

A Deeper Shade of Green

by Taryn R. Hutchison

I hate to disagree with a muppet, but Kermit the Frog got it wrong when he sang “It’s not that easy bein’ green.” It *is* easy. I learned that a couple years ago when my husband’s car died. It was time to find my deeper shade of green.

We’d already implemented several small changes in our home which had yielded large savings. We changed all of our light bulbs to compact fluorescents, added weather stripping around our windows and doors, and replaced our old refrigerator with a new energy-efficient one. We resolved to use canvas shopping bags instead of plastic and turn lights off when we leave a room, unless, of course, someone is still there. We’ve reduced our consumption of hot water by running only full loads in our dishwasher and clothes washer, taking shorter showers, and using cold-water detergent for our laundry.

It was time to take it up a notch. My lifestyle was a muted sage green and I wanted it to be a bright emerald. The demise of my husband’s old car, and my worries about adding car payments to our already-stretched budget, gave me the courage to take the next step.

In a moment of temporary insanity, I gave my husband my car while I volunteered to find another way to work. Two hilly miles separate my home from my office. *What was I thinking?* I considered my options. I could ride my bike, buy a scooter, or walk.

Since I'm not experienced with biking up hills, I knew I'd arrive sweaty, without a way to shower and change at the office. I quickly nixed that idea. I checked scooter prices and found I could barely afford a used one. However, if I bought a scooter, I'd have to contend with scooting in the rain. I'd get home quicker but I'd be just as wet as if I walked.

So I decided to try walking, though doubtful that I could keep it up. I've never been confused with being athletic and I don't like early mornings.

Immediately when I started walking to work, I noticed that I had lots more energy. My doctor was amazed by the dramatic change in my good cholesterol level. Experts recommend that we all take 10,000 steps every day. To make the math easier, let's round a mile down to 5,000 feet. I have an average two-foot stride, so that's roughly 2,500 steps for one mile. For me, my four-mile “commute” equals the daily requirement. Any additional steps around the office or home are bonus.

Leaving home 40 minutes earlier each morning was daunting, but my walk affords me time to start the day calmly in nature and get to know my community. Unlike my commuting colleagues, I arrive at work de-stressed. I see the same people every day and now I even know their dogs by name. Every morning, Sam greets me with, “Hi there, Speedy,” Jax runs up to me and wags his tail, and Lee and Fran wave from their breakfast nook.

I was hooked! Besides reducing my cholesterol and blood pressure, I also reduced my expenses and my negative environmental impact. That's a *win-win-win* situation.

We never had to purchase a second car. I don't pay one cent for gas (a huge savings), insurance, registration, or repairs. Since our second car *is* my shoes, I splurged on really good walking shoes, a healthy back bag, and an all-weather coat and rain hat (in a light color so cars can see me).

And then there's my environmental impact. I found a site online where I could calculate my personal carbon footprint, measuring the negative impression I make in units of carbon dioxide. The questions had to do with my average monthly utility bill, my vehicle's gas mileage, and the number of miles I generally drive each month. The average person on earth has a carbon footprint of 6,933 pounds, while the average American's is 41,500. My footprint is just 9,604 pounds.

I've been walking consistently for two years now, and it's the best lifestyle change I've ever made. My shade of green is getting deeper, and it can go deeper still. I've learned that it *is* easy to become greener!