



A small house among old trees on Spy Glass.

The people who may rule this country for the next four years, and many of the people who voted for them, have no connection to the earth and would not mourn its passing. These people believe there is a better world elsewhere, and/or imagine themselves to be so thoroughly cocooned that whatever happens to the rest of us can't touch them.

One clear path of positive action and resistance to this mess is to take care of our planet. We can create splendid examples of living well and gently together in our homes and communities, leaving light footprints on the earth.

apartments, rooms, and gardens with a native plant landscape or just a native corner. We might yearn to do it all, but time, energy, and money intervene. Or we're renting. Yet a small project, well-planned and beloved, may create more of a ripple effect than something large-scale.

Sustainability means asking questions about everything we use: Where does this come from? How it is made? How does it affect the environment? How is it maintained? How long will it last? We can ask the same questions about rocks for a wall, roofing materials or garden mulch. It can be embarrassing to ask such questions in stores.

sawing, he decided to change professions. So when our builder framed the house, some boards were missing and had to be ordered from a conventional lumber yard. We have some linoleum floors (eco-friendly) and some vinyl (not!), because we couldn't find linoleum colors we wanted in local stores and were too burned-out to drive back to Portland for wider choices. We gave up on sunflower-hull counters: material was available only in vast quantities. And so on.

I want to make it easier for people to locate environment-friendly building materials, garden supplies, and plants. I'd like to share ideas that work on many scales and budgets, from an apartment to a whole house and garden. Readers are welcome to send ideas and sources to shadesofgreen@eugeneweekly.com.

NOT SO BIG HOUSES

Scale is an important factor in sustainability. Little houses cover less of the earth. Small spaces that are intricate and individualized may take as much money and materials to build as large box-shaped spaces, but small spaces require less heat and cooling and are easier to maintain.

Yet "starter mansions" are abundant, with ballroom-sized family rooms and vast cedar decks. What drives this? The house my husband and I built also grew bigger than we planned. We craved storage space, hoping it would make us better organized. Our growing-up kids wanted rooms to come back to. Beware too of this common advice: "Too small! No resale value." Yet if you love what you are building, someone else

Eugene house to a 400 sq. ft. houseboat off Bainbridge Island, are astonished by the many things they don't need.

Smaller houses and apartments abound in Eugene, Springfield and Corvallis. Many graceful bungalows from the 1920s and '30s have been lovingly restored. Donna Kaehn lives in a 1,000 sq. ft. 1970s cabin clustered with 11 others in an oak grove on Spy Glass Lane in Eugene. She extends storage space with a hollow bench and a bookcase-pantry, and her living room is vibrant with golden-yellow paint and bright Mexican crafts.

Indoors or out, it's crucial to design spaces that match the size and shape of what you want to do. If a space is too small, you'll feel cramped. If it's too large, you'll feel overwhelmed and drifting. Annick Todd remembers first seeing her new house. "So tall! Not the way it was on paper. I felt embarrassed." Karyn Kaplan sleeps on the edge of her new bedroom as she tries to get used to the wide floor and high ceilings. "I like nesty places," she says. "It feels huge." But she's thoroughly at home in her snug living room, with its low ceiling and plentiful windows.

If you get it right, your space can fit your needs, feel both cozy and spacious, and fit you like a second skin. To figure this out, set aside conventional labels like "home office" or "terrace" and think about what activities you would like to cluster together in the same space, and how you want that space to feel. Use rope or hoses to outline a hypothetical space. Arrange any furniture you'll be using, and move around, acting out the things you plan to do. Adjust as needed.

The real miracle is not to walk on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. — Thich Nhat Hahn

Month by month, "Shades of Green" will bring ideas about living sustainably in our homes and gardens. How can we build and change our environment in ways that do no harm? I think often it's possible to do this, even to heal our surroundings, and other times, we must settle for doing as little harm as possible. This column will give a variety of green approaches, from restrained to all-out, and will differentiate among materials that are deep green, pale green, and not green at all.

I'm in favor of totally sustainable houses, and also partly sustainable houses,

You become a Fussy Shopper, especially when you're a woman in the mostly male realm of building materials. Yet a shopper who questions is taking care of the world.

My husband and I recently built a house. Our builder is a skillful designer and a consummate craftsman, happy to use sustainable materials as long as someone else hunts for them. I was the designated hunter. Sometimes I got tired or things went haywire, so the house turned out semi-sustainable.

We thinned trees from our forest and hired a man with a portable sawmill to cut them into framing lumber. Partway through

will too. "Defend your intuitions!" advises Karyn Kaplan, building a new house.

Aaron and Sarah Whitney of Habitats, a sustainable design/construction firm, think houses have expanded partly because people have more and bigger stuff: kitchen and sports equipment, toys, video and computer systems. To live in a modest-sized space, they recommend thinning out your belongings. When Ed and Diana Sheridan moved to a smaller house, they rented a truck and drove their big furniture to their grown children in California. David Gordon and Lysbeth Rickerman, who moved from a

To add room without building or remodeling, reorganize spaces so they all are used every day. You can also create an alcove in a living room, with shelves and a desk for an office niche, or a wood screen and comfy chair for listening to music. In *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander points out that alcoves adjacent to a common space help people be together while doing their own activities.

GOOD BOOKS: *The Not So Big House* and related books by Sarah Susanka; *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander et al. **ew**

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