

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Summer is almost here, but you don't have to sacrifice fun and freedom for sustainability and justice. Love has a way of guiding things towards balance without destroying good times. There are many summer adventures one can have (regardless of budget) while still making a difference.

If money is tight, there are plenty of free state parks and local natural areas or city parks to enjoy, and you might bring a picnic! Getting exercise is beneficial, too, so activities like hiking can be rewarding in multiple ways. Bicycling saves money and helps the planet and your muscles, too. Volunteering is also free, and gives the volunteer a boost of self-esteem while helping out others. Summer volunteering is particularly fun because children's camps and non-profit programs are happening everywhere.

If travel is your thing and money isn't an issue, you could consider volunteering abroad (possibly next summer or later this year) or become an "ecotourist." The International Ecotourism Society's motto is "uniting conservation, communities and sustainable travel." Ecotourist destinations should meet the following guidelines: minimize impact, create environmental and cultural awareness and respect, provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, include direct financial benefits for conservation goals as well as local people, and raise awareness of the host location's political, environmental, and social climate.

You might need to stay close to home but still want to spend time with others. If there's someone special in your life, try to make a difference for them and the planet this summer. Supporting restaurants that serve local, organic, healthy food options can leave a great impression on your date. Holding hands while taking a walk saves gas money and offers time together without paying for concert or movie tickets. There are myriad sustainable or ethical condom options out there, too!

Even if you're all alone, there are countless ways to make a difference with minimal effort when it's hot. Using less electricity, water and other utilities is one way. Sun tea is easy enough to make: just add your favorite tea bags to a clear container filled with water, put it in full sun, wait until the tea has steeped to your desired strength, pour it into a cup with ice and add lemon or other flavorings. It's best to choose a black tea when using this method, because the caffeine in black tea inhibits the growth of bacteria for a couple of hours (but no longer). To prevent harmful bacteria from growing in your sun tea, use good quality water, a sterilized container with easy-to-clean parts, and don't leave the tea sitting in the sun for more than two hours.

Or you might want to go all-out and build your own solar cooker (or purchase one online). They're great at reducing electricity consumption and keeping the kitchen cool. They can cook or bake anything you can make in a regular oven, and come in various sizes. These are just a few ideas for sustainable summer fun, but hundreds more exist. Whatever you decide to do, stay safe and never stop trying to enjoy life and make a difference!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.