

50 Years of Earth Day

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, all in-person Earth Day events have been cancelled. Please check the [NIH Earth Day website](#) for the latest information about which activities have been cancelled and any virtual Earth Day activities.

This year is the 50th celebration of Earth Day! The first Earth Day was held in 1970 throughout the United States and represented the first major movement for environmental consciousness.¹ The original Earth Day was led by Gaylord Nelson, a senator from Wisconsin, who had recently witnessed the devastation caused by a large oil spill in Santa Barbara, California.¹ Senator Nelson and his team organized “teach-in” events across the entire country to spread environmental awareness.¹ On April 22, 1970, an estimated 20 million Americans (10% of the total population) participated in the first Earth Day.¹ This event is widely regarded as the driving force behind the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the passing of the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts.¹ Throughout the years, Earth Day has inspired countless changes, now on a global scale.

The NIH is proud to hold annual Earth Day activities and encourages all NIH staff to contribute toward protecting the environment year-round. However, this year, to ensure the safety of all NIH staff and families during the current COVID-19 virus outbreak, all in-person Earth Day events have been cancelled. Full details for all virtual activities can be viewed on the [NIH Earth Day website](#). In place of in-person events, we have put together a list of actions each of us could use to support the Earth Day philosophy of protecting the environment. Since many readers are currently teleworking, most of these actions will apply specifically to our homes. Also, following Earth Day tradition, we ask each of you to consider involving your children in any actions you may take!

Here are some actions you can take in support of Earth Day:

- **Make an Earth Day pledge for 2020!** We have created a virtual activity where you can pledge to make a difference in 2020. Visit the [Earth Day Pledge](#) site to make your environmental pledge! The Pledge Tree is hosted on an NIH SharePoint site, so users must be connected to the NIH VPN or within the NIH network to access this activity. If you are having trouble accessing the Pledge Tree, you may alternatively email your pledge to green@od.nih.gov.
- **Build a bird feeder!** There are many bird feeder designs available on the internet that involve supplies common in most households. [Here are a few designs](#) to get your ideas flowing!
- **Plant a garden!** Gardens are an excellent source of fresh and local produce and they can reduce your carbon footprint by eliminating shipping and packaging. Gardens also provide benefits to your lawn such as not needing to be mowed, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Gardens can serve as a protective barrier to reduce stormwater runoff and provide habitats for many insect and pollinator species. If you do not have lawn space, potted plants are a great space-saving alternative.
- **Remove invasive species!** Invasive species are classified as non-native species that cause harm to the environment, to the economy or to human health (as described in a [previous Newsletter issue](#)). You may even find some of these species growing in your yard, like English ivy, Japanese honeysuckle and Tree of Heaven. These plants can out-compete the other plants in your yard, overtaking large sections of ground or smothering trees. Remove these invasive species to improve your yard and prevent the spread to your neighbors!

- **Have a car-free day!** Since many of us are working from home, consider eliminating any car trips for a day (or longer). While public transportation may be limited during this time, walking and biking are viable (emission-free) alternatives. See if you can go an entire day without using your automobiles! Please also follow social distancing practices whenever you leave the house.
- **Create your own “Earth Hour!”** [Earth Hour](#) is an annual, global event that asks us to “power down” for an hour by turning off all lights and shutting down electronics. This year’s Earth Hour was on March 28, but you can plan your own shutdown to support this initiative.
- **Make crafts out of recycled materials!** There are many crafts that can be created out of unused items around the house. For example, you can make pet toys out of old socks and fabric or make an insect house out of sticks and some twine.² There are tons of ways we can turn our unused items into new and useful crafts!
- **Teach your kids/roommates/spouse/parents about recycling!** Teach someone about recycling that may not be aware of the current rules for your household. This will help increase recycling rates and decrease the amount of recyclables that become discarded as trash. Most counties post very detailed information about what they accept in their recycling bins, such as [this guidance for Montgomery County](#). It never hurts for each of us to brush up on our current recycling rules!
- **Buy local!** Many grocery stores are suffering from limited stock of essential items like meat, milk, eggs and sanitation products. This stems from the current high-demand and the inability of distributors to meet this demand. Yet there are many products produced locally that may be available without the environmental drawbacks associated with shipping. Many local businesses may be dealing with fewer customers or forced closures and could be looking to sell their goods at a discount before they expire.