

The Ultimate Guide to Being an ECO-FAMILY

Don't let sustainable living overwhelm you – even the simplest of changes can make an impact! Dig into this plethora of easy green ideas to give your kids the best gift for the future: a healthier planet.

Why it matters

Carolyn Barr, the founder of eco-app susGain, shares what sparked her family to go green, and how small changes can help Mother Earth.

With forest fires, floods and record temperatures in the news, we get frequent reminders that climate change is at our doorstep and something needs to change. While it's true that governments and corporations play a critical role in driving that change, we tend to underestimate our own power of influence.

My sustainability journey began around five years ago – following the birth of my daughter and my family returning to Singapore, after living abroad for a few years. While I marvelled at new shopping malls, MRT lines and parks, I realised many places where we used to eat had switched to single-use tableware. With food deliveries and online shopping on the rise, my family found ourselves overwhelmed by the amount of products and packaging around us.

I began to explore sustainable alternatives like buying package-free groceries, taking only public transport, or refusing gifts for my daughter's birthday party. But I soon realised it was impossible to fully switch to greener options in all aspects of our lifestyle.

"We tend to underestimate our own power of influence."

About that time, I came across cookbook author and zero-waste proponent Anne Marie Bonneau's quote: "We don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly." That gave me a new perspective.

Instead of focusing on making a big difference, I started looking into the little things I could change. As parents, we play a crucial role: It's our everyday actions and choices – be it separating waste or reducing consumption – by which we act as role models to our children.

And kids can take the lead, too. My daughter's favourite book series teaches about water, air and land pollution, and she often brings up its "how to protect our planet" discussions at mealtimes. We now bring reusable bags along when leaving the house, get second-hand toys and clothes, eat more plant-based meals and occasionally spend a Sunday morning picking up litter in our neighbourhood.

While these are small lifestyle changes, the journey we've embarked on enriches us as a family – and we keep learning. And, if my hubby or I ever forget to switch off the bathroom light, it's our daughter who will remind us!

SUSGAIN TO THE RESCUE!

Social enterprise susGain's free, rewards-based app enables users to turn socially conscious eco-actions into points, cashbacks, donations to local charities, and trees. Kickstart your green journey with susGain and plant a mangrove tree – an offer just for *The Finder Kids* readers – by scanning the QR code here.



Photo: susGain, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan

The Finder Kids is the insider's guide for international families in Singapore, full of inspiring ideas and helpful information for living well with kids.

Download the digital copy of *The Finder Kids* for **FREE** at thefinder.life/magazine to start reading now!

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Easy eco-habits

These sustainability tips are totally doable by you and your crew.

How to Get Your Family On Board

- **Get inspired.** Find ideas in magazines (like *The Finder Kids!*), blogs and social media groups. Our local libraries also have a great selection of children's books about recycling, saving water, DIY crafting and upcycling activities.
- **Learn from one another.** Make sustainability a discussion topic and brainstorm the little things each family member could do. Don't be surprised if your little ones come up with plenty of suggestions.
- **Take small steps.** Be it bringing a water bottle or remembering to switch off the lights, acknowledging these actions gives your children a sense of accomplishment and will spur their motivation to do more.
- **Set up a recycling corner.** Have your kids help to decorate and label it. Next to a general waste bin, set up a "blue bin" for glass, paper, metal and plastic, and an "e-waste box" for batteries, light bulbs and small electronics.
- **Pass it on.** Ask the kids to gather toys, books, clothes and other goods they no longer use or want for donation. (While you're at it, why not declutter your own closet or cupboards?) Have them join you for the drop-off, so they can see how their donations help others.
- **Spend more time outdoors.** Explore public parks or nature reserves (flip to page 44 for some how-tos). Discuss with your kiddos what you see, listen to the different sounds, and discover and appreciate the wonders of nature. – *Carolyn Barr*



Household Hacks

Rather than disposing of them, repurpose these common items around the home.

- **Cooking water:** Use the water that you used to cook pasta or steam veggies to water plants.
- **Packaging:** Finished the drink in your paper beverage carton? Rinse it, cut off the top and fill it with soil to grow some plants. You can also repurpose plastic bottles and egg cartons for home gardening.
- **Glass bottles:** Have leftover glass or wine bottles? Turn them into pretty bottle lights or make lamps out of them to spruce up your home – and give those lamps away as eco-friendly gifts.
- **Old clothes:** Cut up old clothes to make cleaning or dust rags. – *K Praveena*



There's a Station for That!

From recycling bins to food bank donation boxes, SG's eco-infrastructure is extensive. Here's when and where to use its more than 1,000 handy stations.

- **Excess food:** Unopened, dry or packaged food items with at least four weeks till expiry can be donated to any of over 100 food bank bins around the island.
- **Empty drink containers:** Deposit them at 50 reverse vending machines throughout the island.
- **Old batteries, light bulbs, mobile phones:** Leave them at e-waste recycling bins deployed islandwide. More than 300 bins are spread across SG.
- **Contact lens blister packs:** Eyecare brand Two of a Kind's "Project 2x2" provides free envelopes to collect plastic lens holders from any brand.
- **Empty toner and ink cartridges:** All public libraries have a Project Homecoming collection box for printer waste.
- **Poly mailers, paper envelopes, boxes, styrofoam stuffing and other packaging materials:** Donate them to eco-brand Package Pals or green business The Sustainability Project's "Zero Waste Packaging Initiative".
- **Books and magazines:** Bring them to Dignity Mama's preloved book stalls run by young adults with disabilities and their caregivers.
- **Pens:** Leave them in Save That Pen bins at various university campuses. The ink will be refilled and the pens will be passed on to underprivileged students in Singapore and the region.
- **Kids and adult shoes in good condition:** Drop these at kids' shoe fitting studio Ten Feet Tall in Holland Village. Alternatively, ActiveSG's "Old Shoes New Future" bins at Active SG sport centres accept worn out sports shoes to be turned into materials for jogging tracks, playgrounds, etc.
- **Old or new spectacles and sunglasses:** Donate these at Visio Optical's shop in Holland Village. – *CB*

GOOD TO KNOW!

All these eco-stations are listed on a map in the susGain app. In addition, it lists more than 70 water refill stations, places that give discounts for BYO (bringing your own reusables), places for clothing swaps and more.



Swap Out Disposables

Ditch disposable kitchen supplies in favour of sustainable alternatives, such as beeswax wrap instead of plastic wrap, cloth towels instead of paper towels and zip-seal silicone bags instead of plastic ones. That goes for baking supplies, too! Opt for silicone baking mats over parchment paper, and silicone baking moulds in place of paper cupcake or muffin liners.



Photos: i23RF.com, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan

Easy eco-habits (cont.)

Do Laundry the Eco-Way

How to clean your clothes and linens without sullyng the environment.

- **Choose natural fibres.** Before you even start washing anything, know this: According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, part of the microplastic concentration in our oceans comes from laundry wastewater – most likely from loads containing synthetic fabrics such as fleece. So, simply opting for natural fibres like cotton, silk and linen can help prevent microplastics from threatening marine life.
- **Wear it more than once.** Want to reduce your water and energy consumption? Re-wear clothes like cardigans, jeans and jackets, instead of washing them immediately. Just spot clean and air-dry them between wears.
- **Wash at a cold temperature.** On average, 80 percent of the energy used in a wash cycle is for the temperature and only 20 percent is to power the motor. By reducing the temperature, you can save heating costs, help protect the environment and prevent your clothes from shrinking or colours from fading.
- **Use sustainable laundry detergents.** Phosphates found in conventional laundry detergents can have detrimental effects on marine ecosystems. Look for plant-based detergents in eco-friendly packaging, or find homemade (or make your own) vegan laundry detergents.
- **Opt for sustainable dry cleaning.** A chlorinated solvent called perchloroethylene (or perc) is used by most dry cleaners. This is bad not only for your clothes, but also for the environment and your health. For The Love of Laundry uses a form of liquid silicone called GreenEarth technology, a sustainable alternative to Perc that biodegrades into sand and trace amounts of water and carbon dioxide. Find them on the susGain app (see page 7 to download). – CB + KP

WHY BAR SOAP IS BEST

Use bar soap instead of liquid soap, which uses less water to make and less packaging, too. Tip: Cut bars into smaller pieces to make them last longer.

Sustainable Supermarket Habits

Follow these tactics on your next marketing trip to save the Earth (and even a little money!).

- Create meal plans and make grocery lists to reduce overbuying.
- Buy whole foods in bulk. Ditto oils and soaps. When possible, use your own cleaned containers.
- Look for eco-labels on products such as sustainable seafood, or Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) labels on palm oil products.
- Bring your own bags for produce, and use the plastic bags only when necessary. One idea: Stick the weight label on fruit or vegetables directly; you don't need the plastic bag just to affix the label. – CB

Have Fun for Free!

Check out these clever ways to reuse items with or for the kids.

"Upcycling does not have to be boring!" enthuses Susan Tan, Sustainability Leader of Kinderland International Education (see more on page 49). "There are many ways in which we can inspire eco-consciousness among the young, by simple acts of sustainability." Case in point: these crafty ideas for being creative at home.

- **Upcycle old items for art and craft projects.** Paint or redecorate picture frames. Make holiday decorations or greeting cards with recycled bits and bobs plus brown or craft paper.
- **Create toys.** Turn milk or juice cartons into buses and cars; paper towel or toilet roll tubes into racing ramps or tracks. Convert supermarket plastic bags into parachutes.
- **Use them for teaching.** Get kids to learn to count, with bottle caps or natural materials – such as pebbles or leaves you find in the garden or at the park. Or, set up a maker's corner using cardboard boxes and discarded paper packaging from online purchases.
- **Repurpose old clothes.** Turn old clothes into costumes or accessories for children's role play.
- **Make gift wrap.** Instead of buying wrapping paper, use brown paper bags, newspapers or magazines, or even your children's doodles. – KP

Greener Gifting

Rather than giving the usual presents, consider gifting one of these five eco-experiences for kids and families instead.

1. **Have some good, clean fun.** After completing Fawn Labs' Bath Bombs x Farmer's Edition workshop, you'll get to take home your all-natural creations for some bomb-diggity bath time. Or, get messy while having a little eco-fun at Soaprise's Soap and Slime workshop. Find booking info online. (facebook.com/FawnLabs; soapriseonline.com)
2. **Go fly a kite.** Visit Sustainable Singapore Gallery to learn about sustainability, then let the good times continue by flying kites at Marina Barrage. (terra.sg/ssg)
3. **Turn green living into an adventure.** Rent a Cleanup Toolkit from Green Nudge, then go on a litter-picking expedition around your neighbourhood or East Coast Park. (greennudge.sg/resources)
4. **Get your hands dirty.** Farming fun awaits you and your little ones at urban farm and community space City Sprouts. See the website for current programmes. (citysprouts.com.sg)
5. **Empower your eco-warrior.** Sign up your kiddo for one of DinoStaury's half-day Little Green Warriors camps, and he or she will learn the fun-damentals of land, water and air pollution. (dinostaury.sg) – CB + KP



Photos: Courtesy of respective brands, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan

Sustainable shopping

Get to know (and love!) these 24 super eco-stores and sites in SG.

To quote American author Joshua Becker, who writes about minimalism and intentional living, "The most sustainable product is the one you didn't buy." This is certainly true, but your everyday consumption choices are important, too – be it saving over 100 litres of water per roll by switching to bamboo toilet paper, or buying locally sourced food to help reduce food

waste and your carbon footprint caused from shipment. Plus, as susGain founder Carolin Barr points out, "Supporting brands that give back to social causes makes us feel good and improves our sense of purpose and well-being."

Here, we've rounded up top shops that prize sustainability to help your family on its journey to green living. – Jayme Chong

Grocers

1. Scoop Wholefoods

With six locations around the island, Scoop sells only natural and organic products, and uses plastic-free and biodegradable packaging. But its name says it all: It sells foods in bulk to minimise food waste, allowing customers to scoop up just what they need. (sg.scoopwholefoods.com)



2. The Source Bulk Foods

On this store's shelves are unpackaged bulk whole foods, healthy snacks and organic goodies. Use its bags and containers or bring your own. Find household items here, too, such as organic cotton beeswax wraps and plant-based dishwashing and laundry liquids. (thesourcebulkfoods.com.sg)



3. UnPackt

Founded in 2018, UnPackt is Singapore's first home-grown zero-waste grocer. It sells package-free bulk goods including local spices, dried fruits and organic seeds – so come prepared with containers. (unpackt.com.sg)



4. Everyday Vegan Grocer

Everyday Vegan offers natural and non-toxic food and lifestyle products, which are also planet-conscious and animal-friendly. Shop for fresh produce, plant-based meats and dairy, as well as bamboo toilet paper and even vegan perfume. (everydayvegangrocer.com)



5. Eco.Le

Eco.Le carries bulk foods. And you can bring your own containers, use the store's second-hand containers or pay a refundable deposit for silicone bags. It also sells items and provides services that aid with zero waste, from reusable straws to candle refills. (eco-le.com)



6. Two Sisters Pantry

Two Sisters Pantry may be a small store, but it is chock-full of high-quality organic food and household products imported mainly from Australia and New Zealand. It has a bulk goods section, too. (facebook.com/TwoSistersPantry)



7. Nourish

This online vegan marketplace offers a plethora of plant-based foods, like organic superfoods and gluten-free snacks. Not only do these "clean" products tend to be healthier, they are also ethically and sustainably sourced. (nourishsg.com)

Photos: Courtesy of respective brands, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan

continued on page 14 ►►

How Schools Help

Find out how these international schools promote sustainability on and off campus – and inspire students to be their greenest.

Australian International School (AIS)

"Our school has invested in a waste recycling machine that takes food scraps from the canteen to create up to 15 kilograms of organic fertiliser, which is then used in the school gardens. Our Elementary pupils are also involved through their Eco-warrior CCA (Co-curricular Activity), where pupils develop initiatives to help teach others about the environment. Furthermore, for every level, we have created Sustainability Ambassadors – teachers who make a positive change by passing on sustainability messages and fostering interest among students to make eco-friendly choices." – Felicity Meltesen, Year 5 Classroom Teacher and Paul Quon, Year 4 Classroom Teacher

Chatsworth International School

"Leaders of Environmental Awareness and Protection (LEAP) is a student-initiated environmental organisation with clubs set up across various schools internationally. Within Chatsworth, we have created a branch of the LEAP Club as an environmental CCA led by a few students. They have implemented No Trash Tuesdays, encouraging students to bring and use only reusable masks, food containers and utensils every Tuesday. Students also organise clothing drives, where they encourage staff and students to donate used and unused clothes, which are given to Greensquare, an organisation that promotes sustainability through recycling." – Abigail Melisa, Secondary Teacher and LEAP Club In-Charge

Dulwich College (Singapore)

"At Dulwich, students are excited to be immersed in the new Forest School site on campus. Forest School at Dulwich uses the outdoor environment to deliver high-quality learning experiences and was introduced by Alex Hall-Gray, a Nursery teacher specialising in Early Years teaching. The natural landscape provides environmental and ethical awareness, as students interact with nature. Interactions with nature also allow students to develop emotional resilience and confidence." – Jason Hoppner, Director of Admissions and Marketing

Sustainable shopping (cont.)

Kids' Clothing Stores

8. Sea Apple

This homegrown brand carries an extensive collection of clothes made of quality organic fabrics, focusing on comfort for kids up to 6 years old. Its designs are original and take inspiration from the simplicity of children's ideas. (seaappleshop.com)



le petit society



9. Le Petit Society

Le Petit Society uses choice fabrics to create clothing for young ones up to 12 years old, with an eye on offering safe and comfortable products. It also has an organic range of kids' sleepwear and baby muslin swaddles. (lepetitsociety.com)



12. Little Suite

Specialising in organic cotton baby and toddler wear free of harmful chemicals, this GOTS-certified brand also offers eco-friendly gear such as toys, baby loungers and teething necklaces. (littlesuite.com.sg)



14. Fumbles & Jumbles

Kids outgrow their clothes so fast. Rather than having to invest in new pieces every few months, check out the Fumbles & Jumbles site for good quality preloved children's garments. Hello, zero waste! (fumblesjumbles.com)



13. RAPH&REMY

RAPH&REMY sells personalisable baby apparel and gift sets made with bamboo – a sustainable, renewable source. Other benefits of bamboo: It is soft and absorbent, making it kinder on bodies, especially for babies growing up in a tropical climate. (raphandremy.com)



15. Grokinder

Renting baby apparel wastes less and reduces your family's carbon footprint. At Grokinder, you can borrow bags of sustainable clothing like pants, sleepsuits and onesies for newborns and toddlers up to 2 years old. When it's time for a new size, simply swap for a new bag. (grokinder.com)

continued on page 16 ➡



10. Esse for Pēpi

Conscious fashion brand Esse has a sustainable kids wear collection for tykes 3 months to 5 years old. Like the minimal and laidback designs for adults, the children's range is versatile and gender-neutral. (essethelabel.com)

11. Kalila Organics

Certified by the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), this French and Singapore clothing label creates stylish organic children's wear. Expect to find swaddles, pyjama sets, dresses and more. (kalilaorganics.com)



Photos: Courtesy of respective brands, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan

How Schools Help (cont.)

EtonHouse International School

"EtonHouse has year-long farm-to-table harvesting projects, where children grow amazing herbs and vegetables in mandala planters. In this project, they consider how to be sustainable: Greens are grown to feed people and animals, and the balance is used as fertiliser. Additionally, our school uses a paper recycling vending machine, which is courtesy of a local environmentally friendly company that advocates 'Recycle To Save The Environment'. The children enjoy feeding used paper into the machine and having recycled paper returned to them in a bundle, to experience the full process of recycling and reusing." – Lisamarie Hughes, Principal of EtonHouse International School Sentosa

NEXUS International School (Singapore)

"Our students are always encouraged to 'think green' in everything they do. We have labels in a variety of languages to remind students to switch off the air conditioner and lights after use. They are encouraged to refuse plastic whenever they can, too. Most of our learners bring reusable straws and cutlery, thanks to our previous 'Say No to Straws' campaign, and in collaboration with catering staff to remove plastic bottles and cutlery from dining halls." – Representatives from NEXUS International School (Singapore)

Sir Manasseh Meyer International School (SMMIS)

"We work with Sembcorp to create a programme to recycle used papers,



plastics, metal cans and glass bottles. We also use sensors or Presto taps in most of our toilets to save water. SMMIS runs a series of Kiss the Ground days, where students work in vertical groups while viewing the documentary of the same name, and learn about the science of 'CO2 drawdown' to fight climate change. They carry out an eco-audit of the school, too, and formulate action plans to present to the senior leadership team for effective change at SMMIS." – Ali Cipriano, Vice Principal & Head of Secondary School

Sustainable shopping (cont.)

Toy Stores



16. Ailefo

Boost creative sensory play for your little one with this Danish company's organic, allergy-friendly modelling clay, which contains no perfume or parabens. The clay comes in recycled packaging, too – intended for reuse. (ailefo.dk/en)

17. Lilac Todds

This online store stocks sustainable toys and baby goods from international brands like Grapat and Grimm's. All are made from non-toxic materials. (lilactodds.com)



18. Green Toys

Whether it is a toy truck or a house playset, Green Toys' playthings are made completely from recycled materials like milk jugs, and packaged in recyclable cardboard. (greentoys.com)



19. PlanToys

PlanToys uses only earth-friendly materials – such as chemical-free rubberwood, organic colour pigments and water-based dyes – to create its range of toys, including dollhouses, musical instruments and even a portable tabletop soccer board. (plantoy.com)



20. Petit Collage

This brand creates its products with the health of the planet and your children in mind. Its toys are free from harmful chemicals and made from recycled materials, organic cotton and FSC-certified wood (i.e., sustainably harvested wood). (petitcollage.com)

21. ÖkoNORM

From finger paints and watercolours to wax crayons, you can get almost all the art essentials you need at ÖkoNORM. Its craft supplies are biodegradable, compostable, non-toxic and made exclusively from renewable raw materials. (oekonorm.com)

22. A Hopping Bunny

Bringing sustainable toys to your doorstep, this family-run online business stocks adorable wooden cupcake sorters and playdough stamps to felt fruits and vegetables. Even better? For every \$10 spent, 1 percent of the sales goes to a mission that the company cares for deeply. (ahoppingbunny.com)



23. Toy Around

Toy Around's curated selection of age-appropriate playthings are all sourced with the help of psychologists, discerning parents and kids themselves. It allows you to swap, buy and sell pre-loved toys through its app. (toyaround.io)



24. Books Beyond Borders

Sure, books aren't technically toys – but nothing beats a good bedtime story with your babes! At Books Beyond Borders, find a range of pre-owned children's books by authors like Roald Dahl, May Gibbs and Dr Seuss. Bonus: Your purchases help fund education for children in underprivileged countries. (booksbeyondborders.org)

How Schools Help (cont.)

Stamford American International School (SAIS)

"In 2020, SAIS spearheaded a Rare Tree Forest initiative in collaboration with Elango Velautham, a Deputy Director with the Singapore Botanic Gardens. This initiative took 'root' in the Grade 9 Science curriculum and Field Studies programme and eventually became a whole school project about creating ecological sustainability at Stamford. The Rare Tree Forest site was inaugurated by planting endangered species of trees indigenous to the region and Singapore. The students have since developed a Rooftop Garden and Nursery where they design, plant and harvest an edible landscape of vegetables, herbs and fruits in commemoration of Earth Day." – Rhonda Wiens, MYP Coordinator (High School)

St. Joseph's Institution International (SJII) Elementary School

"SJII has a group of volunteer students called the Eco Activists, who create strategies for implementing environment-friendly practices within our school. These students highlight environmental concerns at the school through our ESTV in-house television channel, school newspaper, mini-assemblies and other activities. Our Eco Activists also walk through the school during lunchtime to check that the classroom lights and air conditioners are turned off. In addition, our Elementary Parent Support Group (EPSG) has established a specific portfolio to consider and encourage growth as a community, in terms of environmental thinking and impact." – Clayton Cumming, Service Coordinator

Tanglin Trust School

"Tanglin Trust School has many visible reminders of the need to be sustainable around campus, including upcycling projects such as classroom equipment storage containers made from packing boxes – and even an old piano that was freshly decorated by our Art CCA club. We also have a very active Green Team and Eco-monitors who share ideas with their teachers and peers. The Green Team members help to check that we are switching off air conditioners and lights when not in use, avoiding single-use plastics, using reusable bags and taking care of our garden spaces." – John Ridley, Director of Learning – Arshi Iqbal

Photos: Courtesy of respective brands, Illustrations: Vanessa Tan