



**ECO-FRIENDLY GUIDE  
TO SUSTAINABLE AND  
HEALTHY LIVING FOR A  
BETTER TOMORROW**



# ABSTRACT

Living eco-friendly means that every community, business, and individual must do their part by taking action to conserve energy, reduce waste, and protect all wildlife. Although an eco-friendly lifestyle may not come with the conveniences of everyday life, there are easy ways you can contribute to protecting our planet.

# INTRODUCTION

The term “eco-friendly” gets thrown around a lot — you see it on labels for everything from sandwich bags to sheets. Because it’s used so often, it can be hard to understand the true importance of eco-friendly products. And if you aren't sure what the word actually means, there's a greater risk of being misled by companies claiming to be conscious of the environment.

## I. What Does "Eco-Friendly" Actually Mean?



We’re passionate about all things sustainable at team regularly evaluates products for the Green Good Housekeeping Seal, an emblem earned based on a given product’s environmental impact, and hosts our Raise the Green Bar sustainability summit and Sustainable Innovation Awards annually. In short: We’re here to help you decode eco-friendly claims so you can make smarter decisions for your household and the environment.

### What is the definition of eco-friendly?

According to Merriam-Webster, the official **definition of eco-friendly is: “not environmentally harmful.”**

When it comes to products, that means everything from production to packaging needs to be considered safe for the environment. But the FTC has strict guidelines on eco-friendly claims, and here's where it gets tricky: The FTC Green Guides say that in order for a product to be properly labeled as "eco-friendly," the packaging must explain *why* it is environmentally responsible. Otherwise, based on how consumers actually use the product, it could, in fact, be harmful to the environment.

Truth be told, our environmental experts prefer to use the term "sustainable" rather than "eco-friendly." Why? When it comes to product production, everything has some sort of negative impact on the environment (think: water usage, energy and product waste, etc.), and that means there really aren't *any* products that fit the dictionary definition of eco-friendly.

On the other hand, when we call something sustainable, it means that a single attribute is good for the environment — not necessarily *everything* about the product. "Eco-friendly" is also considered a greenwashing term, given that it is regularly used in misleading marketing claims (keep reading for more on that topic).

### How to spot (and avoid) greenwashing

Greenwashing is a term used for when a company deceptively puts eco-friendly claims (think: "environmentally friendly," "sustainable" or "green") on its product packaging. In most cases, they are broad claims without any support to back them up. Here are a few examples of deceptive claims to watch out for, according to our environmental experts:



**A bottle of laundry detergent is labeled “free of phosphates.”** Since phosphates were removed from this type of product decades ago, any reputable detergent manufacturer has already phased out the ingredient. This is considered greenwashing because phosphate-free laundry detergents are already the norm.

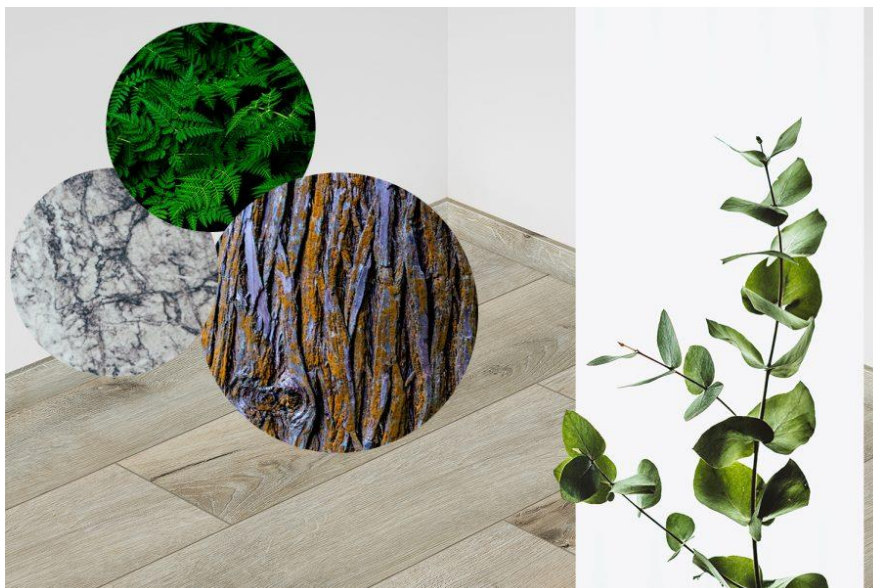
**A comforter or sheet set is labeled “all natural.”** While the product may be made with plant-based materials like bamboo, the raw materials go through a series of manufacturing processes that synthetically alters them. This claim is deceptive because “all-natural” suggests that the bedding came straight from nature. "There actually is no such thing as 'bamboo' fiber since it's really rayon," says Lexie Sachs, Executive Director of the GH Institute's Textiles Lab. "Plus, the process involves toxic chemicals that are dangerous to the workers, wildlife and environment where it's produced."

**A yoga mat is labeled "biodegradable" or "recyclable."** Because of the conditions at landfills, these materials won't break down quickly, and you can't recycle a yoga mat with curbside pickup or even bring them to a recycling center. These claims are considered greenwashing since they state an environmental benefit, but no meaningful benefit exists.

**A company displays an environmentally-friendly symbol that doesn't exist.** Watch out for fake eco-friendly symbols created by brands. Even if a product has a green logo that says "earth friendly," it means nothing if the company designed it themselves. You can find more examples of misleading environmental claims in the FTC Green Guides.

### How to find products that are *truly* eco-friendly

When it comes to products, there are ways to "make smart and educated decisions before you purchase something new," says Sabina Wizemann, a senior chemist at the GH Institute's Health, Beauty and Sustainability Lab. That's where our experts' rigorous testing comes in — they can help you find the products that actually work *and* are less harmful to the planet. "An effective product is less likely to be thrown away or replaced," which cuts down on waste, says Wizemann.



Beyond browsing our product reviews, look for products with established, third-party emblems like EcoCert Cosmos for organic cosmetics or Fair Trade Certified ingredients. Don't get greenwashed by products with false emblems and bold claims: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Below are the logos you can actually trust. They signify a certain aspect of the product is environmentally friendly:

### 1. Think circular.

A circular economy intends to stop waste from being created in the first place — a complete 180 from our current “take-make-waste” economy, which means we take materials from the Earth, create products from them and eventually trash them. Take a chip bag, for example. It's designed to be disposable: The packages typically cannot be reused, recycled or composted, so they end up as waste.

That's where brands with more sustainable product designs are stepping in, like Izzy Beauty with its zero-waste mascara, so you can use, refill and repeat by mailing your empty mascara tubes back to the company in reusable envelopes. We Are Uni's body care line also follows this closed-loop cycle by using 100% recyclable and reusable aluminum bottles that can be emptied, then shipped back to the brand in their original boxes.

### 2. Be mindful about how much you're buying.

Above all, only buy what you need. A product requires a lot of energy and resources before it even gets into your home. If you buy fewer products, you'll lessen the impact on the environment via a lower demand for its production process. If you find that you're stocking up on barely used products, it's time to reevaluate.

### 3. Buy second-hand textiles.

For clothing and bedding products, the best way to live sustainably is by reusing products. “Whether you're sharing clothes with friends or buying from a site like eBay or ThredUp, giving a garment new life is more eco-friendly than creating something new,” says Sachs. “That's still true even if an item has recycled or natural fibers, because of the amount of energy and water that's required in the textile production process.”

### 4. Opt for reusable items.

Remember to bring reusable bags for produce and pantry items when you go shopping to cut down on plastic waste. Switching to reusable sandwich bags (our favorites are made by Stasher) and beeswax food wraps will help replace hundreds of single-use plastic baggies that would eventually end up in landfills and oceans.

These days, you can even be conscious of your effect on the environment when using single-serve espresso and coffee pods: Nespresso recently took a step in the right direction by making fully recyclable capsules.

### 5. If you must buy new, buy recycled.

When shopping, look for sustainable fibers like Tencel and organic cotton. Tencel uses chemicals that are less toxic and less wasteful than those in similar fibers (like rayon), while organic cotton uses less water than conventional growing methods, explains Sachs. And avoid 'bamboo' fiber at all costs.

### 6. Use plant-based cleaners.

"Look for products that contain safer ingredients, like plant-based cleaners and those with EPA Safer Choice certifications," says Carolyn Forte, director of the GH Institute's Home Appliances and Cleaning Products Lab. Even though ingredient transparency isn't required by law yet, more and more companies (like Seventh Generation) are choosing to list all ingredients in a product. This encourages companies to use more renewable resources that are better for the environment. Plus, people simply like to know what ingredients are in their products and where they come from.

### 7. Opt for concentrated cleaning and health products.

The best option for the environment is cleaning concentrates that you can dilute with water in reusable containers, like Brandless Cleaning Concentrates. Forte says this helps eliminate excess packaging and waste.

### 8. Seek minimal packaging.

Avoid products with secondary packaging and films. Instead, look for items with minimal packaging made of recycled materials (like cardboard and aluminum instead of plastic). For example, bar soaps are usually a great option because they often have little packaging and can be completely used up. There are even toys (like the Green Toys Fire Truck) that are packaged with sustainable materials.

## **II. Living an Eco-Friendly Lifestyle: Tips for Everyday Habits**

As climate change continues to be a major issue and resource depletion becomes more pressing, many are looking for ways they can change their lives and, in turn, live an eco-friendly lifestyle and change the world. Luckily, there are several actions even one person can do to make a difference.





- Invest in renewable sources of energy, such as solar energy or wind power.
- Install a smart power strip.

## 2. Reduce, reuse, and recycle.

While land of abundance, it's also a land with a waste problem. In fact, the average produces around 5 pounds of trash each day. That's a lot of trash production!

So, how can you reduce waste and conserve our natural resources? There are several ways you can do just that. – And while a few take more thought and planning, such as building a selection of permanent-use products, others only take wanting to make a change:

- Buy items that don't have a lot of packaging, or opt for recyclable packaging when you can.
- Cut down on single-use items like plastic bottles, paper plates, and aluminum foil.
- Invest in reusable bags, water containers, and more.
- Recycle paper, plastics, glass, and metals whenever possible.
- Reuse plastic bags as much as you can before throwing them away.
- Buy only the things you really need and reduce impulse buys.
- Look for products made to last.
- Don't forget about e-waste – recycle electronics and batteries too!
- Choose refillable containers when you can.
- Cut down on resource-intensive items such as clothes, plastics, and processed foods.
- Participate in beach or park cleanups to help protect our environment.
- Consider donating old goods – someone else might be able to make use of them!
- Aim for furniture and textiles crafted from natural or recyclable materials whenever possible.
- Avoid buying cheap disposables that will just end up taking up space in a landfill later on.

## 3. Reduce your car usage.

Cars are a major source of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. You can reduce your carbon footprint and improve air quality by using public transportation, carpooling, walking, or biking.





When it's necessary to use a personal car, choose eco-friendly models, such as hybrid and electric cars. Drive efficiently, which not only helps the environment but also helps with fuel economy. Retrofit existing vehicles to use alternative fuel sources such as electric, natural gas, or hybrid and keep your vehicle in good condition.

#### 4. Be a conscious consumer.

You can also reduce your environmental footprint by purchasing items from companies that value sustainability and use renewable eco-friendly products and recyclable materials. When out shopping, look for products made from sustainable materials. Purchase fair trade items. Pay more attention to the items purchased and their production methods.

#### 5. Reduce the amount of food you waste.

There's an overproduction of food and an extreme amount of food waste going to landfills. To reduce this problem, be mindful of portion sizes, plan meals, and use food beyond its expiration date. Another way to reduce food waste is to compost food scraps to create nutrient-rich soil and donate unused items to food banks.

#### 6. Conserve your water usage.

Water is a precious resource, and conserving it can help reduce your environmental impact. Below are a few habits you can incorporate:

- Take shorter showers.

- Fix leaks promptly, which also has the benefit of keeping tap water costs lower.
- Use water-efficient appliances, low-flow toilets, and showerheads.
- Turn off the faucet when brushing your teeth.
- Be mindful when watering your foliage and use sensors and timers to maximize efficiency and minimize water waste.
- Install a rainwater harvesting system to conserve water and irrigate during dry seasons.

## 7. Use Eco-friendly Products

Many cleaning products have chemicals that can harm the environment and your health. For example, bleach is a common cleaning agent in many family homes, but is highly toxic. Floor polish, oven cleaners, air fresheners, aerosol spray – all common, yet toxic, household products.



Using natural cleaning products like white vinegar and baking soda, on the other hand, can reduce your environmental impact. As well, you can buy and support eco-friendly brands and products made from recycled materials. Also, avoid products made from rare or endangered species or those containing hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

## 8. Buy local products

Eating locally and organically grown produce can help reduce your carbon footprint. Local products mean less transportation used, lowering the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through the supply chain. Buying from your local farmer's market also helps create more

sustainable local markets. This supports local farmers who, in turn, put their income back into the local economy.

### 9. Grow your own food

Starting a fruit and vegetable garden can help reduce your carbon footprint by reducing the energy and resources needed to transport and package produce. It also provides you with fresh, healthy food.

### 10. Consume less meat and dairy

Livestock farming is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation. Plant-based food uses fewer resources and produces less carbon dioxide. In some cases, it can even be healthier. If a meatless lifestyle isn't in the cards for you, you can make small changes such as eating organic, local foods. Choose a day in the week to eat a plant-based meal, such as "Meatless Mondays".

### 11. Plant a tree

Tree planting can help absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and provide shade, which can help cool your home and reduce energy use. You'll be joining thousands of lumber companies – the number one contributor to reforestation.

### 12. Educate yourself and others

Stay informed about environmental issues and ways to reduce your impact. Share information with others, and encourage them to make sustainable choices. The more you know about the environment and the result of your actions, the more you can do to make a difference.

Read books, join environmental organizations, watch documentaries, take part in Earth Day events, volunteer regularly, and attend lectures on environmental issues.

Living a sustainable lifestyle takes conscious effort and dedication, but it's worth it. All it takes is a bit of planning and commitment, and you can start making a difference for the planet. Small changes in your life can have a big impact on the environment.

## **III. What Is Green Cleaning?**

The term "green cleaning" can have a lot of definitions, but the main goal of the process is to use cleaning solutions and methods that keep us and our environment healthy and free of toxins. Exposure to chemicals and toxins can potentially cause irreparable damage to our bodies, water, air, and ecosystem. Green cleaning can fall

mean using a green cleaning product or cleaning your home in a way that reduces waste that goes into landfills, for example.



If you're looking to sanitize, try green products that contain citric acid, peroxide, and lactic acid, all of which are effective sanitizers (though citric acid is less effective than peroxide).

## What Is Green Cleaning?

For some, green cleaning means that they only use substances like baking soda, vinegar, and lemons to clean the home surfaces. These are considered to be natural green cleaners. Some households may seek out manufactured green cleaning products that are healthy for the environment (some are green brands). Green cleaning products typically have the following characteristics:

- No phosphates
- No chlorine
- No artificial fragrances
- No artificial colors
- Biodegradable or recyclable packaging
- Organically grown ingredients using sustainable farming practices

Some green cleaning products may certify that their items are fair trade, meaning that the product meets certain environmental and labor standards by those who produced it. Other green cleaning products may not be free of additives or harmful chemicals—but they may donate a portion of their profits to environmental causes.

Consider that a product may be branded green, but it may have already impacted the planet or in unseen ways, such as when its raw materials were sourced, or when the product was manufactured, packaged, or distributed.

## How "Green" Are Green Cleaners?

To tell if a product is green, read the label. Not that different labeling programs classify cleaning products. The United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Design for the Environment program mandates that labels are put on products that meet EPA's criteria for chemicals. These products display the Design for the Environment (DfE) label. Others that are labeled as "low VOC" or "no VOC" means they have a lower concentration of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or none at all.



In recent years, there has been quite a bit of debate about the differences between green and traditional cleaners. There are three gray areas when it comes to comparing green and traditional cleaners:

- Labels with vague terms such as "environmentally friendly" and "non-toxic" are not regulated and potentially misleading which means that some green products may still have unhealthy ingredients in them.
- When it comes to effectively killing germs and stopping the spread of infection, for example, it is vital to have a product that cleans and disinfects. However, some people who turn to the EPA-registered disinfectant list, for example, may be wary of some green cleaners not on the list, and instead stick to trusted favorites such as bleach.
- Green cleaning items have also faced a backlash because they can cost more than traditional cleaning products.



The Cleaning Institute is vocal when it comes to educating people about which chemicals are in cleaning agents—and other groups have come out stating which substances to avoid. The EPA also keeps an easily accessible database of greener cleaning products in its Safer Choice program.

Whatever choices you make about your cleaning supplies and practices, there is a huge variety of environmentally friendly choices for green cleaning. This can also include steam cleaners, which do not rely on the use of any chemicals whatsoever to clean and sanitize surfaces. With a little research, you may be able to green up your household cleaning routine to create a healthier, safer environment.

## **IV. Effective Cleaning Solutions For Different Surfaces In Your Home**

Tackling stubborn stains from carpets, stuck food particles from the oven, hard water stains from faucets and brown stains from a toilet bowl require powerful cleaning solutions or products.

Unfortunately, cleaning products available on the market are laden with toxins and hazardous chemicals, such as Phthalates, Sulphates, Ammonia, Bleach, Triclosan, etc. Exposure to these chemicals regularly can lead to various health problems, such as, skin irritation, throat infection, eye infection, and other chronic respiratory diseases.



**Instead, you can prepare homemade cleaning solutions using vinegar, baking soda, and other eco-friendly ingredients to clean different surfaces, such as carpets, tiles, floors, hardwood areas, etc in your home.** Some of these ingredients are great alternatives to store-bought cleaners.

Here is the list of the best and most effective cleaning solutions for different surfaces around your home to help you achieve sparkling results:

## 1. An All-Purpose Cleaner : Vinegar & Dish Soap

If you want a versatile cleaning agent that can work on almost all surfaces, prepare this homemade solution.

You need one part of vinegar and four parts of warm water. Add two tablespoons of dishwashing soap. Mix this solution and remove stains from hard surfaces, glass, furniture, floor, etc.

Avoid using this solution on natural stone surfaces, such as marble, limestone, etc., as it erodes the finish.

**Tip:** Leave the solution 5-7 minutes before wiping it with a microfiber cloth.

## 2. DIY Shower Cleaner : Vinegar, Warm Water & Baking Soda

You can prepare two different cleaning solutions to keep your shower head, glass doors and walls clean and shiny.

For everyday cleaning, use diluted vinegar and remove soap residue, water stains and grime from the surface. All you need to do is to

- Fill a spray bottle with one part of vinegar and two parts of water.
- Spray down the shower after every bath and wipe it off. This will prevent the growth of mildew and mould.

For occasional cleaning or thorough scrubbing, you can prepare a more powerful cleaner by mixing:

- Two cups of baking soda and a few drops of liquid dish soap
- Use a brush to apply it over the affected surface and scrub it gently. Run the shower to get rid of soap scum, grime and grease.

Many professionals use this product when performing a thorough end of lease cleaning Canberra to help tenants secure full bond money.



### 3. Natural Wooden Surface Cleaner : Olive Oil, Vinegar & Essential Oil

You don't need to use abrasive cleaning products on wooden tables, chairs and other furniture around your home.

Mix  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup olive oil, one part of vinegar and a few drops of essential oil (lavender or tea tree) in a spray bottle.



Shake it well and spray the solution on wooden furniture. It will help you remove stubborn stains, grime, and water stains without causing any damage to its polish. Make sure you swipe the surface with a clean microfiber cloth.

### 4. Eco-Friendly Natural Stone Cleaner : Baking Soda And Water

You should not use cleaning products on marble, granite and limestone surfaces that contain acidic acid, such as vinegar, lemon, etc. Instead, use a neutral or alkaline cleaner, such as baking soda, to remove stains and grime from countertops, marble floors and walls.

- Mix a few drops of mild dishwashing liquid and a generous amount of baking soda. Add water to make a thick paste and apply it on the kitchen countertop and natural stone surfaces.
- Leave it for a few minutes to break down stubborn stains. Baking soda can also absorb bad odours and kill harmful germs and bacteria.
- Scrub and rinse the surface for sparkling results. Make sure you buff with a soft cloth as it won't leave scratches behind. You can also hire professional

end of lease cleaners Canberra for the detailed cleaning of the entire rented property. They use tried and tested products to spruce up different surfaces in the premises to help you pass the rental inspection.

### 5. All-Natural Tile & Grout Cleaner : Baking Soda & Hydrogen Peroxide

Instead of using vinegar, you can prepare a DIY tile and grout cleaner using baking soda and hydrogen peroxide. Both have antibacterial properties that can help you easily get rid of stains, grime, mould and mildew.

Combine  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of baking soda,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of hydrogen peroxide and half a teaspoon of dish soap. Use this paste over the stained tile or grout lines and let it sit for 5 minutes or until you scrub it with a sponge or an old toothbrush. Sweep up the excess solution. Rinse and dry the surface to prevent mould infestation.

Make sure you avoid mistakes when cleaning tile and grout, such as using abrasive cleaners, scrubbing too hard or over wetting the surface as it can cause damage.

### 6. Super-Effective Drain Cleaner : Vinegar & Baking Soda

Fix the clogged drain in your kitchen or bathroom using natural cleaning products. Add one cup of baking soda down the drain and add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of vinegar. This will produce a form of bubbles. Let it sit for half an hour to loosen stubborn food particles, grime, and stains.



Now, pour one glass of boiling water to rinse the clogged drain. You can use the same products to remove brown stains from toilet bowl.

### 7. Microwave Cleaning Solution: Lemon And Vinegar

All you need is the juice of one lemon in a microwave-safe bowl, along with vinegar and water. Keep it inside the appliance and let it microwave for three minutes.

Keep the doors closed to let the steam loosen the gunk, built-up grease, grime, and stuck food particles.

Wipe the interiors of your microwave with a damp cloth. Make sure you cover all nooks and crannies, glass doors and handle. Use the same solution to tackle stubborn stains.

If you are at the end of your tenancy, call the experts for a quality end of lease cleaning Canberra and get your full bond money without any dispute.

These are some of the best cleaning solutions you can use to remove stubborn stains and grime from different surfaces without causing indoor pollution or releasing toxic fumes. You can prepare these super-effective cleaning solutions at home and clean like a pro.

## V. Are ‘Sustainable’ House Cleaning Products Worth The Price?



What do you use to clean your house? Do you buy “natural” or “green” cleaning products? These products can have a direct impact on our well-being and on climate change and are a growing market.

The Harvard Business Review studied this issue recently, and reported in June 2019 that, “Products that had a sustainability claim on-pack accounted for 16.6% of the market in 2018, up from 14.3% in 2013, and delivered nearly \$114 billion in sales, up 29% from 2013. Most important, products marketed as sustainable grew 5.6 times faster than... their conventional counterparts.”

Since consumers are indeed reading labels and buying sustainable products, I wanted to find out what these products are made of, how they justify being called “natural” or “green” or “sustainable,” why they are more expensive than standard ones, and how well they clean (my own experience with them is sketchy).



Identify eco-friendly chemicals: Then, they figure out a plant-based way to accomplish the goal, working with their pre-screened suppliers and the Department of Agriculture standards for “bio-based.” She said they eliminate the chemicals they know they do *not* want to use, and look for biodegradable and nontoxic options, especially since these products are used in our homes and go into the water system.

How chemicals work together: I asked her about the fact that some of their products did not fare so well in the Working Group ratings of these products (ratings their own website invites you to check), including their multi-surface cleaner, which got a “D.” She explained that by saying the Working Group rates specific ingredients and some of them react differently when they are combined with certain other ingredients, and even with water. I can’t validate either side of this point.

Why prices for their sustainable products are higher: I pointed out that I had priced a few of their products online and one, for example, cost as much for one bottle as their conventional competitors charged for three. Gebhardt addressed this thorny issue by saying that ingredients from plants are more expensive and, therefore, their products are more expensive to manufacture than conventional ones made from synthetic ingredients. She added that consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products, which the market data bears out.



Packaging matters: Seventh Generation takes packaging very seriously, Gebhardt explained, saying they use “post-consumer recycled material” and focus on their packaging being recyclable as well. She says that’s hard to do, in part because “the recycling infrastructure as not kept pace with the growth of the consumer products industry, which is certainly what I have found in my own reporting on recycling too.

Innovations coming: I asked Gebhardt about what we consumers should watch for in these products, and she predicted the growth of “concentrates,” such as powders or liquids that we add water to when we use them as home and stronger cleaning power. She said concentrates will reduce packaging, which she said is also going through an evolution. “Plastic packaging is on its way out,” she explained, “and fragrances need to be lighter.”

“Science can do amazing things and answer questions for us,” she told me, “but then we can use that knowledge to do this in a responsible way or in an irresponsible way....Science is good to have. Then, what are you going to use it for and how do you do it responsibly?”

## **CONCLUSION**

Living an eco-friendly lifestyle is not rocket science and does not cost you much, all it requires of you is making small changes that will impact the environment. Whether you decide today to conserve water or take other means of transportation know that you are helping to build a healthier planet for the future generations

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