

Closing the cycle

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In the last issue of *Veld & Flora* we spoke about ethical consumersim and how you can use your purchasing power to support sustainable solutions. In this issue we follow on from there with an easier solution which I like to call 'Closing the Cycle' otherwise known as recycling. Modern society is highly inefficient with resource utilization and there are some interesting statistics available to illustrate this. For example, did you know that 15 500 l of water is required to produce 1 kg of beef, while only 1000 l are used for 1 kg of grain; more than 50% of water in dams is lost to evaporation, and that only 50% of energy from coal is received at your power plug. Unbelievable, isn't it? What is even more incredible is that we have managed to live for such an extended time on this unsustainable model. If these numbers bother you as much as they do me, there are several ways you can help at home to close the resource waste gap.

Water: Save water by only using low flow shower heads (approximately 10 l/min compared to conventional flow rates of 15–25 l/min), dual flush toilets and use targeted watering



or drip irrigation for your plants rather than sprinklers. Water in the morning or night to avoid most of the water being lost to evaporation from the wind and sun. Become water independent by investing in rainwater collection, grey water systems and borehole water. This saves energy and the development of new infrastructure needed to collect, store, purify and transport more water to an increasing urban population using a central municipal system.

Food: Recycle your food waste using a compost heap, vermiculture or bokashi bins and enjoy the rewards of the compost and natural liquid fertilizer for your vegetable patch, herb garden and indigenous garden. In this way, you reduce the carbon footprint associated with your food not only through disposal, but also those associated with large scale agriculture and transportation of the food. We all know that harvesting food from our garden is very satisfying.

Oil: Donate or sell your used cooking oil to make biodiesel. The easiest is to drop it off at your nearest participating restaurant which will send it off to a biodiesel facility in your area. It also means that your drains don't get clogged.

Re-use plastic/tin/paper/glass/building material in the kitchen, garden or as art for those school projects.

Sewage: Install an anaerobic digester for your sewage waste and produce your own cooking gas.

Electronics: Find out where your nearest e-waste recycling depot is for used CDs, old cables and broken appliances.

Buy recycled goods which contain no or minimal amounts of virgin material that has been mined or harvested. The number of available recycled goods is steadily increasing in South African shops.

Source local: Purchase locally produced goods where available as these have had to travel smaller distances, saving fuel, and further support local development and jobs.

By implementing these measures, you can help close the cycle. Further to increasing efficiency, these actions also save other natural resources, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help you adapt to the effects of climate change and save you time and money as you re-use and become energy, water and food independent. Let the recycling mantra 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' become part of your life.

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