

[Home](#) ▶ [Articles](#) ▶ [Green Living, Ecoculture, Environment](#) ▶ [What the Amish Can Teach Us About Green Living](#)

PRINT EMAIL

## Sustainable Amish

### What the Amish Can Teach Us About Green Living

BY LINDA EGENES

My mother calls herself the original recycler. Having grown up in the depression years, she stored used tin foil in a giant ball, covered our presents in last year's discarded Christmas paper, and wrapped our school sandwiches in Pepperidge Farm whole wheat bread bags (a source of acute embarrassment for her 60s-era kids). My Dad lined his workshop with neat rows of Maxwell House coffee jars, the kind with bold white stars on red lids, which contained every loose washer, nut, bolt, nail, and piece of wire he had ever encountered in his life. When it came time to fix an appliance or a kid's bike, he had the missing piece at his fingertips. My parents didn't throw things away—they fixed them, mended them, and made do. It wasn't that they were poor—they simply believed a frugal, non-wasteful lifestyle was best way to raise their family and protect the environment.

If you have no special someone to snuggle up with on a chilly February night, then snuggle up with your laptop and check out some cool green websites and blogs that I've enjoyed visiting.

Thinking of this, I suddenly realized that going green to save our economy is not a radical new idea—it's traditional and retro.

Take the Amish. As a growing but still marginal segment of the rural population, they make their own clothes, grow their own food, live off the grid, and drive horse and buggies instead of cars. While most of us are never going to achieve a carbon footprint as low as theirs, we can adopt a few of their habits to help ourselves, the environment, and our economy.

#### Buy Fresh, Buy Local

I once asked an Amish friend of mine why the Amish drive horse and buggies. I expected him to give me the usual answer—that it had to do with their religious beliefs, to remain separate from the world by eschewing modern technology. He surprised me by saying, "If we drove out of town to shop, our local merchants would be out of a job."

While none of us are about to give up our cars, we can support our local restaurants, merchants, and farms. In a tough economy, your dollars spent at the corner market, the one-of-a-kind restaurant, and the local bookstore help prevent a chain reaction of small business failures, home foreclosures, and falling property values. In a town of 10,000 people, it's estimated that a dollar spent locally will circulate a dozen times. Buying local also makes green sense because it cuts down on carbon emissions. And venues such as farmer's markets bring fresher food at better value straight to the customer while supporting local farmers.

#### Live Within Your Means

I remember reading an article in the *Des Moines Register* at the height of the 1980s farm crisis. Small farms across the state were failing, mostly due to large debt-loads when farmers bought expensive new machinery and land at peak prices just before commodity prices fell. The article pointed out that the Amish, who did not incur debt and thus could weather economic downturns better, weren't at risk of losing their farms.

It's never too late to adopt a more realistic budget. A new fashion term cropping up is "frugalista," someone who makes a statement by finding bargains and getting creative with the sewing machine. Even in today's stagnant housing market, innovative new arrangements like house swaps are allowing people to unload homes that are too big to afford or to move up to a larger home to accommodate a growing family.

#### Take Joy in Simple Pleasures

Before I started visiting the Amish, I thought they must be a grave and dour people, judging from their dark, 1600s-era clothing and prim bonnets. What I found was a people who love to laugh, to tease, and to party even when they're working. Whenever there's a tough job to do—whether it's putting up 50 quarts of tomatoes or putting up a new barn—they invite their friends over for a "frolic"

that involves massive amounts of food and good old fashioned fun. And because they have less artificial types of entertainment at their disposal, the Amish have developed their human social skills to a high art. When they talk to you, they are truly present, free of interruptions by telephone, TV, or radio. The Amish enjoy simple pleasures—potluck meals, taking a walk in the woods, playing volleyball, baseball and other nonviolent sports, and family table games that involve a large dose of loud, raucous laughter.

No matter what your budget, you can take joy in simple yet fulfilling pastimes like starting a garden, preparing home-cooked meals for your family, or hiking in a nearby forest. Riding your bike for Saturday errands can burn calories, reduce your gas budget, and lead to new discoveries as you slow down and actually see the architecture and landscaping that were once a blur in your rearview mirror

Recently my husband, Tom, and I downsized to one car. It does require a little juggling when the weather is rainy, but Tom is enjoying a new form of exercise: walking to and from work. He says his daily walks have become favorite times of the day, and he wonders why he spent so many years driving. He also loves not having the extra car to service, which saves us both money and time.

"We're just one car away from being Amish," Tom likes to joke. "But no black hats yet."

Simple pleasures not only save the environment, they save your health and your pocketbook. And like the Amish, who knows, you might find that living simply is simply more fun.

*Linda Egenes is the author of Visits with the Amish: Impressions of the Plain Life, University of Iowa Press, 2009. A freelance writer and book author, Linda visited with her Old Order Amish neighbors in Southeast Iowa for 13 years before writing these very personal stories about her experiences inside the hidden world of the Amish. The book is available at 21st Century Books in Fairfield, Prairie Lights in Iowa City, and other local bookstores. Email Linda at [laegenes@gmail.com](mailto:laegenes@gmail.com).*

Visit the index for more articles on [green living](#).

Add this page to your favorite Social Bookmarking websites



Hits: 3428 [Email This](#) [Bookmark](#)

Comments (1)

[Subscribe to this comment's feed](#)

...

written by [Green Living Technologies](#), November 23, 2010

The "green" trend is sweeping the world, and is bigger than ever in Middle Tennessee since former Vice-President Al Gore won an Oscar for his global-warming documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," as well as a Nobel Prize. In Tennessee, which has one of the worst environmental records in the country, numerous non-profit organizations and businesses are jumping on the green bandwagon, trying to improve the environment and make the world better for future generations.

Votes: +0 vote up vote down report abuse

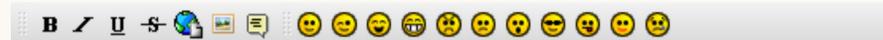
Write comment

**Name**

**Email**

**Website**

**Comment**



[smaller](#) | [bigger](#)

I have read and agree to the [Terms of Usage](#).

security image ...

**cntff**

Write the displayed characters

Add Comment

[HOME](#) | [ADVERTISING](#) | [CLASSIFIED ADS](#) | [ARTICLES](#) | [CALENDAR](#) | [FAIRFIELD](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [CONTACT](#) | [LOGIN](#) | [BLOG](#) | [LINKS](#)