



# Sustainable Living Guide



# Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 4** Plastic packaging
- 6** Grow wild!
- 8** Sustainable shopping
- 10** Banking on organic, from Triodos Bank
- 12** Energy saving advice, from the Centre for Sustainable Energy
- 14** Active and sustainable travel, from Sustrans
- 16** Take action

Soil Association  
Spear House  
51 Victoria Street  
Bristol BS1 6AD  
0300 330 0100  
soilassociation.org  
@soilassociation



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# Welcome to our Sustainable Living Guide



The Soil Association has been involved in the sustainability movement for over 75 years; together with farmers, businesses, policymakers and fellow citizens, our work as a charity has made an impact on the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the items we use in our homes.

In this guide, you'll find lots of ways you can help restore nature, health, and a safe climate from the ground up. The guide covers all areas of sustainability, with a number of small changes you can make at home and advice on bigger changes you can make in your life to reduce your carbon footprint and support a sustainable future. In the current climate with the cost of living increasing, even small acts in our daily lives will add up to make a world of difference.

As you'll be aware, plastic packaging is a huge issue that doesn't have a simple solution. In the UK alone, over 5 million tonnes of plastic is used each year and only a quarter of this is recycled. Find out more about how to reduce plastic waste on pages 4-5.

On pages 6-7, we look at how you can make your gardens and windowsills more nature friendly, including

growing bee-friendly plants and creating homes for wildlife. Around 87% of UK households have a garden - together, this amounts to an area that's about a fifth of the size of Wales. That's over 10 million acres, which is larger than all of Britain's nature reserves combined!

And, with more and more people looking for sustainable options, whether that's organic and natural skincare products or cotton textiles, we look at how to avoid greenwashing on pages 8-9.

In addition to sustainability tips from the Soil Association, we also have some expert advice from our partners, including a piece about the link between your finances and sustainability by Triodos Bank, energy-saving home improvements from the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and tips from Sustrans on how to be more sustainable when you travel.

If you have any of your own ideas, or tips for living sustainably – please let us know!

You can get in touch via Facebook, Instagram or Twitter @soilassociation.

Louisa Pharoah, Director, Soil Association



**In the UK alone,  
over 5 million  
tonnes of plastic  
is used each year  
and only ¼ of  
this is recycled.**

# The latest on packaging

Plastic packaging. It's a huge issue that doesn't have a simple solution.

Soil Association has held standards on the packaging of organic products for over a decade (our organic packaging standards were the first in the world!). They focus on removing the most harmful products to human health and the environment from organic supply chains, such as PVC and phthalates.

Thanks to increasing awareness of the issue, many companies are also now taking action against plastics. Steps like the tax on single-use plastic bags and restaurants banning plastic straws can have an immediate positive environmental impact.

Reducing plastic usage can feel overwhelming, but it's clear that our individual actions really do add up. As consumers, we can all play our part by making conscious choices to reduce our plastic usage in everyday life.

## **Be mindful of what you buy**

Everything we buy has to end up somewhere. A helpful first step in reducing waste is therefore looking at what we buy. If you are tempted by a product, why not see if there's a similar version with either less packaging that lasts longer or one that can be more easily recycled. Or better yet, packaging free!

## **Say no to new plastic bags**

Bring a tote bag when you are shopping. It's classic advice for a good reason: it's easy to do, minimises waste and sends a message that you care about the growing plastic problem. If you are already doing this, try going to the next level by avoiding disposable food containers and swap out for loose food items.

Vegetables, grains, pulses, nuts and so on can usually be bought loose and stored in jars at your local independent retailer.

# Make a pledge

Whether you're already doing some great things to reduce your waste, or aren't sure where to start, Soil Association pledges are here to guide you towards making small changes that make a big difference.

[Click here if you want to get involved!](#)



The best thing you can do for a sustainable future is to support the Soil Association. [Click here to find out more.](#)

## Get yourself a re-useable water bottle and coffee cup

Reuse your old water bottles or get a new one in a solid material. A good quality bottle can last you a long time and save a huge amount of plastic going to the landfill.

The same applies for your coffee cups. Keeping a re-useable one handy in your bag will ensure you can enjoy your next takeaway coffee without concern.



## Reuse, donate and recycle

Packaging can be reused in countless ways. Empty containers can be reused as food containers if you wash and clean them first, and bottles can often be refilled with shampoo or even used as a bird feeder! If your packaging can't be reused be sure to recycle it when possible.

## Public pressure

Public pressure is one of the most important ways you can influence the biggest plastic users, such as supermarket chains, to take action to reduce unnecessary or harmful packaging. Why not tell brands and retailers your opinion on the way their products are packaged? This is the best way to inspire faster change.

This can be done by writing to a shop that you think uses too much plastic, or writing to your local MP about the issue.

# Grow wild!

In our gardens and on our windowsills, there are plenty of things you can do to grow wild - from creating habitats for local wildlife to growing your own food. But wildlife-friendly gardening is about making a haven for you, as well as the wildlife, so we hope you enjoy using some of our sustainable gardening tips in your own home!



## Plant bee-friendly plants

By planting herbs and flowers that bees and other pollinators love, you're helping restore nature's balance. Bees transfer pollen, helping flowers bloom and fruit and vegetables to grow.

Try planting one of these in your garden, allotment or window box:

- Common poppy
- Evergreen clematis
- Foxglove
- Lemon thyme

## Grow your own

One of the best things you can do is grow your own food. Whether you grow herbs in an old container on the windowsill, or fruit and veg in your garden, growing at home is easier than you might think. When you grow nature-friendly food, as well as tasting great it's making a positive impact on the planet and wildlife too!

## Phase out your use of pesticides

'Pesticides' are the group of chemicals designed to kill insects and other pests such as weeds (herbicides). Recent studies on the biodiversity crisis name the impacts of pesticides as key drivers, so reducing application of these chemicals in our gardens is a brilliant quick win for wildlife.

## Create homes for wildlife

This is a great option that's suitable for gardens of all shapes and sizes. A bird box will keep birds warm over winter, but make sure to keep them clean and steer clear of 'pretty' bird boxes made of ceramic or metal. These can cause changes in temperature and humidity which are dangerous for baby birds, so it's best to stick to wooden boxes to ensure birds are kept safe.

Insect hotels also provide refuge for all kinds of creatures, from bees and beetles, to spiders. You can even make them at home using sticks and other natural materials.

## Use peat free compost

Peat-based composts have been widely used by gardeners for many years, but due to its environmentally damaging effects, sales of peat-based composts to amateur gardeners will be banned in the UK by 2024. But why not make a positive choice and switch to peat-free compost now. It's readily available at your local garden centre and is a much more sustainable choice!

## Let your lawn grow

If you have a garden, leaving a section of long grass is one of the most simple and effective changes to help wildlife. Long grass provides a home for nesting butterflies and allows wildflowers to flourish, which provide nectar for bees and other pollinators.

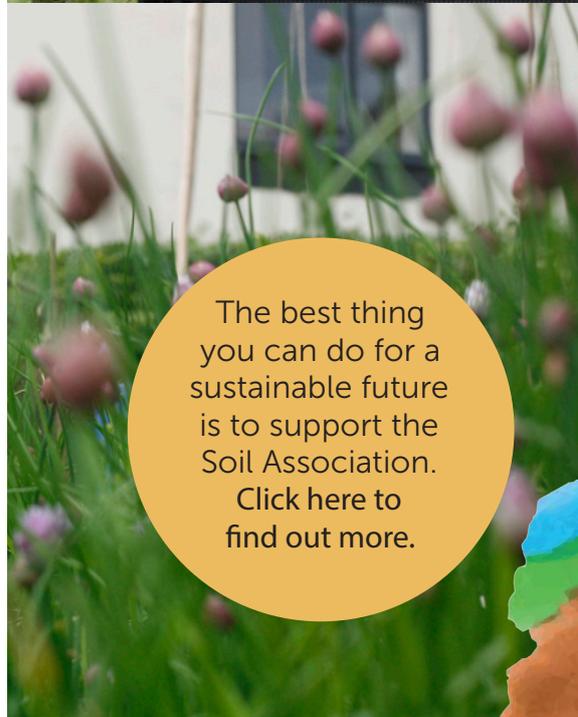
If we inspire you to 'grow wild', be sure to take a photo and tag us on Instagram [@soilassociation](https://www.instagram.com/soilassociation).

Happy gardening!



## Not enough space to grow your own?

Consider getting an organic veg box to support sustainable farmers in your area. You can find an organic box scheme on the Soil Association website or look for the Soil Association logo. Click [here](#) to find out more.



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**Did you know?**  
Our recent survey revealed 76% of consumers feel misled by some labelling on beauty products.

# Sustainable shopping

**Conscious consumerism is on the rise – people care about the potential impact their purchases have on their health and the environment. More and more people are looking for sustainable options, whether that’s genuine organic and natural beauty products or organic textiles.**

While the demand for certified organic products is on the rise, many brands claim to be natural or organic but are actually anything but! Read on to discover how to spot the greenwashing culprits from the authentic organic producers, and together we can encourage more shoppers to say no to harmful products and yes to organic.

## How to avoid the greenwash

The terms ‘natural’ and ‘organic’ aren’t currently regulated like the food and drink industry, meaning brands can use minimal quantities of organic ingredients and claim that it is organic – otherwise known as greenwashing. Even for well-informed

shoppers, it can be confusing to make the right choice when confronted with so many organic and natural claims or logos.

When buying organic beauty or wellbeing products, look out for the COSMOS or Soil Association logo on a product. Or, if you’re looking for organic fashion and textiles, keep an eye out for the GOTS or Soil Association logo.



Our standards do not allow the use of certain ingredients in products due to their potential human and environmental impact, and you can buy with confidence knowing genetically modified ingredients or products tested on animals do not unwittingly sneak into

Click here to find out more about the importance of buying organic.

your home.

## **Sustainable shopping tips**

Find your favourite oil. Add organic coconut oil to water and you've got yourself an amazing makeup remover/makeup brush cleaner. Add organic avocado or organic cacao and you've got a moisture-rich face mask—try experimenting!

Don't forget charity shops. One way of getting your hands on some gorgeous new pieces for your wardrobe is to check out your local charity shops and second-hand retailers. There are so many hidden gems to be found, often still in perfect condition. Plus, you'll be benefiting some amazing charities with every purchase you make.

If you keep an open mind, you can even upcycle worn and mis-shapen pieces into something entirely new. A pair of jeans into a bag? Trousers into shorts? You'll not only be helping the planet, but you'll also be wearing something entirely unique and personal to you! Or if you want to buy new, try some of the Soil Association brands that offer certified organic clothing.

Facewipes & cotton wool. Another great switch is changing your cotton pads, buds and face wipes. Conventional cotton uses 16% of all insecticides used globally, do you really want to be 'cleaning' your face with that? An organic cotton muslin or organic cotton balls/pads are a brilliant replacement. Alternatively, you can upcycle old towels, bedding and clothes into homemade makeup remover pads and flannels!

Don't throw it all out. Of course, the very best way to be sustainable is to use what you have and replace items thoughtfully when they run out or reach the end of their lives. But it's estimated that one third of clothes in UK wardrobes haven't been worn in the last year. The most sustainable item is the one you already own, so be sure to check your cupboards for items you might have forgotten!

Tell your favourite brands. Join us in shouting about the benefits of certified organic products and tell your favourite brands that you want them to go certified organic! If brands know that sustainability is important to you, they'll reconsider how they source their ingredients and materials.

### **The return of bar soap**

Soap bars last much longer and tend to have a lot less packaging than liquid soap, meaning you get a lot more usage from your purchase.

Some Soil Association brands are offering certified organic soap bars. But, if you do use products with plastic packaging, many brands now offer recycling schemes which take the stress out of disposing of packaging properly or the option to bring your plastic bottles back to be refilled. This is often an option in your local plastic free shop.



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# Banking on organic

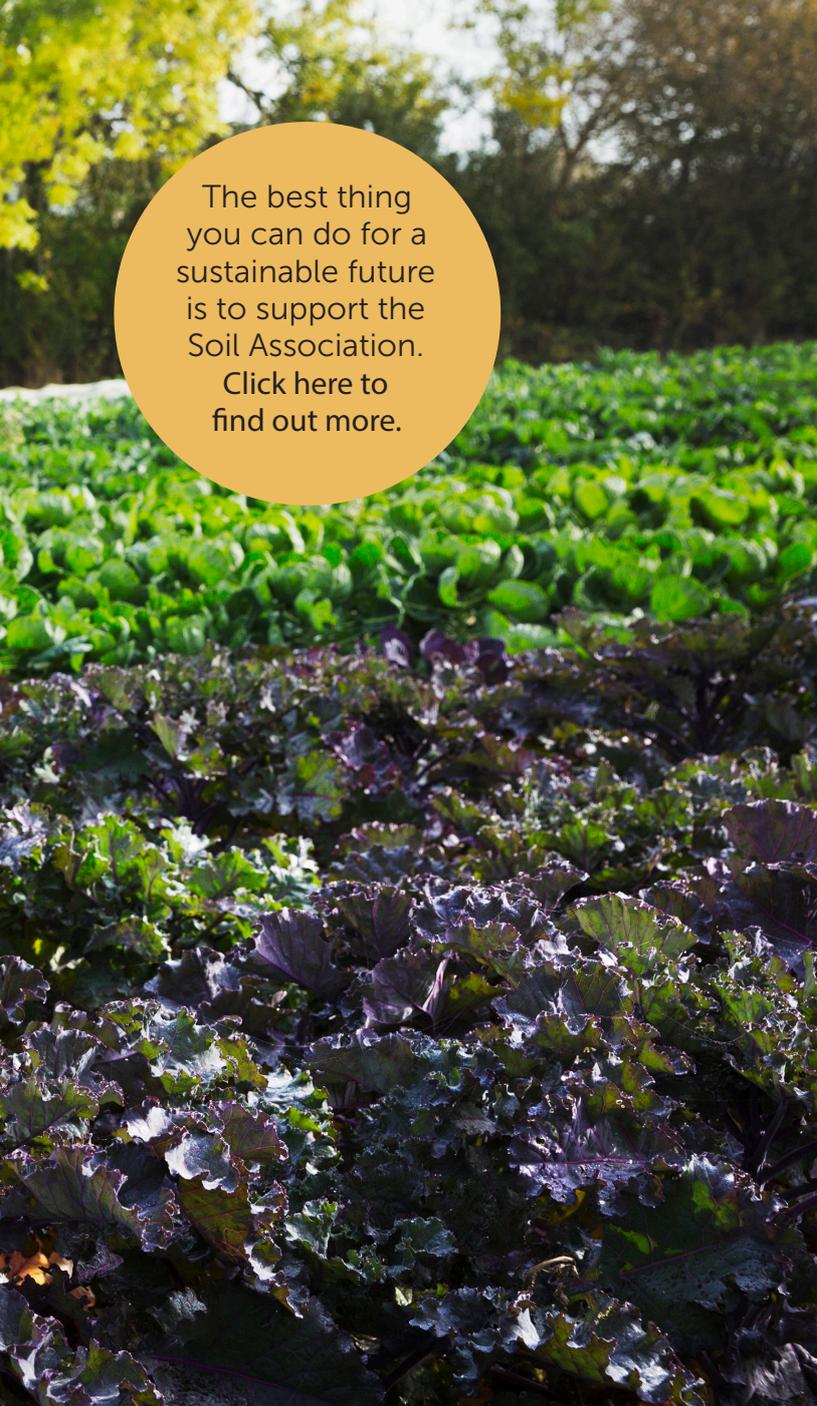
**You may already shop organic, carry a reusable water bottle and avoid plastic bags – but do you ever think about the link between the money in your bank account and the environment?**

Triodos Bank is one of the most sustainable banks in the world, investing in people, companies and organisations that promote positive social, environmental and cultural change. Together, these cover a broad range of sectors – from renewable energy, organic farming and social housing through to retail, charities and education. Including the Soil Association!

So, what can you do?

Do some research

While many of us are now familiar with seeing the Fairtrade Mark or Soil Association organic symbol on the back of the products we buy, the B Corp logo may be a little less familiar. B Corps prioritise working for social and environmental good, voluntarily meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency. Each company's B Impact Report can be viewed online, so that consumers can see where the companies they use sit on the scale. You can use this as a starting point when looking to change your banking provider. Other good resources include Good with Money, Switchit Green, bank.green and Ethical Consumer.



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[Click here to find out more.](#)

### Reduce carbon emissions

Choose a bank that is actively working towards reducing its carbon emissions, both from its own offices and buildings, and from the companies the bank is loaning to and investing in. It is important that we are all moving towards a more sustainable future, so make sure your bank is aligned with your personal values.

### Invest in sustainable industries

When looking to invest your money or pension assets, only choose to invest in industries or companies that have a positive impact on society and the environment. For example, invest in renewable energy or sustainable farming, but avoid investing in fossil fuels and fast fashion.

### Look for transparency

If you can't easily find where a bank is lending or investing on its website, it's worth questioning what industries the bank is supporting. Greater transparency is the key change needed to make the finance sector more accountable, and ultimately more sustainable.

### Talk to your bank

You can talk to your bank or investment provider about these things, and if you don't get the answer you want, you can move your money - making sure that your new bank aligns with your values. Options are out there and by taking action it sends a message to the rest of the finance industry.

Triodos believes that finance can – and should – be a force for good. Like choosing an organic veg box delivery or shopping waste-free, choosing a sustainable financial provider is an individual choice that people can make to be part of the transition to a fairer, cleaner, and greener world.



## Join Triodos and support Soil Association

When you open a Triodos Personal Current Account and your balance reaches £100, Soil Association will receive a £60 donation. Eligibility, terms and conditions and a £3 monthly fee apply. This financial promotion has been approved by Triodos Bank UK.

To find out more, visit:  
[triodos.co.uk/soilassociation](https://triodos.co.uk/soilassociation)



**Did you know?**  
40% of our carbon emissions come from heating our buildings.

# Energy saving tips

## from the Centre for Sustainable Energy

In the UK we are facing two big problems, the staggering rise in energy prices and the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions if we're to reach net zero by 2050. Home retrofits, otherwise known as energy saving home improvements, are one of the best solutions to both these issues. It's good for the planet because you'll use less resources to heat your home, and it's good for your wallet too because you won't have to pay for as much energy.

### **Insulation throughout the nation**

Because most of them are quite old, our UK houses leak a lot of heat through windows, doors, and uninsulated walls, making our heating systems work harder. Not only are we paying for wasted energy, it's resource heavy too: 40% of our carbon emissions come from heating our buildings.

But if you insulate them well, homes become more energy efficient. Imagine you're putting

a new woolly jumper and hat on your house! There's a range of insulation measures available for different budgets and some financial support is available to eligible households. Find out if there's a local advice agency or scheme to give you more information here.

### **Draughts**

Most houses, particularly old ones, have cracks and gaps where warm air goes out and cold air blows in. Draught proofing is easy and any competent DIYer can fix gaps between or around floorboards; around windows and doors; through the letterbox; where pipework comes through external walls; around the loft hatch; and around electrical fittings. There's loads of information in our handy guide. It's important to never block boiler flues, air bricks, or window trickle vents and avoid over draught-proofing windows in kitchens and bathrooms where the moist air needs to escape. Otherwise, you could end up with



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damp or mould problems.

### Loft Insulation

The roof accounts for about 25% of heat loss in a typical house. Loft insulation is a simple and effective way to reduce your heating bills. You can even do some types yourself and still use your loft for storage.

Even if you already have some insulation, your loft may need a top-up. Loft insulation is effective for at least 40 years, and it will pay for itself over and over again in that time. See our [DIY loft insulation factsheet](#) for more information.

### Other home retrofit considerations...

There's no one size fits all approach because each home is unique. How a home is built, what adaptations have been made and how it's used will influence the best approach to retrofit.

It can also be useful to think about energy saving improvements every time you're getting other work done. For example, if you're getting new carpets – consider floor insulation at the same time. Getting a new kitchen? What about installing wall insulation while the disruptive work is being done... We've got more information on home retrofit [here](#). **Make sure you're not wasting energy at home with these simple tips...**

## Energy Saving Top Tips

- Turn your heating down by one degree. One degree is not noticeable and could save you quite a bit. If you are elderly, ill or have small children, don't go below 18°C.
- Did you know an electric shower uses 3-4 times the power of a kettle? Cutting down on the amount of time spent in the shower can make a big difference.
- Use a smart meter. Smart meters are a great way to understand how your home and appliances use energy. You can then make adjustments to lower your bills. Here's CSE's energy advisor Elliot sharing how he uses a smart meter in his home. There's more info about smart meters and how to get one [here](#).
- Defrost your freezer regularly. A defrosted freezer can save over £200 year.
- Wash your clothes at the lowest temperature possible and always make sure you are only washing full loads.
- Prep your radiators. You can add reflective radiator foil behind radiators on external walls to stop heat from being absorbed. If your radiators are under windows, you can tuck your curtains behind them to stop heat from escaping. Also make sure you regularly bleed your radiators.

For more energy saving advice please [click here](#) to visit CSE's advice page.

### The Centre for Sustainable

Energy (CSE) is a charity supporting people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes. Our vision is a world where sustainability is second nature, carbon emissions are cut to safe levels and fuel poverty has been replaced by energy justice. Find out more about how we can support you to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes at [www.cse.org.uk](http://www.cse.org.uk)



**Cycling, walking and wheeling are actions we can all take to reduce our carbon footprints. To tackle dirty air from transport emissions, we need to move away from motorised travel. And this needs to happen now.**

The good news is that even swapping the car for active travel just one day a week makes a difference. Research shows those who swap car-driving for cycling just one trip per day reduce their carbon footprint by about 0.5 tonnes over the course of a year. Here, walking and cycling charity Sustrans share six quick and easy ways you can be more active when you travel.

## 1. Go local

A great way to cut down on car journeys is to start travelling to shops in your local area by walking or cycling. Use a cycle pannier or rucksack to carry your shopping.

Combine your trips as much as possible. If you're going further away, buy in bulk and consider using public transport such as the bus or train.

It's often cheaper and more convenient than driving and parking your car. Then top-up in between big shops by supporting your local businesses.

If you're worried about breathing in air pollution from cars on the road, try looking at alternative traffic-free routes. There are over 5,000 traffic-free miles on the National Cycle Network – a UK-wide network of signed paths and routes for walking, wheeling, cycling and exploring the outdoors.

## 2. Try cycling or walking your commute

Build in some physical activity to your daily routine by planning your commute to include active travel.

Try leaving the car at home and travel by bus or train, then walk, wheel or cycle that last mile. Not only does this have the benefit of improving local air quality, but it is great for your mood and physical health.

## 3. Walk or cycle to school

Walking, cycling, or scooting to school is a fantastic way to start the day.

Start good habits early. Research shows that children who include physical activity in their daily lives are more likely to be active in adult life.

There are plenty of benefits to your own health too. And you'll be reducing air pollution and congestion around the school gates.

## 4. Combine active travel with public transport

Reducing your carbon footprint doesn't mean you have to cycle or walk the whole journey. Public transport helps reduce congestion on roads as well as reducing our individual footprint. CO2 emissions per passenger for train and coach are, on average, six to eight times lower than for car travel.

Bikes are allowed free of charge on most British trains at most times of day – remember to book your bike space in advance. Or you could cycle to the station or bus stop and park your bike there.

Combining active travel with public transport can be a great way to make those longer trips out of town for which you previously relied on a car.



## 5. Plan and practice

Planning ahead for your walk or cycle will save time and stress. Finding quieter routes and cycle paths wherever possible will help make the journey easier and more enjoyable.

When planning a new cycle journey, try out a practice run when the roads are quieter. Knowing what to expect from the journey will help you feel more confident.

## 6. Build a routine

To help integrate walking, wheeling or cycling into your daily life, think of it as a means of getting somewhere rather than just a form of exercise.

One way to do this is to make small changes to your routine and implement active travel where possible.

Start small. Instead of driving to the shops or to a friend's house, try to walk instead.

If walking the whole distance to the shops takes too long, you could drive part way and walk the rest. Set yourself small goals to achieve over time.

# Take action

Act now and together we can make a world of difference. There are lots of ways you can help restore nature, health and a safe climate from the ground up.



## Make a pledge for our planet

The movement towards a world with good health, in balance with nature and a safe climate is growing and you can get involved.

Whether you're already doing some great things, or aren't sure where to start, our pledges are here to guide you towards making small changes that make a big difference. Will you sign up to an organic veg box scheme? Plant a bee friendly herb or flower this month? Buy a certified organic item of clothing?



## Contact your local MP

Lobbying your MP is one of the most effective ways to achieve change and can be a useful tactic across a wide range of issues.

Want to raise an issue with your local MP but not sure how? We have some tips to help you get in touch about the issues that matter – you can email, write, tweet or pick up the phone!

**Join us!**

**The best thing you can do to support a sustainable future is to join the Soil Association.**



**Tell a friend  
about this guide**

Every small change makes a difference, so why not inspire change in someone else and spread the word about sustainable living by sharing this guide with a friend? You can share your tips and tricks for living a sustainable lifestyle, and we'd love to hear them too!

# Together we can make a world of difference.

In our homes and the choices we make; on the land working with farmers; on the streets campaigning with our communities; in schools and hospitals improving the sustainability and health of food on the menu; and in Parliament lobbying government for a more sustainable future.

The Soil Association works with nature to transform the way we eat, farm and care for our natural world.

As a member, you'll join thousands of others who are passionate about protecting the future of our natural world. You'll be supporting us in restoring nature, health, and a safe climate from the ground up.

**Find out more:**  
[soilassociation.co/join-soil](https://soilassociation.co/join-soil)



