

Living sustainably

Heather Rising



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Living Sustainably

Living for the Future

Earth is the only known planet with lush forests, sparkling rivers, deep oceans and air to breathe. However, human activities have increased harmful **greenhouse gases** by burning coal, oil and gas. These gases pollute the air and contribute to warmer temperatures. Higher temperatures on Earth are melting polar **ice caps** and causing extreme weather.

In 2015, nearly every country in the world supported what was called the “Paris Agreement”. These countries agreed to a **net-zero** release of greenhouse gases by 2050, to prevent world temperatures from increasing even more. To achieve this goal, people all over the world will need to live more sustainably.



A photograph of two young students in a school garden. They are wearing yellow polo shirts and green bucket hats. They are holding white watering cans and watering a large patch of green leafy vegetables. In the background, there is a wooden fence and trees.

Students at a sustainable school help out by watering the vegetable garden.

Living sustainably means living in ways that do not harm the environment. Sustainable living can allow people to grow up, go to school or work, enjoy their free time and visit places in the world while leaving the planet unharmed for the future.

The decade between 2011 and 2020 was the warmest on record. Greenhouse gases are the main cause. These gases surround Earth and prevent the Sun's heat from escaping back into space.

Sustainable Schools

Building Sustainable Schools

Sustainable schools have been built all over the world, constructed with local materials. This means large amounts of greenhouse gases don't need to be released to transport the materials a long distance. The materials used to build sustainable schools are also renewable.

In Indonesia, the school building and furniture at The Green School have been constructed from locally grown bamboo. Bamboo grows in as little as three years, making it quick to replace and a good sustainable resource.

A large, open-plan interior space of a school building constructed entirely from bamboo. The structure features a high, vaulted ceiling and multiple levels of balconies, all supported by thick bamboo poles. The floor is made of bamboo planks. In the foreground, there are wooden tables and chairs. In the background, there are more tables and chairs, and a person is sitting on a bench. The space is well-lit by natural light coming through the open sides of the building.

The Green School in Indonesia is built from renewable bamboo.

To reduce the need for electric lights, designers of sustainable schools take advantage of natural lighting using **skylights** and **insulated** windows. Another way to make a school more sustainable is to install a “green roof”. This type of roof has a layer of living plants which acts as insulation, reducing the power needed to heat or cool the building. Covering the roof in native plants also provides habitat for insects and birds, and absorbs rainwater, reducing the risk of floods.



A green roof is a layer of living plants on the roof of a building.

One primary school in Kenya has a roof that collects rainwater and directs it to an underground storage tank. The water is used to supply the school vegetable gardens, which provide food for students and a habitat for other living things.



Students take care of their school vegetable garden.

Sustainable School Grounds

Many other schools are making changes to contribute positively to the environment and become more sustainable. Some schools have garden boxes to grow trees or vegetables on the school ground.

One primary school in Melbourne, Australia, hung planter boxes around their covered sports area. The plants clean the air and provide extra shade to keep students cool.



Planter boxes hung in this covered school sports area help to clean the air.

Methane is a greenhouse gas that is produced when **organic** waste decomposes, or breaks down. More methane is produced when there is less oxygen available while waste is decomposing, such as in a landfill.

At many schools, student clubs maintain composters to break down vegetable and fruit scraps from snacks and lunches. This keeps the waste out of landfills, reducing methane **emissions**, and the **composted** nutrients can also be added to school gardens.



Students tip food waste into their school's composter.