

# Discussing sustainable sustainability on the Island

A column on the importance of protecting the planet and how to go about doing that.

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*Special to the Reporter*

Sustainability is a buzzword that gets thrown around a lot these days. We read about it in the news, it's printed on packaging, debated about on TV, and posted all over social media. Sustainability is a challenging concept to grasp because it is a topic one could study for years, and it holds a different and personal meaning to everyone.

This new column is written to help define what sustainability can mean for the average person, but also as a place to start the conversation without judgment. We will attempt

to give readers digestible information on ways that individuals can make steps toward a more sustainable lifestyle.

On its website ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)) the Environmental Protection Agency defines sustainability as "the ability to maintain or improve standards of living without damaging or depleting natural resources for present and future generations."

We have been dedicated advocates of the environment for more than 10 years for our city and schools. However, our efforts often feel dwarfed by the fact that one of us has five kids, we both drive large SUVs and we love to travel. Our carbon footprint, despite all our efforts

to conserve resources, is huge.

My mom always says, "Everyone is doing the best that they can," but are we really? While I don't believe we are all truly doing the best we can, I do believe we are doing what we can within the confines of each of our busy, scattered and complicated lives. The name of our column comes from the fact that sustainability is ineffective if it is not consistently observed, and that takes time, dedication and understanding.

The biggest step toward becoming more sustainable is through educating yourself. If you don't know the horrible effects of 'single-use plastics' on our oceans, why would you ever refuse a plastic straw and fork at a restaurant? If you didn't know you could compost in your yard waste bin, why would you do it?

Even if you do have all the information, it is so loud and overwhelming, most people don't know where to begin. The noise of what you can do to be more sustainable can drive people to shut down and

turn away from taking small steps. That is why we decided to start writing this column. Our hope is to lower the volume to the right level so you can hear it and do something about it.

We are reaching out to you, this incredible Mercer Island community, to raise awareness around sustainability and all facets that relate to it. We want you to start taking action. As a whole, our society needs to run to catch up, so there is no time to waste.

In the many weeks and months to come, we will be covering many topics that pertain to protecting our environment and all of its precious resources. We encourage you to contact us with questions or suggestions about topics you want to hear more about.

For our maiden voyage article, we will start at the tip of the iceberg of the simplest ways to walk into a sustainable life and that is through reducing your waste.

Waste reduction is a low-hanging fruit because everyone is in control of their own waste, and the

reduction of that waste can start right now. Many businesses on Mercer Island are making an effort to improve their waste reduction. Restaurants like Homegrown, New Seasons and Pagliacci's offer only compostable and recyclable to-go items. This is called zero waste, meaning nothing goes into the trash and everything can be either composted or recycled. Patronizing businesses that support these types of efforts sends the message to other business that this is a value of our community. Where you put your money is very powerful.

Mercer Island's trash hauler, Republic Services, promotes recycling and sends flyers throughout the year to educate our community about composting in your yard waste bin. Did you know that everything you eat can be composted including eggshells, chicken bones, coffee grinds, shellfish, pizza boxes and fruit rinds? It all goes into your yard waste bin with your landscape cuttings.

Even better, compost costs 50 percent less to pick up than trash, so you

can cut your trash bill in half if you start recycling and composting more.

Composting and recycling are the easiest ways you, as a resident, can have an immediate and fast-acting impact on our environment. Fact — when trash sits in our landfills, it breaks down under the intense heat of the sun and releases toxic greenhouse gases called methane. Methane is dozens of times more potent than just plain old CO2 gases released from our cars. This means that sorting your trash into compost and recycling is an incredibly important way to reduce your own carbon footprint. It will save you money while saving our planet.

When we talk too much about being 'environmental,' people start to roll their eyes like a teenager. If we say "Don't forget your cloth grocery bags," or "Can we carpool?" you can almost see the mental exhaustion. But you know what? Too bad. The time is now.

Please contact us with questions or suggestions for upcoming articles at [nancyweil@gmail.com](mailto:nancyweil@gmail.com).



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