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Going Green

Photography by Animax

In many homes across the globe people are assessing how they can make small changes to minimise the impact on our planet. There are many reasons for looking at your immediate environment—your home—and the products and practices you use to make little changes. These changes can benefit you, your wallet and most importantly, your pets.

Last year, carbon-trading company Easy Being Green estimated that an average cat causes almost half a tonne of greenhouse gas emissions per year, and a dog produces 1.75 tonnes. In the US pet industry the current green spend on eco-friendly pet products is estimated at just two percent of a \$US40 billion pet care industry. However, looking through at the trends in the US pet product market, it's clear that manufacturers and suppliers are keen to tap into this green corner of the market.

Marketing hype or holistic heroes, there's a new breed of pet product—from 'natural' bio-degradable toilet training pads, to 'organic' toys and 'whole food' pet treats, so it's over to the consumer to make the decisions on the products they buy or the changes they make. Even pet food, with its ingredients, additives, processing, packaging, and origin from shipping to your pet store can make any carbon conscious pet owner's mind boggle. Do you choose the brand that really is a more natural and holistic choice but is manufactured offshore, or do you opt for something that's made closer to home but may not have such a high standard of ingredients? Or is there a home-grown, close to basics food approach, just right for your pet, sitting under your nose?

Kermit the Frog sang "It's not easy being green", and we know that he was talking about his colouring not about "going green". However, we've compiled some helpful tips and simple ways to make your home and your pets' environment a little greener. The upshot of making earth-friendly changes is that you and your pets will be less exposed to toxic pest-control products, chemical cleaners and dangerous toys. There are some simple ways to lessen your carbon paw print by adopting some eco-friendly practices.

Top tips to detox your home

Ventilate!

The easiest and cheapest way to improve the air inside is to let the good stuff in—open windows and let clean air in. Fresh air dilutes pollutants and helps keep mould at bay.

Go natural when it comes to flooring and furnishing

Where possible choose natural and untreated material for flooring such as natural wool carpeting, felt underlays. Hemp, cotton, linen and wool fabrics for furnishing fabrics don't contain toxic substances that man-made fibres do.



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Clear the air

Forget those supermarket air fresheners that come in ugly plastic packaging and smell worse than your nan's cheap perfume. Fresh flowers and herbs are ways to naturally scent your home. Baking or bicarbonate soda with a few drops of peppermint or rose oil makes for a quick, fragrant household cleaner.

A few drops of fragrant, essential oil like lavender or orange on the inside of a toilet roll will release a pleasant smell to counteract the more unpleasant ones in a bathroom.

Back to basics

Chemical-laden cleaners are advertised on TV as being a quick cleaning solution—one wipe and bam! the grease and grime just disappear effortlessly. Reading the ingredient list and trying to understand the contents requires a science degree. There are simpler cleaning solutions that use many of the products you already have in your pantry or refrigerator and it's easier than you think.

Window cleaner

- 3 tablespoons lemon or lime juice
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- ¾ cup water

Mix all ingredients in a spray bottle. Spray onto windows and use newsprint or clean paper coffee filters to reduce streaking.

Drain cleaner

Drop 1 cup of baking soda followed by 2 cups boiling water down drains to freshen and eliminate odours.

To unclog a drain pour 1 cup baking soda and 1 cup hot vinegar down drain. Let sit for five to ten minutes and then flush with hot water.

Deodorisers and air fresheners

Simple ideas to rid your home of pet smells. Set out open dishes of white vinegar to absorb odours.

Sprinkle baking soda on carpets and rugs and let stand for 30 minutes before vacuuming. Fresh lavender can also be sprinkled on fibre flooring for a fresh scent.

Natural odour-absorbing products

Leave an open box of baking soda in areas where odours can accumulate and get trapped—like your fridge, laundry, closets and your pets' sleeping area.

Green tip

Little fabric pillows or pouches made from leftover fabrics are an ideal air-freshener and green alternative to chemical-laden supermarket brands. Fresh lavender can be dried in a low-heat or slow oven.



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Flea-free naturally

Everyone hates those creepy little pests called fleas that hop into our lives from time to time. Sydney seems to have been infested with them this past year and that's because it's been wet and humid—perfect conditions for these blood-sucking varmints. Many of the flea prevention products on the market work swiftly and efficiently to rid your furry friend of these annoying critters. However, not everyone wants to routinely douse their pet in chemicals so there are some more natural alternatives and remedies that can stop an infestation between applications of flea treatments.

Minimise the use of flea products through the cooler months and make flea prevention a regular practice. Brush and comb your dog and cat regularly through the flea season. A flea comb works by catching the fleas and eggs in its very narrow teeth. For best results, comb your pet outside and have a container of soapy water where you can drown the fleas.

Very important part controlling fleas is making sure that your pets' bedding is washed every couple of days in a hot-wash cycle. Even a weekly practice of washing pet bedding will help reduce the flea cycle. It may be time to rethink that type of bedding that your pet sleeps on and opt for a bed and covering that is fully machine washable.

Vacuum high-pet-trafficked areas—carpets and furniture—every few days and make sure you empty the vacuum bag outside, after every vacuuming session.

During high flea season, bathe your dog regularly and choose products that have natural flea repellents. There are products made here in Australia from Tasmanian chrysanthemums that are readily available in good quality pet stores and vet clinics. Chrysanthemums contain Pyrethrum which is a natural insecticide. When not present in amounts fatal to insects, it still appears to have an insect-repelling effect.

Use caution when using these around fish as they are harmful to our finned friends. Pyrethrum, however, is far less toxic to mammals and birds than many synthetic insecticides and is biodegradable, breaking down easily on exposure to light.

Toys – recycle and reuse

There are limited numbers of pet toys on the market that are non-toxic. Cheaper, plastic types found on the shelves of your supermarket or two-dollar shops have high levels of toxic materials and should be



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avoided or tossed from your pet's toybox.* You only need to sniff them to smell the plastic fumes—you wouldn't want your dog sucking or chewing on these chemical cocktails.

Look for toys made from safe materials or choose ones that are safe to the planet and recyclable like Planet Dog toys. Toys made by companies that care have a conscious, for instance the Planet Dog Glow For Good super-bouncy balls, give a portion of the profits to dog charities.

*see Urban Animal's article on toxic toys from issue 11 or view online to read more about why these plastic toys are being banned from the shelves in the US.

Toy project

Making your own toys from recycling things you already have in your house is both cheap and fun. Make use of old socks by turning them into kooky sock monsters and other fun toys. We took a bunch of socks and stuffed them with stuffing from an old cushion that a large puppy had decided to chomp on. Rather than just toss the cushion out, we reused and recycled something that was destined for landfill.



Ugly old tennis balls can take on a new lease of life by becoming another version of sock toy. Take a knee-high sock—either the fashion variety or a sports sock, stuff a tennis ball to the toe end and then do a knot. Repeat with as many balls as you can stuff in.

Recycle old water bottles by stomping them flat and then stuff into a long sports sock. These make fun, crunchy toys and the sock will muffle the normally loud noise scrunched plastic bottles make over hard floors.

Old t-shirts can be cut into multiple strips and then plaited and made into softer-style rope toys. These make for great tug toys, so instead of throwing out your raggy Metallica t-shirts, your dog is going to think this 'new' toy rocks.

The twitter on litter

Green kitty litter products are not as plentiful here as they are in the US. Earth-friendly Australian cat owners should steer clear of clay-based cat litters. They don't break down in landfill and they contain silica, a known carcinogen. There are several alternatives in Australia. They are processed, but a better environmental choice because of their biodegradability. Max's Cat & Pet Litter uses a byproduct of the Australian rice industry. www.coprice.com.au Oz Pet Animal Litter uses plantation timber off-cuts. www.oz-pet.net.au



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