GrayIsGreen

Household Sustainability
Ecological Footprint Overview

Who are we?
Gray Is Green is an online gathering of older adult Americans aspiring to create a green legacy for the future. As environmentally conscious elders, we respond to a generational call: to co-create a future of economic justice, ecological sustainability and social justice.

We hold next generations of humans in mind and consider the future of ecosystems and other species. We are alert to the historic challenges facing our planet. And we are aware of the question arising from descendants generations hence:

What did you do, when you knew?

What do we do?
We aspire to embrace our eldership, living beyond consumerism and ageism. ***Our Curriculum for Gray-Green Living*** offers a variety of ways to join–and re-engage with–this elder movement.

We offer a periodic newsletter, a speaker's bureau, online resources, a Facebook page for relevant updates. In partnership with congenial organizations, we serve as a central clearinghouse of ideas and communications for older adults interested in greening their lives, learning about sustainability, advocating for sound public policy, being creative stewards or grandparents, emerging as elders, and mentoring young people.

*We invite **you** to get involved!*

www.grayisgreen.org

Ecological Footprint
An ecological footprint is a measure of human impact on Earth's ecosystems. Footprints vary by country, region, community, household and individual, depending on various use factors. Common footprint measures include those for land, water and carbon consumption.

The Global Footprint Network calculates the global ecological footprint from UN and other data. They estimate that as of 2007 our planet has been using natural capital 1.5 times as fast as nature can renew it. Terrapass offers simple and accessible footprint calculators for individuals, households, businesses, and events.

Land Footprint
A land footprint is a consumption-based indicator that considers the resources needed to create a final product, to sustain an organization, or support a geographic region or country. This is in contrast to production-based indicators, which just look at resource use within an organization or country. For example, cows will require land to graze on within a country, but may also be fed by feed grown on land in another country.

A common way of estimating the global land footprint is to consider the area of wilderness—both land and sea - required to supply resources to the global human population each year. This includes the area needed to assimilate human waste.

Water Footprint
Water footprint calculators for personal use are marvelous tools to learn about direct use of water at home and in the garden as well as indirect water consumption related to food choices.

One water footprint tool from National Geographic features a cute duck cartoon making it fun to use with children and grandchildren.

Another from Grace Communications Foundation provides users with the ability to hypothetically adjust and play with their answers to discover ways to lower their water footprint.

Carbon Footprint
A carbon footprint is defined as the total set of greenhouse gas emissions caused by an individual, event, organization, or product. There are serious technical challenges related to accurately calculating my carbon footprint—or yours—arising from the complexities of our carbon-intensive world: indirect vs. direct energy consumption, naturally occurring

(continued on back)

emissions, and more.
Indirect sources of CO2 emissions include emissions from transportation, production, and related activities often far removed from our personal or household consumption. In the United States, most of the carbon footprint emissions for the average household come from indirect sources, such as fuel burned to produce goods far away from the final consumer. These are distinguished from emissions from burning fuel directly in a personal car or furnace, which are commonly referred to as direct sources of the carbon footprint.

Carbon footprint calculators measure direct emissions of gases that cause climate change into the atmosphere, as an indicator of relative sustainability of energy use practices. Terrapass offers an online calculator for individuals, as well as a tutorial on carbon offsets.

The next two pages of this article feature a quick and easy Carbon Footprint Calculator for Group Discussion. This accessible and evocative instrument is useful for personal reflection followed by group consideration of ways to reduce carbon footprints.