



low-impact living



LILI

what is it?

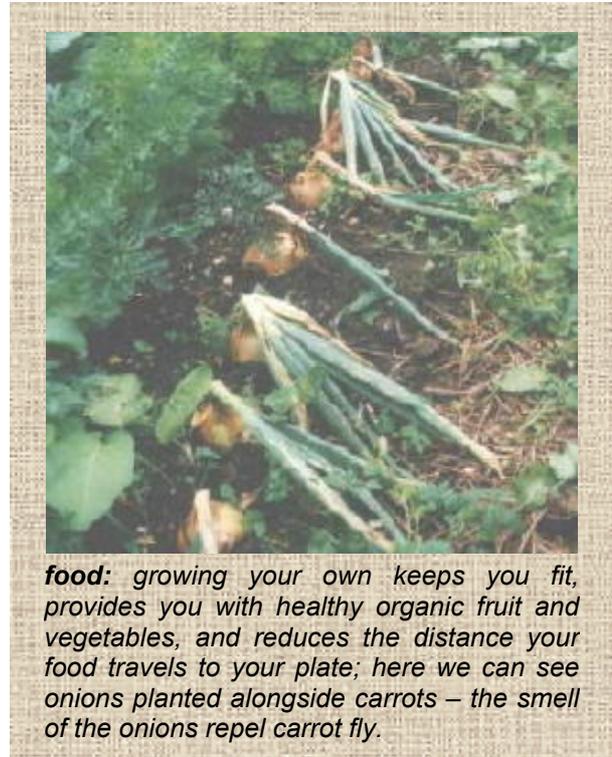
It is reducing human impact on the ecological systems of the planet, starting with one particular human – *you*. Human activity, especially since the industrial revolution, has dramatically affected our environment; for example, CO₂ levels in the atmosphere were 290 parts per million (ppm) in pre-industrial times, compared to 370 ppm now (a 25% increase). Another example: the UN Environment Program, in its Global Biodiversity Assessment, estimated that current extinction rates are around 1000 times the natural (pre-human) rate!

We don't have to wait for governments to do something about it (although they should), and why should corporations have any interest in making significant changes to a system they've done so well from? We can reduce our own impact by making relatively small changes in the way we live; if enough people do it, it can make a real difference.

Eventually we can all look to satisfy our needs from small-scale, local production based on renewable resources, which can actually provide more jobs and improve people's quality of life. It's hard though, when we live in a world where there is constant pressure from advertising and the media to consume big name brands.

what are the benefits?

Probably the most important reason for lowering our impact on ecological systems is to try and reduce the rate of extinctions of species. Peter Raven (PhD), President of the International



food: growing your own keeps you fit, provides you with healthy organic fruit and vegetables, and reduces the distance your food travels to your plate; here we can see onions planted alongside carrots – the smell of the onions repel carrot fly.

Botanical Congress, predicts a loss of 30-60% of all species of plants and animals during the second half of this century – if current trends continue. All species (and not just the big ones) need space to maintain viable breeding populations. Roads, mines, plantations, towns, industry, and more people every year take up more of the available space. Then we pollute their air and water, destroy the ozone layer, remove rainforest, erode the soil, over-fish, spray pesticides and change the climate.

A planet with reduced diversity is an unhealthy and unstable one. If our range of foods becomes too small, there is more risk of disease, which could wipe them out and put us at risk; we need wild diversity to create hybrids and new food species. We don't know how many species will have to become extinct before there is a global ecological catastrophe, but it's an enormous risk, with possible implications for human survival – and extinctions are irreversible.

Some scientists say we have nothing to worry about – for example Bjorn Lomborg, who received extensive coverage in *The Economist* recently; even if we take his optimistic figures seriously (and most scientists don't) they still indicate that we only have a few hundred years until all rainforest is gone, and that we have an extinction rate of around 8000 species a year!



housing: this house in Wiltshire is made from rammed earth; other natural materials include timber, straw-bales, lime, slate and stone. Natural materials can often be sourced locally, are biodegradable and healthier for people.



what can I do?

energy: make sure your home is well insulated, and that you have energy efficient appliances, and low-energy light bulbs. Then you can think about installing solar hot water, photovoltaics or even a wind turbine; or you can switch to a renewable energy supplier (see solar electricity factsheet).

transport: walk or cycle to work or school; use public transport; work from home; car share; use biodiesel.

housing: use eco-paints, lime, linseed oil putty and other environmentally friendly materials; if thinking of self-build, consider natural materials like straw-bales, wood or earth; join a community / housing co-op.

food: grow your own; eat less meat; buy organic; use farmers' markets and local suppliers (reduce food miles).

water: install water-saving facilities such as rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling, and a compost loo.

waste: have a compost heap; recycle; re-use or repair things instead of throwing them away.

consumerism: you have the ultimate power of deciding where or whether to spend your money. Don't believe the hype: research has shown that populations with an average income of around \$10,000 (eg Portugal) are happiest – basic needs are met, communities and traditions are intact, and there isn't an emphasis on fulfilment through making more money and buying more consumer goods.

'localization': join a LETS scheme; use your local farmers' market and credit union; reduce the distance that the things you buy travel, and keep money in the local economy; DIY is of course the most local of all.

resources

books

- Colin Hines, 2000, *Localization: a global manifesto*, Earthscan, London
- M Schuman, 1998, *Going Local: creating self-reliant communities in a global age*, Free Press, New York

- David Korten, 1995, *When Corporations Rule the World*, Earthscan, London
- Naomi Klein, 2000, *No Logo*, Flamingo, London
- Simon Fairlie, 1996, *Low Impact Development: planning and people in a sustainable countryside*, John Carpenter Publishing, Oxon
- John Seymour, *Self-Sufficiency* - bit of a bible, latest version 2003, Dorling Kindersley
- *Low-impact Living Manual* - £6.00 from LILI (see below)

web

- www.wri.org/press/mk_lomborg_09_things.html - World Resources Institute: extinction statistics and a debunk of Bjorn Lomborg by scientists (see 'what are the benefits?', above)
- www.abcul.org - UK credit unions
- www.bigbarn.co.uk - UK farmers' markets
- www.letslinkuk.org - UK LETS systems
- www.tlio.org.uk - The Land is Ours: promoting small-scale sustainable development
- www.permaculture.org.uk - The Permaculture Association: promoting sustainable living

courses

- Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales: (01654) 702400 - www.cat.org.uk
- Low-Impact Living Initiative (see below)



energy: switching to renewable energy such as wind and solar (above), solar hot water, wood stoves and biodiesel reduces emissions of CO₂ and other pollutants, and gives you control over your power supply.

Contact us or visit our website to find out more about our factsheets, manuals & books, residential weekend courses, presentations and shop. You can also become a 'Friend of LILI', and receive our biannual newsletter, discounts on our courses, and help us to make a difference.

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