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6 ways to change the world (and your budget)

By [Matt Alderton](#)

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Before it was synonymous with sustainability, green was the color of money. For financial planner R. Joseph Ritter Jr., it still is.

"When we think of sustainability, our minds are often drawn to living off the land," says Ritter, a father of four and president of Zacchaeus Financial Counseling. "I tend to think more of financial sustainability, which means a home can function on the money at its disposal. "

Like environmental sustainability, financial sustainability is all about embracing efficiency and reducing waste. "Financial sustainability ... extends to living within our means and avoiding the use of debt, " Ritter continues. "It becomes a way of life that touches every area of our lives."

Because "green" products often are more expensive than their counterparts, many families assume that eco is expensive. What Ritter has discovered, however, is that environmental and financial responsibility are not, in fact, contradictory; rather, they're complementary.

Perhaps that's why 72 percent of [S&P 500 companies published corporate sustainability reports](#) in 2013, compared to only 20 percent just two years prior, according to the Governance & Accountability Institute. "Businesses ... recognize that waste equals lost profit," Ritter continues. "Think of all your waste, from garbage to packaging to food scraps, as money. Now stand outside on garbage day and imagine the garbage truck hauling your money off to the dump. Smart businesses find ways to cut waste and loss of raw materials. The average home can do the same to save money."

Indeed, whether your goal is eliminating debt or building savings, being an environmental steward could help you achieve it. Here are six ways to get started:

1. Plant a garden. Three years ago, LaShaun Nicole Williams and her husband, Bradlee, launched the Environmental Exchange Group, a sustainable commodity management and consulting firm that helps companies balance sustainability with profitability. It wasn't long before the Atlanta couple found themselves doing for their family what they already were doing for their clients. One of their favorite strategies so far has been gardening.

"Our large family consumes quite a bit of food, which can be expensive — especially when you're committed to eating whole foods," says Williams, a mother of four. "So, we decided to begin growing some of our own food. With no background in gardening, we started with herbs — and knocked \$20 off of each grocery bill."

2. Reuse and recycle. Williams' children have been so engaged by gardening that they're now looking for other ways to live sustainably. Reusing and recycling is one way they've found to do so.

"[Gardening] sparked an interest in our children to begin recycling as much as they could, converting jam jars into cups and using old cardboard boxes for crafts," Williams says. "As a result, we have inspired creativity and ingenuity while saving money on purchasing drinkware and paper products."

3. Use less energy. Energy-efficient appliances and light bulbs, such as ENERGY STAR-rated washers and dryers and compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs, use less energy. And less energy translates into fewer emissions and lower energy bills.

"I am constantly reminding my children to turn lights and electronics off," Ritter says. "It can be frustrating, annoying and seemingly trivial; however, the impact shows up in the electric bill. Shutting off computers and other electronics when not in use for extended periods of time, adjusting the thermostat by one degree and other conservation practices can add up to savings on your utility bills."

4. Shop smarter. Your home isn't the only thing in your life that consumes energy and cash. Your car is equally to blame, says Ritter, who recommends saving money and avoiding pollution by combining shopping and other trips.

"You can use less gasoline by combining errands, postponing an errand until you have several errands to run, locating more efficient routes of travel and planning your route to reduce idle time as much as possible," he explains. "Companies such as the post office and UPS have this savings strategy down to a science, and for good reason. Saving money and time means you have that extra money and time for something else."

While you're out, keep your foot off the gas. "Don't speed," advises Coleen Pantalone, Ph.D., associate professor of finance at Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business. "You'll save gas and help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels."

5. Buy used instead of shiny and new. Whether it's clothing, toys or furniture, new items generally cost more money and take more energy to manufacture. Used items, on the other hand, typically cost less, with the added benefit of reducing landfill waste.

"Frequent consignment shops and, for kids' toys, yard sales," suggests Pantalone. "You will be recycling products and clothes and saving money."

6. Take care of yourself, your things. Eating more whole foods and fewer packaged and processed foods nets more nutrition for your body and less waste for the environment. Long term, however, it also can benefit your bottom line.

"Health care is also a major strain on household budgets, and one reason is ignoring healthy habits," Ritter explains. "Taking care of our bodies means we encounter fewer major medical issues and spend less money on health care."

The same principle applies to your possessions, such as your car. "A happy car is much more efficient than one that needs attention," Ritter continues. "A car that is maintained well will last much longer, which means you have to spend less money on car repairs and purchases. A car that is maintained well is also more efficient and will use less gasoline."

Whatever your preferred strategy, the lesson is clear: When you do good, you also can do well.

Concludes Pantalone: "Even if you don't care about the environment, being green will often save you money, especially over the long haul."

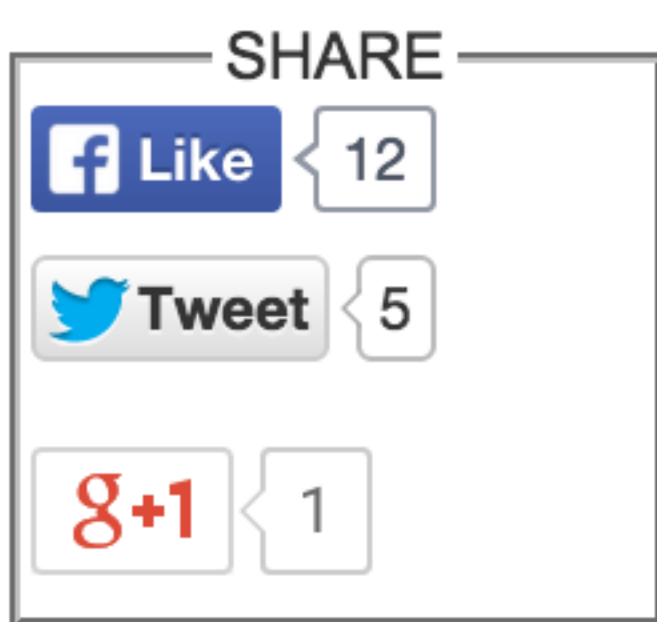
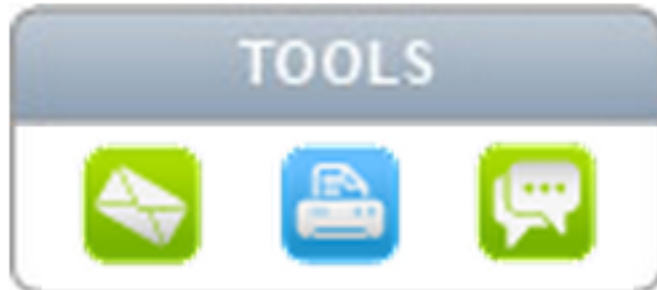
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—R. Joseph Ritter Jr., Zacchaeus Financial Counseling

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