

CLIMATE ACTION: REDUCING YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT



To help lessen the impacts of climate change there are many things we can do to reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions and therefore our personal carbon footprint. Here are some ideas to consider.

Energy usage

For most of us, the amount we spend on gas and electricity is a significant amount of money. By reducing usage we not only reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, we also save money. To reduce our emissions we need to move to using more electricity for our daily living rather than gas.

There are several ways of doing this. We can install solar panels and batteries where we own our home. There is a significant cost to do this but if you can afford it, you will see a notable reduction in your energy bills. We are also being encouraged to replace our gas boilers to ground or air source heat pumps. Again, there is a cost to this and uncertainty about a 'new' technology. So if you can, speak to someone who has already done this to learn from their experience. Other electric options exist such as electric boilers. These are cheaper and easier to install and suitable for smaller homes.

An even simpler thing to consider is the efficiency rating of items. When you replace equipment look at this. Even if you replace an existing gas boiler with a new one you will find the efficiency of modern condensing gas boilers is far higher than older ones, saving on running costs.

Car travel

We depend on our cars for many aspects of life. However, as with energy, reduction is key to lowering your carbon footprint. Over short distances, walking or cycling are the best ways to travel in terms of carbon, as well as being healthier. For those who can afford it an electric bike may be an easier option.

Using public transport is the next best choice. Currently on buses all single fares are limited to £2. From Bovey Tracey there is a half hour service to Newton Abbot and hourly to Exeter. Trains are another low carbon way to travel for longer distances. The cost and access to trains is a consideration, but think about using the bus service to reach Newton Abbot station. Also investigate the many railcards on offer which reduce fares by between one third and one half and are available for many age groups, plus families.

In terms of cars, switching to an electric car is an option. Although there are concerns about range and availability of charging stations, both are improving. Also consider your needs. Most car journeys are short and so it is not necessary to go for the largest battery/range. Other things to consider are reducing your petrol usage, and therefore carbon emissions, by driving more slowly, buying smaller cars and keeping your car for as long as possible.

Food

Often, we are encouraged to buy locally produced food considering the food miles used to transport the food from where it is produced. The longer the distance the more carbon is produced. However food miles only have a significant impact if transport is responsible for a large share of the food's carbon footprint. Overall the emissions from transportation make up only a small part of total emissions. What we eat is more important than where the food has come from, although locally produced food will have other local economic benefits which should be considered.

Research shows the production beef and lamb, has far higher emissions than other meat and overall animal-based foods have a higher carbon footprint than plant-based foods. This does not mean we should stop eating meat, but we can eat less. Look at having meat free days and more vegetable- based meals, replacing meat with vegetables in recipes. Many plant-based alternatives are now available in shops.

Air travel

Once more reduction is the key message here. Not everyone travels by air and those who don't will already have a much lower carbon footprint. If you do need to travel by air to visit relatives or for a holiday, think about reducing the number of flights you take. Even reducing by one will have a large impact on your personal carbon footprint. To mitigate the impact of flying, buy carbon offsets and for a higher amount than suggested to help cover the issues with these schemes.

If you are flying within this country look at alternatives such as using trains or coaches. We all need to consider the time taken to travel and the cost but if you can, try taking more time over your journey. Also think about your where you go. This country has many wonderful places to visit, especially on our doorstep in the southwest. Holidaying locally will reduce travel time and your carbon footprint.

Apart from the above, there are many other ways we can reduce our own carbon footprint, However before considering any of these, use one of the online carbon calculators to get an idea of your current personal carbon footprint. For example follow the link on the Action on Climate in Teignbridge website (actionclimateteignbridge.org) to their carbon calculator. Once you have done this, and to make a difference, set a target to reduce your footprint, perhaps promising yourself a (low carbon) reward if you achieve it. In addition have a competition with friends and family to see who can reduce their footprint the most. Whatever you do make it fun and enjoy it.

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