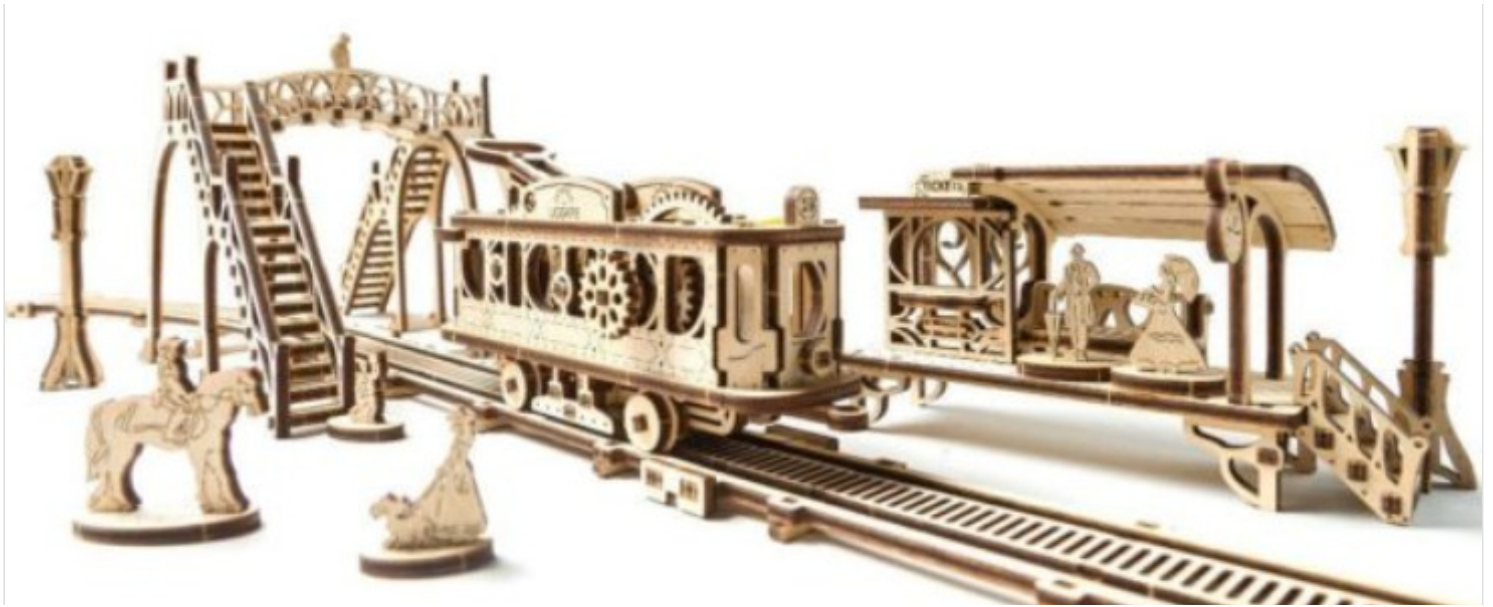


Monday, December 10 2018, 8:30 AM

Top Eco-Toy Brands

Gemma Alexander | December 10, 2018

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The toy industry is much better known for shilling cheap plastics and toxic chemicals than for transparency and high environmental standards.

The green toy market offers myriad FSC-certified wooden blocks (a must for every toy box, to be sure), but sourcing other green play options can be a challenge at the best of times. During the holiday season it's even harder than usual for parents to resist the siren's call to buy this year's hottest toy. Kids don't always understand why you even want to try. We've rounded up a few companies making toys that kids will love and parents can feel good about.

If you're wondering why this list omits stalwarts Green Toys and Plan Toys, it's because we already covered them in last year's eco-toy guide.

LEGO

About 90 percent of all toys on the market are made of plastic, an environmentalist's least favorite material. You wouldn't expect a toy company whose primary product is a plastic brick to make a list of eco-toys, but more than any other major toy company, Danish company LEGO is taking significant steps towards sustainability. Where Green Toys uses recycled plastic, LEGO is developing new, petroleum-

free plastics made from plants.

So far, only one LEGO product uses bioplastics, but if they develop a suitable substitute for their bricks, it could revolutionize the entire industry. In the meantime, LEGO's manufacturing facility operates entirely on renewable wind energy and more than half of their packaging is recyclable and FSC-certified.

Featured toy: Vesta Wind Turbine



VESTAS WIND TURBINE. IMAGE: LEGO

This detailed, motorized LEGO model of a traditional wind turbine features a new-for-January 2019 spruce tree, manufactured from sustainably sourced plant-based plastic. It's an expensive, challenging kit with over 800 pieces that the whole family could work on together.

Ages: 12+

Cost: \$200

Caaoch

Children deserve toys that don't degrade the environment they will live in as adults, but for babies, the need is more immediate. It's an infuriating irony for new parents that the humans most vulnerable to chemical exposures are offered phthalate-laden plastics to play with and chew on. Enter Caaoch, a Vancouver, Canada-based line of 100 percent pure natural rubber toys and teethers that are safe and nontoxic. All Caaoch toys are certified PBA-, phthalate-, and PVC-free; bath toys are hermetically sealed to avoid mold growth; and their natural, biodegradable rubber is sourced from farms in Malaysia.

Featured toy: Sola the Goat





SOLA THE GOAT TEETHING TOY. IMAGE: CAAOCHO

Super cute, all-natural rubber goat Sola was a 2016 NCW Eco Excellence award winner. She is the perfect size for baby hands and has just the right hardness and texture for a good teething chew. She even squeaks when squeezed.

Ages: All ages

Cost: \$19 on Amazon

UGears

This crowd-funded Ukrainian start-up makes unique 3D puzzles and self-propelled mechanical models with moving components like gears and pendulums that contribute to a steampunk aesthetic. Ranging from the mundane tractor to the dramatic theater and with a few more whimsical offerings, the only materials used in UGears functional model kits is plywood and rubber bands. There are no additional glues or fasteners involved. The kits are produced in Europe using plywood from FSC-certified sources.

Featured toy: V-Express Steam Train with Tender

Ugears V-Express Steam Train with Tender. Exclusively on...

This replica steam train is an almost exact model — in wood — of a real locomotive. Due to its complexity, this STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) toy is expected to take 10 or more hours to assemble. Once completed, the train can travel up to 13 feet on one winding.

Ages: 14+

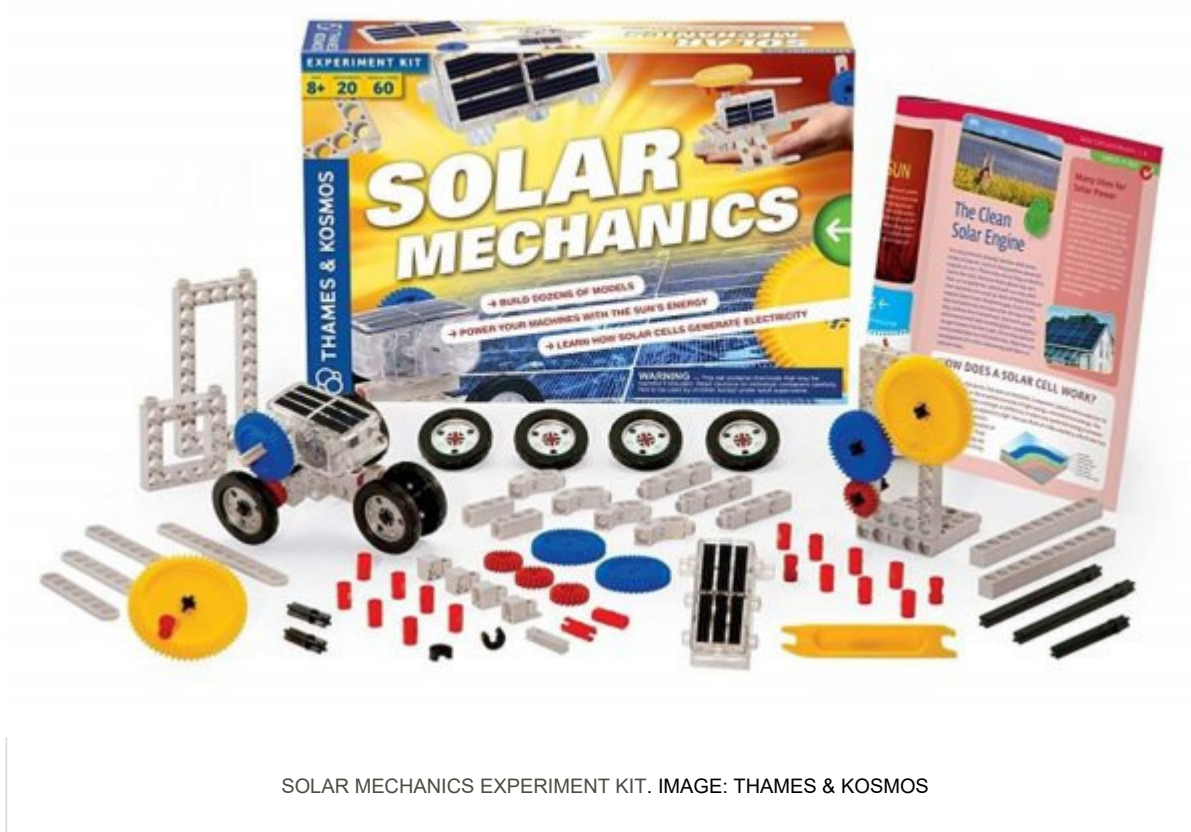
Cost: \$77

Thames and Kosmos

There doesn't appear to be any notable sustainability efforts in the production of Thames and Kosmos' products, but their educational toys are indispensable for parents trying to raise environmentally conscious children. They make more than 140 STEM kits including several that examine sustainable energy and a host of old-fashioned chemistry, biology, and physics experiments.

Thames and Kosmos is the go-to supplier for hands-on, experiential learning of the laws of science. If your kids think science is memorizing boring facts, these kits are the tools to reignite the spark of curiosity about the natural world that is at the heart of environmentalism.

Featured toy: Solar Mechanics Experiment Kit



SOLAR MECHANICS EXPERIMENT KIT. IMAGE: THAMES & KOSMOS

This kit includes a unique single-piece solar motor that is composed of a photovoltaic cell and an electric motor joined together in one compact unit. Your budding environmental scientist can build more than 20 solar-powered models to learn about how solar cells convert energy from sunlight into mechanical energy.

Ages: 8+

Cost: \$36

Wild Thing Toys

Wild Thing Toys is a U.K.-based purveyor of fair trade soft toys — rag dolls, crocheted stuffed animals, paper dolls, and sewing kits. Certified by the World Fair Trade Organization, Wild Thing soft toys and dolls use hand-loomed cotton and environmentally friendly and child-safe dyes, with hypoallergenic polyester stuffing and no plastic pieces. Dolls represent multiple ethnicities and come with traditional and western clothes.

Featured toy: Hajj Play Set



FAIR TRADE HAJJ PLAY SET. IMAGE: WILD THING TOYS

This play set comes with everything children need for their own imaginative journey to Mecca in celebration of other cultures or exploration of their own; includes two dolls, two mountains, a camel, a Kaaba, and a palm tree.

Ages: All ages

Cost: \$32 + international shipping

Eli and Mattie at Lehman's

Lehman's is not a toy store or a toy manufacturer. But this former hardware store in Ohio's Amish country is a reliable source of handmade, non-electric toys and lifestyle goods. Nearly everything they sell is manufactured within 45 miles of their brick and mortar store. Eli and Mattie is a local-to-Lehman's
https://www.evernote.com/Home.action?_sourcePage=YAg6E_IAGbbiMUD9T65RG_YvRLZ-1eYO3fqfRu0fynRL_1nukNa4gH1t86pc1SP&__fp=-rZR... 6/10

is manufactured within 15 miles of their shop and their store. Eli and Mattie is a local to Lehman's Amish-made toy collection of stuffed animals and wooden doll furniture, vehicles, and ride-on toys.

Besides Eli and Mattie, Lehman's also carries a variety of old-fashioned puzzles and games. If you're looking for something that you don't think they make anymore, there's a good chance Lehman's has it.

Featured toy: Single Wheel Roller



ELI & MATTIE SINGLE WHEEL ROLLER. IMAGE: LEHMAN'S

This handcrafted marble roller is made from unfinished oak and comes with wooden wheels designed to roll slowly down the connecting ramps. But kids will probably experiment with dropping their own marbles and other small items down the ramp.

Ages: 3+

Cost: \$50 (currently on sale for \$35)

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Do you have a favorite eco-toy manufacturer that we missed? Share it with the community in the Earth911 Forum.

Featured image: UGears Tram Line mechanical model

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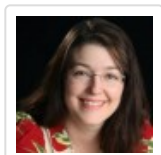
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Gemma Alexander

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing here.

