



green shopping



what is it?

Shopping is one of the most environmentally-damaging things that humans do. The scale of it is constantly increasing, and we are forever pestered to buy more by the advertising industry. Products contain more and more unhealthy, synthetic ingredients; and then there is the huge growth of just a few retailers who dominate, concentrating wealth and power, seriously damaging democracy and decimating small businesses. But it doesn't have to be like that. We have a choice in how we spend our money. We can support products and companies we approve of, and boycott products and companies we disapprove of. There are 3 main features of green shopping:

shop less: this is linked with 'downshifting', which involves earning and spending less. It's about deciding that you just don't need a lot of stuff that's on offer, but it's also about buying more durable products that last longer, buying things with less packaging, and doing things yourself, like producing your own food, crafts etc.

shop eco / ethical: buying products that are recycled (including second-hand), biodegradable, organic, fair trade, and contain natural ingredients; and also boycotting products and companies associated with things such as environmental damage, pollution, sweat shops, toxic ingredients, animal cruelty, working with oppressive regimes and arms manufacturing. An easy place to start is Nestle, who have caused the deaths of many babies in Africa with disinformation on powdered milk v. breastfeeding.

shop local: shopping at local, independent shops rather than giant chains, and buying locally-produced goods rather than goods that have been flown half-way round the world.



shop less: have a go at growing some of your own food - in your garden, in tubs or window boxes, or if you're ambitious, on an allotment



shop local: the closest independent shop to LILI's office sells, amongst other things, locally-produced honey, free-range eggs, fruit, vegetables, bacon and sausages

what are the benefits?

shop less: means less production, land / resource use and transport – all of which involve environmental damage. It can also make you healthier and happier, as you reduce stress by having to earn and spend less, and ignoring advertising, which is designed to make us dissatisfied and unhappy.

shop eco / ethical: helps to reduce pollution and environmental damage, and promote social justice. Boycotts really do make companies change their ways. Also, if you avoid nasty ingredients in food, bodycare and other products, it will be much healthier for you and your family.

shop local: most small shops are being put out of business by supermarkets. Independent grocers have fallen from over 120,000 in 1960 to less than 20,000 now. That means more money concentrated into just a few enormous companies, which damages our society and democracy. Supermarkets also fly goods around the world, squeeze suppliers, concrete green belts, require customers to drive due to their out-of-town location, sell only the products of giant corporations – damaging democracy even more. And yet they control 80% of the UK grocery trade, and are after 100%. Let's not let them. And shopping malls are concentrations of multinational stores that look the same wherever they are - boring as well as damaging. Local shops spread money more evenly, provide more (and better) employment, sell more locally-produced goods, and you can often walk to them. Locally-produced goods don't travel so far, reducing transport and all the resource use, pollution and CO₂ emissions associated with it.



what can I do?

First you have to ignore the dominant message (earn more, consume more, buy brands etc.) It's difficult, and involves a slow change in habits, until you get to the point where TV adverts, shopping malls and T***o make you feel slightly unclean. Even when you've decided to do it, there's a lot of greenwash around, so be careful.

shop less: think carefully about whether you actually need something. Can you do without it or find/make it? Buying unnecessary eco-gadgets isn't green shopping, it's just consumerism. Tips: don't believe advertising hype - learn to ignore it; don't follow fashion, and have to throw away your clothes after a year; don't go food shopping when hungry – eat first; use libraries and free-exchange websites; buy durable goods – they may cost more, but they'll save money in the long run; re-use things like envelopes, glass jars etc.

You can provide many of the things you need without shopping by DIY - e.g. crafts, natural cleaners, bodycare products, soap, and of course, food. And you can boycott the shopping bonanza that has taken over Christmas. There's nothing about Christmas that says you have to spend lots of money – we've been persuaded to do it by big business. Make a pact with your friends to spend time instead of money, make them something, give them a fruit tree or vegetable seeds, and instead of a card, send a charity e-card.



shop eco / ethical: check the ingredients label for nasties, and check what the company is up to - boycotts force companies to change

shop eco / ethical: do your homework - there are lots of different ratings, certification and labelling schemes; they change regularly, and some are more reliable than others (some are voluntary, or run by the companies themselves). Others have done the hard work for you - e.g. the *Good Shopping Guide* or *Ethical Consumer*, which contain reviews and ratings for thousands of products and companies. They look at materials used and energy-efficiency too. Check the ingredients - you'll quickly get used to it. Avoid things like aspartame, chlorine, or ethyl-/butyl-/alkyl-anything. For more details, see *What's Really in Your Basket*, which covers thousands of ingredients - natural and synthetic - and gives an easy red, amber and green code for health risks. You can also go for organic, fair trade and recycled (including second-hand) if you can, and donate unwanted goods to second-hand shops. And try and avoid anything disposable – including taking your own bag shopping with you.

shop local: you can read up on the problems caused by supermarkets (see below). You'll need to do a bit of research into what local shops you have, if you have a local market day, veg box scheme or farmer's market. Farmer's markets are just markets on the continent. We only see them as something special because we've gone so far in the opposite direction. You can also check food miles, and try to buy local food that's in season. Plus why drink Californian or Australian wine when Europe produces so many fantastic wines? Shopping local may not be easy, as so many small shops have been put out of business by supermarkets, but try and see it as an adventure. It can be more expensive (but not always), but if you cut your overall consumption it should be doable, and as more people do it, prices will drop.

resources

- Ethical Consumer, ethicalconsumer.org
- Charlotte Mulvey, *the Good Shopping Guide*
- Andrew Simms, *Tescopoly*
- Joanna Blythman, *Shopped: the shocking power of British supermarkets*
- Ashton & Salter-Green, *the Toxic Consumer*
- Bill Statham, *What's Really in Your Basket?*
- for these books and more, plus links and information, see LILI's website

Contact us or visit our website to find out more about our message, networks, factsheets, books, courses, products, services, magazines, links, forum, events and volunteering on organic farms. You can also become a Friend of LILI, receive our e-newsletter, and help us change the world.

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