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EcoConsumer

Green resources you (and the Earth) can really use

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

If information alone could save the planet, we'd be sitting pretty right now.

An astounding array of resources has become available to help us make better environmental choices. Many are free, just a click away on the Internet.

But to really become an EcoConsumer — someone who balances consuming and conserving — you have to actually find the specific information you need, and then use it.

For the 37th anniversary of Earth Day on Sunday, I've selected my favorite EcoConsumer resources. These can help reduce your environmental impact, save money and make your life better. Some may also inspire and entertain.

GreenerChoices

[GreenerChoices](#) is a project of Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of Consumer Reports magazine. Unlike the magazine's regular Web site, which costs \$26 a year for full access, this is a free site — an impartial, common-sense guide to green products and practices. Features include: calculators for energy savings and fuel consumption; green ratings for appliances, computers and lawn mowers; and a toxics search to learn which types of products contain materials such as mercury, lead and arsenic.

Grist

[Grist](#) is a free, nonprofit, independent online environmental magazine based in Seattle. It's a reliable Internet source of eco-news and commentary, and it's also the funniest and least self-righteous (although the humor has seemed a bit more forced lately). Recent articles: a critical look at Sen. Barack Obama's views on energy policy, an appreciation of vegetable gardening and an interview with

Ikea's sustainability director. Twice-weekly highlight: the often-hysterical advice column "Ask Umbra."

Energy Star

[Energystar](#) is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. It has a free Web site and is arguably the federal government's most useful consumer resource of any kind. It includes extensive listings of products — from appliances to home electronics to lighting — that have earned the Energy Star efficiency rating. For money-saving ideas on home-energy conservation, presented in an intuitive, "click-on-a-room" format, visit the "Energy Star @ Home" section.

ReadyMade

[ReadyMade](#) is a bimonthly print magazine (\$19 for a one-year subscription) that takes the "Don't waste it — Reuse it!" ethic and makes it real. It's light-hearted and aimed at the under-40 crowd, but has wide appeal. Recent article: profile of a couple who turned an abandoned school into an artists' colony. Popular feature: The "MacGyver challenge" (after the 1985-92 TV series), which invites readers to make something useful from a common throwaway item, like a plastic berry basket from the grocery store.

What Do I Do With ... ?

www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/wdidw This is a free Web site provided by King County Solid Waste Division that lists recycling, reuse and proper disposal options for 98 categories of items, from propane tanks to paint to packing peanuts. For businesses as well as residents, it's indispensable when you've got something that's gotta go. It's useful even if you're not in King County, since many listed recyclers also have locations elsewhere. Tip: Click on "Advanced Search" to scroll through every category, not just the main ones.

"Worldchanging: A User's Guide for the 21st Century"

www.worldchanging.com/book Sometimes only a book will do. This hardcover book (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., \$37.50), edited by Seattle's Alex Steffen, is an ambitious, encyclopedic survey of environmental and social issues and activism, studded with hundreds of timely resources for green living. Editors wisely banned all charts and tables, instead relying on small, compelling color photos to break up the text. Ideal for the living-room end table, or the bathroom.

The monthly EcoConsumer column aims to help readers balance consuming and conserving. Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at tom.watson@metrokc.gov. Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at [www](#).

KCecoconsumer.com.

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