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WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T BUY LOVE? PAGE 58

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earth

Angels

Living well and taking care of our planet do not have to be stressful or expensive, and both are very necessary. Most of us probably do some things without even realizing that our choices are “green.” To show you just how easy it really is, we got people just like you to share how they have incorporated green living into their everyday lives. So read on, get inspired and join the eco-revolution!

Words by E. Monique Johnson

Growing up, many of our families lived green lifestyles and we didn't even know it. Today, many of us take what we knew as children (raise your hand if you've ever brushed your teeth with baking soda and/or peroxide or watched your mother add borax to a load of clothes) and devise ways, large and small, to make the world a better place.

People like Agatha Achindu make it easy for the masses. A native of Nigeria and Cameroon, Achindu, 42, has been in the United States since 1990. For her, living organically was ingrained from birth. Her 5-year-old son, however was born and is growing up here, and that comes with exposure to sodas, potato chips, cookies and a host of other processed foods—all things Achindu did not want for him. So the former software company owner/manager left her lucrative job and started Yummy Spoonfuls.

“For people who know me, Yummy Spoonfuls is a natural extension of who I am,” says the Marietta, Ga., resident. “I had started teaching other moms how to make baby food for their children and it got to the point where I had about 300 moms and I was not charging anybody anything because it

was just fun. But at the end of the day, people would come back and say, ‘Oh, Agatha, can you just make it for us, I don't have time? When I make it my baby doesn't like it...’ I realized this could be a brainchild.”

That brainchild evolved into a successful frozen baby food company sold in several stores (including Whole Foods and Dean & DeLuca), but Achindu hasn't forgotten how she got started and works to keep wholesome foods accessible for all children. “I still go about doing these workshops because my mindset is the people who can buy, buy, and people who cannot, I'll teach them because kids are honestly entitled to a healthy meal,” she says. “There really is no excuse for our babies eating food that's older than them. I mean, that's what jar foods are, they have a two-year shelf life, and that's too long.”

She also acknowledges that going green can be overwhelming and daunting. “When I talk to other moms, I try to be very conscious, because we are all so excited about green,” says Achindu, who suggests taking things slow. “There is a list the USDA publishes every year (also on yummyspoonfuls.com) and it is the 12 most highly contaminated foods, so even if you can't go organic for

JOHNSON, YUMMY SPOONFULS; COURTESY OF SUBJECT

everything, [for] those things in particular it is really important.”

Achindu also says to be strategic. “Buy in season. In-season items are really cheap (visit eatwellguide.org or sustainable.org for guides in-season). The whole green thing makes me plan for everything—what I eat, the skin products that I use. I pay attention to details. I do whatever I can to be kind to Mother Nature and I train my kids to have respect for the planet.”

Canyon Country, Calif., dad and Yahoo! music editor Billy Johnson Jr. fell into a greener lifestyle when breaking his ankle two years ago forced him to carpool because he couldn’t drive (“It has been great because I have cut my gas costs by 50 percent”), but the 40-year-old is now training his kids to respect the planet early.

“I have 7-year-old twins and they are totally into recycling,” says Johnson, who admits that he was also influenced to go green in part because there was so much awareness, and also because of how easy it was to do.

His son Reese’s and daughter Bailey’s involvement in the Santa Clarita Valley/Antelope Valley Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., also helped jump-start the family’s green living. “My wife, Ebony Macon Johnson, is the fundraising and community service chair [of their Jack and Jill chapter],” he says. “The national organization, Jack and Jill of America Foundation, Inc., asked the children in the local chapters to raise money to donate money to help buy children’s books for libraries in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. They suggested recycling as one of the ways to raise money.

“It took us about two and a half months to collect two big trash bags of aluminum cans and plastic bottles. There is a recycling center in the same shopping plaza



Yummy Spoonfuls Carrots & Peas

as my barbershop. So, after getting a haircut one Sunday afternoon, Reese and I went to cash in our recyclables. It was my first time recycling since I was a kid taking a bag full of soda bottles to the store to get candy money.”

Though they only made about \$18, Johnson says both he and his son felt good about trying to make a difference.

For many people, it is all about making a difference. Clayton County, Ga., first grade teacher Leah Cooper expanded upon a school-wide paper recycling program and introduced Terracycle to her school after seeing it on the *Oprah* show.

Though not everyone in the school participates on the same level, Cooper is supported by her coworkers and students’ parents. “Parents will send stuff from home. I’ll go into the office and there’ll be stuff in my box,” she says. “Some of the teachers will have their kids bring me their chip bags and stuff, and one of our para-pros (teacher’s aides) is the school’s representative for the county’s green initiative, so she is just as gung-ho as me. She has a recycling tree in the hallway that gives examples of the things we recycle at the school and she distributes handouts with tips on how they can recycle at home for the students to take home.”

Cooper says she is especially inspired by her students. “My kids bring their milk bottles to the room after lunch and we rinse them out and I drop them off to the recycling place down the street from the school on my way home,” she says with a laugh. “Well, the lunch lady stopped them from bringing the milk containers out of the lunch room. I went and explained to her what we were doing

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Billy Johnson Jr. and son, Reese

“People who can buy, buy, and people who cannot, I’ll teach them because kids are entitled to a healthy meal. There really is no excuse for our babies eating food that’s older than them.”



and she said 'ok,' but then she did it again. So when my kids get back to the room, they're telling me what happened, then they unload milk bottles from under their shirts and out of their pockets where they were hidden, because they are just that passionate about it!"

It's not just the students at her majority black, primarily free-lunch school, either. Her 4-year-old son is nicknamed the Cycle King. "He gets extra excited about it. He likes to take the bottles and jars to the recycle bins in the garage," says the 30-year-old mother of two, adding that even his preschool teacher is in on the action. "His teacher asks us to bring her our empty formula cans and baby food jars (from her infant son) because she uses them in class for projects. So when I started Terracycle, I sent Capri Suns to his class for a class party and asked her to send the empty pouches back home with him that one time. She did, and now she collects them and sends them home with him all the time—and chip bags, too!"

Terracycle's Vice President of Media Relations, Albe Zakes, says that the relatively young company (its current incarnation started in 2007) is wholly committed to helping us all reduce our negative impact on the Earth, and Cooper's efforts, along with those of 60,000 other organizations, are what keep them going.

"We really want to provide opportunities to recycle things that would otherwise be going to landfills," says Zakes. Drink pouches, candy, cookie and chip wrapper programs are among their most popular, but Terracycle offers more than 20 brigades (everything from disposable diaper packaging, beauty and personal care tube packaging to margarine/spread tubs and disposable tape holders) sponsored by favorite brands such as Stonyfield Farms, Frito Lay, Nabisco, Huggies, Aveeno and Capri Sun. But, says Zakes, "In all of our programs, we accept material regardless of brand."

The company introduces a new, full-curriculum program (developed with the help of the Education Association and Scholastic) for the new school year, will distribute an expected \$2 million to partner organizations this year and will launch its largest retail initiative this month with more than 50 retail products in every Walmart across the nation.

Now, with the largest retailer in the world in the "green" business, living an eco-friendly, sustainable lifestyle is more affordable—and who can argue with that? **U**



Terracycle products

Multitalented

Five surprising (and easy) eco-friendly tips



Vodka isn't just for drinking—you can also use it to freshen clothes (spot test before using it!), repel insects and kill mold.



Cold-water laundry washes are just as effective as hot washes and are better for maintaining fabrics and colors (not to mention they use 90 percent less energy than a hot-water wash). Have greasy stains or concerns about whites being bright? Add a natural booster like borax to the wash and wash in warm water (you'll still use 50 percent less energy than a hot wash).



Vinegar and baking soda are probably in your kitchens right now—use them! They have myriad uses, including declogging drains, general cleaning and disinfecting, brushing your teeth, cleaning grout, relieving minor aches, shining windows and fixtures and more.



Besides filling you up at breakfast, oatmeal can also be used for making molding clay, treating dry skin and acne, creating a soothing bath soak and absorbing odors.



And olive oil is great for cooking, but did you know it was also good for squeaky doors, curing earaches and easing snoring (with a few quick sips)? For more eco-tips visit thedailygreen.com or dailycotips.com —E.M.J.