New Year's Resolutions For a More Simplified and Peaceful Life

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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To put behind us the "con$umerist relationship" that we have with nature, we can do something new that may be radically traditional. Judge for yourself whether if done widely, it might inspire to move us faster toward a paradigm of actual sustainability. Maybe it's something like this new set of alternative New Year's resolutions. Some of them happen to be gift options too. Let the fun and peaceful rebellion begin, starting with a solstice party.

Humans did evolve by spending many a millennium in "the Garden" -- pre-civilized living without the antithesis of nature, i.e., the city. It is obvious we now need to bring back our intimate relationship with the Earth before it is too late. It this all sounds too familiar or boring, what about being a little subversive, eh? It's simple:

Turns out that some simple practices, if writ large, can deal a blow to a polluting, corrupt industry and even the entire "Waste Economy." Some of these practices or resolutions can also save money, allowing us to spend more time in garden environments than workplaces. Growing our food, including having chicken coops, come to mind -- especially when combined with sharing and bartering.

Admitting that we're captive of (and captivated by) myriad manufactured products and artificial environments, what is the alternative to all this? Is it merely to behave a little less consumerist, by making "greener" purchases and riding our bicycles a lot more? Those habits are part of our improved direction, but a massive trend has not reared up and spread like wildfire. The oft-published "Things You Can Do" has been nifty for some, but largely unheeded as a message for the masses.

To reach people not yet fully engaged, it might make the most sense to first get into a more radical spirit. To start with, we can do something now and daily that the best of us often forget. It lays a little foundation for the 15 resolution options that follow.

Focus quietly on plant life sprouting up right near us. Wondrous that it still comes up everywhere to this day, despite the concrete and asphalt covering the soil, and climate chaos kicking in. We can regularly avail ourselves of the opportunity to get closer to the green, vibrant natural world that gives us life. This is where we get our oxygen, food, beautiful scenery, animal "friends," and protection from flooding. In calmly getting closer to other species we may mentally shut out the artificial world, as a natural meditation. Receding during that moment from our awareness are the manufactured artifacts and toxic manmade systems using up nonrenewable, severely limited resources. The mere presence of the materials and objects of the modern built environment is oppressive, and this is just one aspect of their probably enslaving us more than freeing us over time.

Our 15 resolutions to make for this new year are a bit unusual for many in the U.S. But they are easy, and have a common thread of efficiency and nurturing. They're proactive and fun. The 15 actions aren't meant to replace but to enhance the well-publicized efforts to lessen consumption and be healthier. We "all" know about basics that have mostly stalled: recycling, composting, patronizing farmers markets, not having more than two children, etc.

• Token Depaving: Break or pull up just a small piece of pavement or road-tarmac. Expose the soil and put something living there to take root. The space could be as modest as a few square feet. In so doing we call forth the Life Force we are all connected to. We speed up the inevitable breakdown of the artificial. Water will find its way into this newly created and grateful patch of nature, stopping a bit of runoff that carries toxins from cars and plastics to our bodies of water. If you do it, tell others what you did, and show people your work. Thus, group depaving of a whole driveway or parking lot just might come about.

• Tell the future of transportation: When anyone mentions a planned or desired trip, whether by car or jet plane, say "Well, you might find that if you wait very long there might not be today's ample petroleum for driving (or flying). Can you picture having to bicycle or ride a horse or take a sailing voyage some day, baring some unforeseen technofix?" The idea is not to get people to take the trip sooner rather than later, but to get the conversation going on energy. A debate among the educated is that while jet plane trips are to be avoided on environmental grounds, there is also much good done by globetrotters needed for teaching such skills as permaculture.

• Tip your hat to defenders of nature: Sign a petition to save a watershed from water-privatization, or to stop "development" of farmland or wildlife habitat. Make a note from news sources about efforts to halt mountain-top removal for coal mining. Then tell others about the campaigns to defend Mother Nature. Check into he good deeds of Earth First! groups or Sea Shepherd warriors, to name just two groups protecting nature for us all.

• Reject the product's packaging: When buying any item, perhaps at a "drug store" -- selling far more consumer products than pharmaceuticals from the petroleum refineries -- remove the plastic and paper packaging at the check-out counter on the spot. Then ask the clerk to recycle it. Walk off and bike away with your bare purchase in a non-petroleum bag or in your backpack.

• Soak or sprout a meal of grains or beans: Take five minutes to pour out from your brown paper bag of bulk-section dried foods: organic whole oats perhaps, or mung beans, as the next day's meal. Rinse the grain or beans to clean them, and soak in clean, filtered (or pristine spring) water. This is a tasty example of planning ahead, insuring that you have most healthful food the next day. It enables you to also save money and not be tempted to go out to a restaurant.

• Get used to night: Use little or no lighting at night in most of your dwelling. There's no need to illuminate more than one or two rooms. We thus cut down on additional warming of the globe with fossil fuels, in either a direct or indirect way. Even renewable energy systems rely on the petroleum infrastructure to an extent. Ideally, we arise when dawn breaks, and we go to bed when it's dark or not long after.

• Pass on the car for entertainment: Many of us feel the need to drive across town, or to accept a ride, to go to a party or a show. But if it can't be done via bicycle, walking or public transport, just stay home or do something very local instead. Enjoy your home, or that of a neighbor, for socializing or having a meeting about depaving!

• Suggest fruit or nut trees: Ornamental shrubs and trees are beautiful, and when native are particularly excellent for shade, homes for birds, and reducing the urban heat island effect. But yards and parks, and even street foliage, can be devoted to fruit and nut trees. This provides fresh food to pick, for free, that usually tastes better than even the organic health-food store's products. Plant guerilla style if necessary.

• Extol the gazing upon of the sea or land: Instead of consistently firing up the TV or computer for electronic entertainment, take a walk or bike ride to the nearest park or overlook of the ocean, river or lake. Every day if you can. Do so alone or with a friend or family member, and enjoy moonlight or the sound of the breeze. You'll get back home refreshed and happier.

• Talk to family: The U.S. epitomizes the isolated consuming & rat-race routine that takes us away from bringing up our own children. We also neglect other relatives who may be up to something interesting and fun. They might be struggling, and need a visit or a letter from you. Extend your family and grow solidarity by renewing connection with relatives near or far.

• Enjoy repairing your clothes: This takes a little time, but we can easily reinforce the heel of fraying socks, or do some other kind of mending such as securing a loose button. This saves us money, prevents more purchases, and offers some meditative, easy work while we concentrate on the needle and thread. Listen to music at the same time, or talk with someone. Making clothes such as knitting a cap is wonderful, but it means taking more time to learn a craft.

• Hit the thrift stores and yard sales, or fashion a gift: If you must buy something, enjoy finding inexpensive used items at a thrift store or yard sale. Purchasing Christmas gifts at such places is cheap, but it's even cheaper and personable to draw a picture or make some music as a present. Or create a poem. The question of whether something we buy is local or not can be crucial. A used car as opposed to a new car, for example, is not only cheaper; it keeps much money in the local community and hits the distant, unaccountable corporations where it hurts.

• Fast one day a month on water: Rest your digestive system. A little discipline gives health benefits. Put your mind into a slightly more meditative state. Find yourself explaining to others why you deliberately miss a few meals once a month or week, thereby educating. Fasting "hits the re-set button" to reduce allergy symptoms, for example. Instead of popping a pill, self-heal and reduce constant (over)eating. A 24-hour fast presents no risk of strain from having to go to work. (Longer fasts require much rest, very careful resumption of eating, smaller quantities, unprocessed foods, and avoiding complex combinations.)

• Be your artist self: So many people say they are not talented, because they have not learned a musical instrument or taken painting lessons. But humans share the innate ability to create art in a multitude of ways, whether instructed or self-taught. When one "cannot play the piano" or other instrument, perhaps he or she has not tried drumming or daring to sing. If you find yourself enjoying your favorite music, get up and do some kind of dancing even if by yourself.

• Write out your thoughts and feelings: Hand-write a letter to a friend, family member, or make a journal entry. Your thoughts and feelings will magically become more clear on paper as they expand onto the page. Hand-writing a letter or using a manual typewriter yields a more cohesive flow, than when entering text into a machine that can be manipulated, moved and taken from elsewhere. Thoughtful communication with others combined with self-expression results in more positive decisions than silently brooding. Write a book, or review one, and keep passing it on. That's what everyone everywhere wants: to pass something on, such as our very species on a livable world.

The above alternative New Year's resolutions are modest but significant departures from the status quo of mediocrity. They have potential for popularization, if very slight initially. They are not new at all, but do free us momentarily from the uncertain trajectory we are on as a dysfunctional society. They may get us thinking about a little more self-reliance and liberation. They can foster growing resistance to the corporate economy, and help counter the tide of too many humans buying and using too much stuff as alienated, powerless consumers. Above all, do your own thing and enjoy! Please let us know in the Comment section below how the 15 "practices of subversion" work in your life and improve community.



