



# low-impact shopping



**Shop local:** this local shop provided locally-produced honey, free-range eggs, fruit, vegetables, bacon, sausages and firewood, until competition from an out-of-town superstore closed them down. There are strategies to preserve and re-introduce local shops, which are essential for strong, vibrant communities.

## what is it?

We have a choice in how or whether we spend our money. We can support products and companies we approve of and boycott products and companies we disapprove of. We all have to shop to get the things we need – unless you're a self-sufficient smallholder or a hunter-gatherer; but if so, I guess you're not reading this, and don't need this advice anyway. Good luck to you.

There are 3 main types of low-impact shopping:

**Shopping less:** linked with 'downshifting', i.e. earning and spending less - deciding that you just don't need much stuff, 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.

**Green / ethical shopping:** buying products that are recycled (inc. second-hand), biodegradable, organic, fair trade, and contain natural ingredients. But also boycotting products and companies associated with things such as environmental damage and pollution, sweat shops, toxic ingredients, animal cruelty, working with oppressive regimes and arms manufacturing. Nestlé have been targeted due to their spreading of disinformation about powdered milk vs breastfeeding in Africa; Amazon have been targeted too, for lots of reasons (see resources).

**Local shopping:** 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.

## what are the benefits?

**Shopping less:** means less production, land use, resource use and transport – all of which involve environmental damage to a certain degree. 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.

**Green / ethical shopping:** helps reduce pollution and environmental damage, and to improve the lives of exploited people. Boycotts really work – they force companies to 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.

**Local shopping:** independent grocers have fallen from over 120,000 in 1960 to less than 20,000 now, which means more money concentrated in just a few supermarkets, which overflows into the political system and corrupts it. Then there's also flying goods around the world, squeezing suppliers, concreting green belts, requiring customers to drive due to their out-of-town location etc. And yet they control 80% of the UK grocery trade, and want more. Shopping malls are full of corporate chains that look the same wherever they are – boring as well as damaging. Local shops spread money more evenly, provide more (and more satisfying) jobs, sell more locally-produced goods, and you can walk to them. Locally-produced goods don't have to travel so far to the shops, reducing transport and all the resource use and pollution associated with it. And local shops build community.



**Green / ethical shopping:** check the ingredients for nasties. Every purchase you make is a vote for or against certain products, companies, activities and/or ingredients – and it works – companies are very responsive to customer preferences.



**Shop less:** have a go at growing some of your own food – in your garden, in tubs or window boxes, or if you're really ambitious, you could apply for an allotment.

## what can I do?

**Shopping less:** think carefully about whether you actually need something. Can you do without it or find/make an alternative? Buying unnecessary eco-gadgets isn't green or low-impact, it's just consumerism. Don't believe advertising hype; don't follow fashion – it tries to make clothes more disposable to make more money; don't go food shopping when you're hungry; use libraries and freebie websites; buy durable goods – they may cost more, but you'll save money in the long run; re-use things like envelopes, glass jars etc.

You can obtain many things you need without shopping by doing-it-yourself – crafts, natural cleaners, bodycare products, soap, and food. Browse our topics to find something you fancy.

Boycott the Christmas shopping bonanza. 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 (how often do you get what you want anyway?) – spend time instead of money, make them something, give them a fruit tree or vegetable seeds etc.

**Green / ethical shopping:** do your homework - there are lots of different ratings, certification and labelling schemes; they change regularly, and some are more reliable than others. Do a bit of reading – e.g. *the Good Shopping Guide* or *Ethical Consumer* magazine and website, which contains reviews and ratings for thousands of

products and companies. They look at materials used and energy-efficiency as well.

Check the ingredients list. Avoid nasty ingredients like aspartame, chlorine, or ethyl-/butyl-/alkyl-anything. For a detailed look at the ingredients in your shopping, have a look at *What's Really in Your Basket*, which gives an easy red, amber and green code for health risks.

Go for organic, fair trade and recycled (including second-hand) if you can, and donate unwanted goods to second-hand shops. And try to avoid anything disposable – take your own bag shopping with you.

**Local shopping:** do a bit of research into what local shops you have, and if you have a local market day, veg box scheme or farmers' market (aka markets on the continent). Check food miles, and try to buy more 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 many small shops have been put out of business by supermarkets. It can also be more expensive (although not always), but if you cut your overall consumption it should be do-able, and as more people do it, prices will come down.

Buying from co-operatives is a good way to help build a new kind of economy, where people and community is more important than returns to shareholders. Also, the exchange medium you use for shopping is important too. It's debatable whether lasting change can be achieved within the current debt-based money system. Mutual credit provides an alternative. Expect mutual credit and other alternatives to bank money to gain traction in the coming years.

Noncoporate.org is a site where you can find non-corporate alternatives for the essentials of life.

## resources

- see [lowimpact.org/low-impact-shopping](http://lowimpact.org/low-impact-shopping) for more info, links, mags & books, including:
- Cait Flanders, *The Year of Less*
- Ruth Winter, *A Consumer's Dictionary of Food Additives*
- Bill Statham, *What's Really in Your Basket?*
- NonCorporate.org – non-corporate shopping
- [bit.ly/31rluvZ](http://bit.ly/31rluvZ) - reasons not to use amazon
- [adbusters.org](http://adbusters.org) – spoof ads, ridiculing corporates
- [ethicalconsumer.org](http://ethicalconsumer.org) – Ethical Consumer
- [thegoodshoppingguide.com](http://thegoodshoppingguide.com) – ethical shopping

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