

## HOW ECO-SAVVY ARE YOU?

By Jeff McIntire-Strasburg

There has been lots and lots of information coming at you about how to live with a lighter environmental footprint. Of course, with all of the media focus on sustainability over the past couple of years, you may figure there's not much left for you to learn. Maybe... or maybe not! Take this quiz to see how much you do know... and what you can still learn about the green life.

**1.** You're shopping for ingredients to take to a potluck a neighbor is hosting, and want to choose the most Earth-friendly options. Which of the following labels has strict definitions attached to it, and is certified by a third party?

- A. Vegan
- B. Antibiotic-Free
- C. Organic
- D. Natural

**2.** A friend suggests that the two of you chip in and purchase a CSA (community-supported agriculture) membership for the coming year. You think hard, and try to remember what a CSA is. Is it...

- A. A farmers market in the neighborhood?
- B. A food cooperative?
- C. An urban or community garden?
- D. A model for buying "shares" in a local farmer's harvest?

**3.** The weather warms up, and, one morning, you discover your puppy is covered in fleas after playing outside. What's the potentially harmful way (to the environment, and your puppy) to handle this problem?

- A. Sprinkling diatomaceous earth over your yard.
- B. Spraying beneficial nematodes over your yard.
- C. Bathing your puppy in an herbal flea shampoo containing citrus oils.
- D. Begin applying a monthly spot-on flea treatment from the veterinarian.

**4.** You've got a sizzling hot weekend of romance planned. Among your plans: introducing some new toys to your relationship (yeah, *those* kinds of toys). To ensure a safe, healthy experience for your partner and yourself, you want to make sure the sex toys you purchase are free of...

- A. Phthalates
- B. Phlebotomists
- C. Phragmites
- D. Phalanxes

**5.** Work, family, and friends have kept you hopping lately, and now the house is well past its deadline for cleaning. What's the one quality you should look for in a "green" cleaning product?

- A. It's free of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- B. It's free of chlorine bleach.
- C. It's homemade from non-toxic ingredients.
- D. All of the above.

**6.** Your energy bills have been through the roof lately. What's the most important step you can take to lower your use of energy (and, in the process, lower those bills!)?

- A. Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents.
- B. Unplug electronics and appliances when not in use.
- C. Increase insulation levels in your exterior and basement walls, ceilings, floors, and crawl spaces.
- D. Switch from a desktop to a laptop computer.

**7.** Keeping healthy and fit requires a regular exercise routine, but much of the "stuff" associated with working out these days consumes resources unnecessarily, and creates waste and pollution. What's the most important step you can take to minimize the environmental impact of your exercise regimen?

- A. Buy (and use) a reusable water bottle.
- B. Take your exercise routine off the treadmill and elliptical, and get outside to work out.
- C. Join a "green gym."
- D. All of the above.

**8.** From excess packaging to the potential presence of parabens (say that three times fast!), the morning beauty routine can take its toll on the environment, and even present health threats. Which of the choices for changing beauty and personal care habits listed below will most likely make multiple positive impacts on your health and your environmental footprint?

- A. Buy cosmetics and personal care products labeled "organic."
- B. Cut back on the number of products (even "safe" products), and use them less often.
- C. Buy cosmetics and personal care products labeled "natural."
- D. Grind your own minerals, mix your own moisturizers, and boil your own soap.

**9.** You're cooking for a group of friends, several of whom are vegan. The recipe you want to make lists eggs as an ingredient. What should you do?

- A. Ditch the recipe, and serve carrot and celery sticks.
- B. Include the eggs – they won't notice.
- C. Replace the eggs with mashed bananas
- D. None of the above

**10.** A friend's birthday is approaching, and you'd like to give her a gift that she'll not only love, but that also respects both of your environmental values. What's the best choice out of the list below?

- A. A case of CFLs.
- B. A gift certificate to Outback Steak House.
- C. Yoga lessons at a nearby studio
- D. Tomato plants for her garden

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*Now, look at the answers below and see what your score says about you.*

**Answers:**

**1.) Correct answer: C**

The USDA has established relatively tight definitions for the use of the term “organic” (but for food only... not for cosmetics or personal care products). The other terms on this list (and many others) do not have definitions established by a government regulatory body, or other organization with authority over food producers.

**2.) Correct answer: D**

“A CSA, (for Community Supported Agriculture) is a way for the food buying public to create a relationship with a farm and to receive a weekly basket of produce. By making a financial commitment to a farm, people become ‘members’ (or ‘shareholders,’ or ‘subscribers’) of the CSA.” Though you may have trouble purchasing a CSA membership this year (as they’re generally sold before the growing season), Local Harvest can help you find one for next year.

**3.) Correct answer: D**

According to veterinarian Shawn Messonnier (author of *The Natural Health Bible for Dogs & Cats*), chemical flea products often aren’t necessary, and can accumulate in your pet’s body.

**4.) Correct answer: A**

While no one can say with certainty that phthalates, a compound used to soften PVC-based plastics, are harmful to humans, we do know they’re toxic in animals they’re toxic in animals

**5.) Correct answer: D**

**6.) Correct answer: C**

While all of the choices above will help you save energy and money, home heating and cooling represent the biggest chunk of our energy use

**7.) Correct answer: D**

**8.) Correct answer: B**

While D may be the truly correct answer, most of us probably don’t have that kind of time or inclination. As beauty and style blog *Feelgood Style* notes, “Believe it or not you can get too much of a good thing and we may be overdoing it without even realizing it. Most of us use too many beauty products. Not only that, but we tend to use too much of each product at one time.” Still unsure about the products you are buying? Check the Environmental Working Group’s “*Skin Deep*” cosmetics safety database. And remember: ingredients in cosmetics and personal care products are not regulated (so the labels mentioned in A. and C. could mean little or nothing).

**9.) Correct answer: D**

While mashed bananas can be used to substitute for eggs in certain circumstances, you need to make sure that any egg replacement you use (and there are many of them) performs the same function as the eggs did in the original recipe. The Vegan Society has a great list of vegan egg alternatives.

**10.) Correct answer: All of the above**

As Kermit the Frog said, “It ain’t easy being green.” Technically, all of these gifts are “green.” But a case of light bulbs for a birthday gift?? Gift certificates certainly cut back on immediate resource use, but a steak dinner (that can’t be traced to its source) likely has a pretty high environmental footprint. The last two options are also good, but if your friend’s not into yoga, or has already planted her tomatoes (or, god forbid, doesn’t like tomatoes), these gifts could be a

bust, no matter how green. Look for the balance between a low environmental footprint, and expressing how much your relationship with this friend means to you.

**Scoring:**

**9-10:** You're a green guru... you should be writing tips instead of reading them!

**7-8:** You're on your way — and if you read the next 18 posts in this series, “30 Days to a Greener You” — you'll be a green guru by the end of the month!

**5-6:** You'll definitely want to keep tabs on the “30 Days to a Greener You” series, and take a look at the lists of tips that come through your inbox, or appear on various websites during April.

**0-4:** Immediately subscribe to the RSS feeds of all of the sites listed above (and Intent's “Planet” feed)... you have much to learn, my friend!