

# Broke Is the New Green | Earth911.com

## Broke Is the New Green



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Planet-friendly products are getting easier to find, but they're still [too expensive](#) for most people to buy.

If you can't afford fair trade coffee, organic cotton towels, and reclaimed wood tables, environmentalism can seem like a cause you can't join. It's good to [shop your values](#), but the truth is, you can't shop your way to sustainability. If you're too broke to shop green, there's a pretty good chance that you are already living that way.

### Housing

Housing ties with transportation as Americans' [biggest direct carbon impacts](#), making fantasies of [off-grid homesteading](#) or [net-zero efficiency](#) hard to resist. At least, they would be if they weren't so expensive.

As inspiring as these sorts of homes are, it takes [15 to 20 years](#) for a net-zero house to offset the carbon emissions from its own construction. Which means that energy retrofits to an old house are not only much cheaper than moving to a new one, they are just as green.

[Density](#), meaning both the size of your home or the number of people you squeeze into it, lowers per capita emissions more than almost any other housing change. Besides reduced per capita energy consumption, the benefits cascade into reduced transportation emissions and consumer waste.

In fact, the U.S. could achieve [half of its climate targets](#) if everyone got a roommate.

### Transportation

Feel guilty because you can't afford a Prius? Don't be too hard on yourself. It's true that about 80 percent of a vehicle's emissions result from driving it rather than manufacturing it. But the exact math on whether it's greener to buy an efficient new car is [not clear cut](#).

Replacing your 1970s Buick that gets 8 mpg with a 1990s Honda might be greener than buying a new electric vehicle (unless it's a [recycled EV](#)). Next time your old car is in the shop, you can feel extra virtuous.

Walking, biking, and taking public transportation are all greener than driving, no matter what kind of car you own.

### Shopping Less

Four-fifths of the impacts that can be attributed to consumers are not direct impacts, but are [secondary impacts](#), the environmental effects of producing the stuff we buy.

If your tight budget has you thinking twice before you head to the register, you are eliminating waste before it's produced. That's called [pre-cycling](#), and it's the greenest consumer choice you can make.

When you really do need to buy stuff, a new [organic cotton](#) T-shirt is undoubtedly better than a new one made from conventional cotton. But [life cycle analysis](#) shows that by far the most important factor is the number of times consumers wear a garment before throwing it out. Buying second-hand is almost as good as not buying at all, because it extends the life of the product.

### Cooking More

Forget fancy dinners at the latest organic, locavore restaurant. Even fast food is [more expensive](#) than cooking at home.

What you might not know is that cooking at home produces [fewer greenhouse gases](#) than eating the same meal at a restaurant. Plus, you have more influence over your own [ingredient choices](#) and [food waste](#) at home. Suddenly, making beans and rice starts to look like environmental activism.

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