

Barking up the right tree

Eco-friendly pathways
to a greener planet

By Laura Oppenheimer

Green may be the new black, but how can you go green if you don't have a lot of it in your wallet? Even if you don't have the spending power of Al Gore, you can still do your part for both pets and the planet. Check out these easy and inexpensive eco-friendly solutions to the everyday problems facing pet guardians and their furry friends.

| problem | traditional solution | green solution | how it will make a difference |
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| Fido or Fluffy is feeling sick and needs to be taken to see the vet—stat! | Hop in your SUV, fill up your tank, and head over to your local vet's office. | Investigate local car-sharing services, like Zipcar (Zipcar.com) and iGo (iGoCars.com), which, with an inexpensive membership fee, allow you to rent cars by the hour. | Zipcar, the nation's largest car-sharing network, estimates that each Zipcar member uses 219 less gallons of gasoline per year than if that person owned a car. |
| Bowser peed on the floor—again—and company is coming in an hour. | Mop up the mess with a paper towel, and then use bleach to finish up the job. | Get the job done by dousing a reusable rag with household vinegar. | Vinegar is nontoxic and earth-friendly, while bleach can be harmful to children especially when mixed with other cleaning agents, like ammonia. While recycled paper towels are an option, a rag is more environmentally friendly. |
| It's a dirty job, but someone needs to scoop Fido's poop. | Use old plastic bags from the grocery store to pick up after your doggie does his doodie. | Opt for biodegradable bags made out of corn or soy, like those from Poop Bags (PoopBags.com) or BioBag (BioBagUSA.com), which break down in a matter of months. | Each year, Americans throw away some 100 billion polyethylene plastic bags; the bags are made from a nonrenewable resource (oil), do not biodegrade, and can take thousands of years to break down. |
| Kitty is an indoor cat who does her business in a litterbox, but all that used litter has to end up somewhere. | Use a standard clumping clay litter or silica-based litter to deal with the mess. | Switch to a biodegradable litter made of pine, paper, wheat, or corn, like World's Best Cat Litter (WorldsBestCatLitter.com) or Swheat Scoop (SwheatScoop.com). In addition to being environmentally friendly, many of these all-natural litters are flushable. | With roughly 2 million tons of cat litter making it into landfills every year, it's important that it can break down. Clay and silica litter are produced by strip-mining, which means they are already in their natural state and won't decompose further. |
| Somehow Whiskers escaped out the back door when you weren't looking. | Print up flyers and post them around the neighborhood, visit area shelters to look for her, and drive around the neighborhood, hoping she is just a few houses away. | Get your pets microchipped the next time they visit the vet, post online flyers at Craigslist.org or LostPets.org , and ride your bike to the neighborhood shelter or pound while you search. | Posting online will save a tree and riding a bike is better than driving. If Whiskers has a microchip implanted, none of this may even be necessary. |
| You ran out of food so you run to the grocery store to grab a bag. | Pick up one small bag of kibble at a time to satiate your favorite friend. | Buy the largest sized bag of kibble you can and transport it home via carpooling with a neighbor. | When it comes to buying food for your pet (or for yourself!), bigger is better. When you purchase the king-sized bags or ones in bulk, the ratio of trash to food inside is decreased, meaning less overall waste. |
| Animals are your passion, and you want to help a local shelter. | Send over a check to help cover operating costs or stop by to volunteer. | Try also donating old cell phones, printers, cartridges, and computers to your local animal shelter. | While money and time are always appreciated, many nonprofits are able to make some extra cash recycling used electronics, while you can feel secure knowing that harmful chemicals like mercury or lead aren't ending up in a landfill. |