

CLIMATE CHANGE

EVERYDAY DILEMMAS – WHAT IS REALLY BEST FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

The parish council continues to encourage residents to take small steps to help reduce climate change – all individual actions by very many people add up to a powerful response. While the ultimate key to reducing the UK's carbon emissions remains firmly in the hands of government and big businesses, there is no doubt that there are small changes we can make to our everyday lives to reduce our own personal environmental impact.

Shower or Bath?

Taking a shower might seem inherently more efficient, but that really depends on your shower and your habits. Some power showers can pump out more water in five minutes than it would take to fill a bath. The average standard shower uses around twelve litres a minute. The average amount of water used to fill a bath is around eighty litres. That equates to a shower of about 6½ minutes. Eco shower heads reduce water use to around six litres a minute, meaning you could shower for more than 13 minutes and still not use the same amount of water as the bath. Then there is the heating to consider. Whether you choose a shower or bath, your carbon footprint will depend on whether you are using renewable energy or fossil fuels. If you are using an electric shower powered by renewable electricity, your impact will be considerably lowered compared to water heated by an oil boiler. So short showers, powered by renewables, are the way to go.

Which bags to use?

We all agree that using plastic bags once and throwing them away isn't good, but what about the alternatives? Long-life plastic bags: because of the extra plastic used, these bags need to be used a minimum of between 4 and 12 times (depending on the type of bag) to make them more environmentally friendly than their single-use counterparts. So, you really must reuse them to make it worthwhile. Paper bags: because they are heavier, more emissions are used to transport them. Plus, they must come from a reputable sustainable supply chain to avoid risks of deforestation. Cotton tote bags: an organic cotton bag must be used 149 times before its levels with the impact on climate change of a single-use plastic bag, an ordinary cotton bag needs using 52 times. When the impact of some methods of cotton production on ozone depletion are included, the reuse figure became very much higher, between 7,100 and 20,000 times. So, whatever you use, make sure that you re-use the bags as often as possible.

Non-dairy spread or butter?

Milk used in butter has high greenhouse gas emissions, plant-based spreads have lower climate, water, and land impacts than butter. But some plant spreads contain oils that are tied up in significant land-use change, such as palm oil. In a hypothetical worst-case scenario, the climate advantage of choosing a plant spread would be wiped out by the damage caused by the land-use change. If you're choosing a plant-based spread, check that any palm oil in it is certified sustainable. Some plant spreads use coconut oil instead, but coconut farming can also come with environmental baggage - choosing organic or Fairtrade can mitigate against some of these concerns.

Glass bottles, aluminium cans or plastic bottles?

Glass and recycled glass bottles have the most environmental impact, caused by the extraction of the composite materials used to make them, the energy needed to melt the materials down into glass, and the emissions caused by the melt. Aluminium can be endlessly recycled, so 100% recycled aluminium cans are the best option for containing pressurised beverages, Tetra Pak-style cartons are best for fruit juice, and milk cartons (that don't contain aluminium) are best for milk. Always recycle these containers. For carrying your own drinks around, a reusable bottle is always a good bet. A container designed to be refilled with water must be topped up only fifteen times to have a lower carbon impact than a single-use plastic one.

Alternative to cling film

Cling film can take decades to decompose. It is made of plastic, which is not naturally biodegradable, meaning it will sit in landfill releasing harmful chemicals. A great alternative to cling film is beeswax wrap, which came out on top out of all the different types of eco-wraps tested. Beeswax wraps are malleable, keep food fresher for longer and, most importantly, can be reused for up to a year, and longer if you re-wax yours. At the end of their life, you can chop them up and put them in your home compost to decompose naturally.