

The Language of Going Green

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Unless you've been living in a yurt in Inner Mongolia for the past few months, you've probably noticed that the English language has taken on a distinctly greener hue. But can you tell a "freegan" from a "locavore"? How down are you with "downcycling"? And should you try to exorcise "vampire power"? Set sail for a brave, new and verdant world by sharpening your environmental vocabulary.

100-mile diet: The purchase and consumption of food that has been grown, produced or manufactured within a 100-mile radius of where you live. Studies show goods shipped across the country, on the other hand, involve significant amounts of fuel.

Alternative energy: Clean and environmentally sound energy that isn't derived from traditional, nonrenewable resources such as coal, oil and natural gas.

Biodegradable: The ability of a material to be broken down by natural processes (such as microorganisms) and then absorbed by the ecosystem.

Biodiesel: A fuel made from vegetable oil that can be used in diesel engines.

Biomimicry: A new design strategy that seeks to observe nature and emulate its best ideas, especially when it comes to waste reduction and limiting environmental impact.

Carbon emissions: Refers to polluting carbon compounds that are released into the atmosphere, usually as a result of human activity such as burning fossil fuels.

Carbon footprint: A measure of the total amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse-gas emissions that a product, service or lifestyle produces, all of which contribute to global warming.

Carbon neutral: The fact that no extra carbon dioxide is released as a result of a particular manufacturing process, service or lifestyle. This is brought about by balancing the amount

of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere with an equal amount of carbon dioxide that has been sequestered or offset. Examples include planting trees or using renewable energies that don't emit any carbon dioxide.

Carbon sequestration: The act of capturing large quantities of carbon dioxide and storing it, instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. One idea is to bury it in the ground.

Carbon offsets: Also known as renewable energy certificates or "green tags"; refers to credits that can be purchased to neutralize an activity's (such as air travel) carbon emissions.

Climate change: Refers to a change in global temperatures and weather patterns over time, either due to natural variability or human activity.

Community-supported agriculture (CSA): A community of individuals who pledge to support a local farm's operations in exchange for weekly deliveries of seasonal produce. Members usually pay for an entire season upfront, or in monthly or weekly installments.

Compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL): An energy-efficient alternative to traditional incandescent light bulb, CFLs use about 75 percent less energy than incandescents and last up to 10 times longer, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program.

Compostable: The ability of organic material to be biologically decomposed under aerobic conditions, typically within a span of several months.

Corporate social responsibility: A concept whereby an organization considers the welfare and interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their operations on their customers, community, stakeholders and the environment.

Cradle to cradle: A phrase brought into the mainstream by William McDonough and Michael Braungart in their book "Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things" (North Point Press, 2002); refers to manufacturing processes that are efficient and practically waste-free.

Downcycled: Refers to materials that lose viability or value after they've been recycled.

E-waste: Refuse created by discarded electronic equipment and components.

Energy efficient: Products and systems that use less energy than their conventional counterparts to perform the same tasks.

Energy Star: A joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy that promotes the use of energy-efficient products and services. Energy Star-marked appliances and electronics, which meet the program's strict energy-efficiency guidelines, saved Americans \$16 billion on their utility bills in 2007 alone — or greenhouse-gas emissions equivalent to those from 27 million cars.

Fair trade: A movement advocating that farmers and producers should receive equitable compensation for their labors, i.e., what counts as a living wage in the country of their origin. TransFair USA is the only U.S. certifier of fair-trade products, which have to comply with the organization's economic, social and environmental criteria before they can carry the fair-trade label.

Freegan: A person who lives an anti-consumerist lifestyle that often involves salvaging discarded (but unspoiled) food from supermarket dumpsters.

Geothermal energy: Energy generated by heat stored beneath the Earth's surface, which includes natural steam, hot water, hot rocks or lava.

Gray water: Residential wastewater — from household processes such as dish washing, bathing, and laundry — that does not contain serious pollutants and can be recycled to water plants or wash cars.

Greenhouse effect: The process whereby greenhouse gases trap heat from the sun, keeping the Earth's surface warmer than it should be.

Greenwashing: The practice of making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about the environmental benefits of a product or service.

Global warming: Like "climate change," refers to a change in global temperatures and weather patterns over time, either due to natural variability or human activity.

Guerilla gardening: The practice of cultivating plants and foliage on someone else's land, usually without permission.

Hybrid car: A car that uses two forms of power — an internal combustion engine and an electric motor.

Hydroelectric: Energy generated by moving water. Typically refers to dams but can also mean harnessing ocean waves.

Hypermiling: The practice of maximizing mileage during driving. Best practices include not speeding, only accelerating when you have to, and using your car's cruise control when you're on the highway. Some take it to extremes.

LEED: An acronym for "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design," a green-building certification program developed and administered by the U.S. Green Building Council. The LEED rating system offers four certification levels for new construction — Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum — each corresponding to a certain number of credits earned in green-design categories such as water efficiency, sustainable sites, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality.

Locavore: A person who eats mostly locally grown foods.

LOHAS: An acronym for Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability, an emerging demographic related to sustainable living.

Negawatt: A measure of energy efficiency that refers to a megawatt of power avoided or saved.

Nuclear energy: Energy that is generated by a nuclear reaction through the process of fission or fusion.

Off-gas: The evaporation of volatile (usually toxic) chemicals from the surface of a material into the environment.

Off grid/off the grid: Refers to living in a self-sufficient manner, without relying on public

utilities such as municipal water supply, natural gas, or electrical power grid.

Organic: Refers to foods and fibers that are grown and processed without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Organic livestock is reared without the use of antibiotics or hormones.

Phantom power: Also known as "vampire power" or "phantom load"; refers to the power drawn by appliances and electronics even when they're switched off or not in use. By one estimate, U.S. residents spend \$1 billion per year on it.

Pre-consumer: Refers to a material that is being reused or recycled before it goes to market, such as waste left over from manufacturing.

Post-consumer: Refers to an end product generated by a consumer that is being diverted from the solid waste stream for recycling.

Recycling: The process of converting materials that are no longer useful in their current condition and turning them into a brand-new product. [Find recycling centers near you.]

Slow food: A movement founded by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986 as a protest against fast food; usually involves partaking of local, seasonal food.

Solar power: Energy that is generated by the sun. Can take varying forms, from solar panels on a home to giant, regional solar towers to solar power collected in space and beamed to Earth.

Socially responsible investing: An investment strategy that seeks to maximize financial return, while supporting corporations that promote ethical causes such as environmental stewardship, human rights, and diversity.

Sustainable: The use of natural resources to meet present needs, without compromising those of future generations.

Triple bottom line: A corporate framework and measurement of performance that recognizes the interdependence of economy, ecology and equity.

Upcycled: Refers to waste materials that are recycled into something of greater value or use.

Wind power: Energy that is generated by the wind. Ideas range from large turbines already in use to storing wind as compressed air for a more consistent supply of power.