *Refuse, Reduce & Reuse:* Before you buy: 1)

Evaluate if you need it. Consider the cost in time and money to maintain it. Think about what you'll do with it when you're done with it. 2) Consider buying used items. 3) Rent or borrow items you don't use often 4) Use up what you have. Check to see if you already have the product you want to purchase. Buying: 1) Buy good-quality, reusable, durable goods. Avoid trendy and disposable items. 2) Look for items with minimal or recyclable packaging. Purchase items in bulk and in concentrate. 3) Buy green. Look for credible labels. Be aware of some terms that *may* not mean anything, such as *environmentally friendly*, *earth-friendly* and *natural*. 4) Buy the right amount for your needs. Plan and measure before you buy. Purchase only what you can use before it expires. After you buy: 1) Take good care of your items to extend their life. 2) Repurpose your items. Find a creative new use for your old stuff. 3) Make use of your reusable items. Remember your shopping bags, water bottles, mugs, napkins, towels, and food containers to cut down on waste.-