



PHOENICIA UNIVERSITY

Sustainable Living

Everyday Choices for a Livable Planet

Concepts, practices, case studies, and applied exercises

1 What Is Sustainable Living?

Sustainable living is the practice of meeting everyday needs — energy, food, water, mobility, and consumption — in ways that stay within the planet's ecological limits, without compromising resources for future generations.

It's not just recycling.

- It covers everyday choices across energy, food, water, transport, and consumption — recycling is only one small piece.

It works at every scale.

- Individuals, households, businesses, schools, and cities all practice sustainable living in different ways.

It's about balance, not sacrifice.

- The goal is meeting today's needs well without depleting the resources future generations will need.

1.7 Earths

the number of Earths humanity's current resource use would require if everyone consumed like the average person — humanity is in ecological overshoot

Small, consistent daily choices compound — collectively, they shape demand for cleaner energy, food systems, and products.

2 The Three Pillars of Sustainability

Rooted in the 1987 Brundtland Report's definition of sustainable development, sustainability rests on three pillars that must all be supported together — not traded off against one another.

Environmental

Protecting ecosystems and natural resources by keeping consumption, waste, and emissions within the planet's limits.

Social

Fair access to housing, food, health, and opportunity, and wellbeing for the communities a lifestyle or business touches.

Economic

Livelihoods and financial stability — sustainable choices must stay affordable and workable in daily life.

A lifestyle only qualifies as sustainable when all three pillars are supported at once.



3

How the Sustainable Living Movement Emerged

1962

Rachel Carson's Silent Spring exposes the ecological cost of pesticides, sparking public awareness of everyday environmental harm.

1970

The first Earth Day mobilizes 20 million Americans and launches the modern environmental movement.

1987

The Brundtland Report defines “sustainable development,” linking everyday consumption and economic growth to environmental limits.

1992

The Rio Earth Summit produces Agenda 21, the first global plan connecting individual and local behavior to sustainability.

2005

The “carbon footprint” enters everyday language, giving individuals a way to measure their personal environmental impact.

2015

The Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals push sustainable consumption into mainstream policy and daily life.



From a scientific warning to a daily-life practice, sustainable living has moved from the margins to the mainstream in about six decades.

4 Why It Matters Now

Sustainable living is no longer a niche lifestyle choice — it responds to pressures that affect everyone, everywhere.

1.7 Earths

in resources humanity consumes each year relative to what the planet can regenerate annually

2B+ tons

of municipal solid waste generated worldwide each year, a figure still projected to keep rising

~70%

of global greenhouse gas emissions are linked to household consumption — energy, food, transport, and goods

9.7B

projected global population by 2050, intensifying pressure on resources, food, and energy systems

This growth is driven by two forces at once: rising population and consumption, against a fixed base of natural resources.



5

Everyday Practices for Sustainable Living

Energy & Home

Switching to LED lighting, improving insulation, and choosing renewable electricity where it's available.

Waste & Recycling

Reducing single-use plastics, composting organic waste, and sorting recyclables correctly.

Food & Diet

Eating more plant-based meals, cutting food waste, and buying local, seasonal produce.

Water Conservation

Fixing leaks, taking shorter showers, and using water-efficient fixtures and appliances.

Sustainable Mobility

Walking, cycling, using public transport, or carpooling instead of driving alone.

Mindful Consumption

Buying less, choosing durable or secondhand goods, and repairing instead of replacing.



6 Example: Zero-Waste Living

The personal-practice model: an individual redesigns everyday consumption to eliminate waste rather than simply managing it.

- Popularized by figures such as Bea Johnson, whose household follows a “refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot” approach to cut waste to a small jar a year.
- The approach prioritizes refusing unnecessary items and reducing consumption first — recycling is treated as a last resort, not a first step.
- Zero-waste living does not require rural life or special skills — it works in ordinary homes and cities through planning and habit change.

Model takeaway: cutting waste starts with what enters your home, not just how you dispose of it.

<1 jar/yr

household waste produced annually by well-known zero-waste practitioners, versus roughly 800 kg per person for the average American

5 Rs

refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot — the order practitioners follow, with refusing and reducing prioritized over recycling

2008

year the modern zero-waste lifestyle movement gained wide public attention through early bloggers and books

7

Example: Copenhagen, A Sustainable City

The city-scale model: sustainability is engineered into daily infrastructure, not left to individual choice alone.

- Copenhagen has targeted becoming the world's first carbon-neutral capital, building its plan around cycling infrastructure that carries more daily trips than cars.
- Well over half of residents commute by bicycle thanks to dedicated cycle lanes, bike bridges, and traffic signals timed for cyclists.
- A citywide district heating network, fed largely by waste and renewables, warms most homes, cutting individual household emissions.

Model takeaway: sustainability scales fastest when infrastructure makes the sustainable choice the easiest one.

62%+

share of Copenhagen residents who commute to work or school by bicycle

~98%

share of Copenhagen homes connected to the city's district heating network

2025

target year Copenhagen set for becoming the world's first carbon-neutral capital city

8 Sustainable Living in Lebanon

Crisis conditions have pushed many Lebanese households toward sustainable practices out of necessity, not just choice.

Lebanon's Energy Crisis

Chronic power cuts have pushed households and businesses toward solar panels and battery storage simply to keep the lights on.

Decentralized Energy Law (2023)

Opened the door for private companies and communities to generate and distribute renewable power directly to customers.

Urban Gardening & Local Food

Rising food costs have revived rooftop and balcony gardening and demand for locally grown produce across Lebanese cities.

Community Recycling Initiatives

Grassroots groups and municipalities across Lebanon now run local sorting and recycling programs to fill gaps in formal waste services.

9

Sustainable Habits vs. Performative “Eco” Choices

Not every “green” purchase or habit meaningfully reduces impact — some create the feeling of sustainability without the substance.

Signs of a genuinely sustainable habit:

- It reduces overall consumption or waste, not just substitutes one product for another.
- It's kept up consistently, not only for occasions where others are watching.
- It targets a habit's biggest source of impact — such as flying, diet, or driving — not just its smallest.

72%

of consumers say they want to live more sustainably, but cite cost or convenience as the main barrier to acting on it

4x

roughly how much larger the footprint of frequent flying or a meat-heavy diet is compared with most other individual lifestyle choices

Genuine sustainable living targets high-impact habits consistently — it isn't defined by a single visible gesture.

10 Barriers to Sustainable Living

Cost & Affordability

Sustainable products, organic food, and energy-efficient appliances often carry a higher upfront price than conventional alternatives.

Convenience & Time

Composting, biking, or cooking from scratch typically take more time and effort than the default, less sustainable option.

Access & Infrastructure

Recycling programs, public transit, and renewable energy are unevenly available, especially outside major cities.

Information Overload

Conflicting claims about what's truly “sustainable” make it hard to know which changes matter most.

Habit & Convenience Culture

Years of built-up routines around driving, disposables, and fast fashion are hard to unlearn, even with good intentions.

Limited Individual Impact

A single household's choices can feel small against industrial emissions, which can discourage sustained effort.

11 Clarifications: Common Misconceptions

Misconception	Reality
<i>“Sustainable living is too expensive for most people.”</i>	Many of the highest-impact changes — eating less meat, using less energy, buying less — cost less, not more.
<i>“Individual actions don't matter next to corporate emissions.”</i>	Consumer demand shapes what companies produce, and household choices drive large shares of emissions.
<i>“Sustainable living means giving up modern comforts.”</i>	It usually means choosing differently, not going without — efficient appliances and better-planned trips stay comfortable.
<i>“Recycling is the most important sustainable habit.”</i>	Reducing consumption and choosing durable goods cut more impact than recycling alone.

Exercise 1: Personal Footprint Audit

- Track your energy, food, water, and transport choices for one typical day.
- Identify the single habit with the largest environmental impact.
- Propose one realistic, sustainable swap for that habit and note any barrier to adopting it.

Exercise 2: Sustainability Claim Check

- Bring in a product, ad, or label that markets itself as “eco-friendly” or “sustainable.”
- Evaluate it against the “signs of a genuine sustainable habit” from Slide 10.
- Is the claim substantiated? What evidence would make it more credible?

Discuss: Which barrier from Slide 11 would most affect your Exercise 1 swap, and how could it be addressed?



Key Takeaways

- Sustainable living means meeting daily needs — energy, food, water, mobility, consumption — within the planet's ecological limits, not through one grand gesture.
- The three pillars — environmental, social, and economic — must all be supported together for a habit or lifestyle to count as sustainable.
- Change happens at every scale — from zero-waste households to bike-first cities like Copenhagen — and no single model fits everyone.
- Genuine impact comes from consistent, high-leverage habits, not occasional or performative “green” gestures.