



Woodbury Family Lives Green

www.cleanwatermn.org

Kermit the Frog once said, "It ain't easy being green." The Gustafson's disagree. Every day the metro area family finds simple ways to live an earth-friendly lifestyle. "Simplicity is the key," says Laurie Gustafson, who along with her husband John, has her hands full with three-year-old Claire, 2-year-old Collin, a Bernese Mountain Dog named Emma -- and preparations for a third baby due in July. "We look for easy ways to reduce our impact on the environment," Laurie says. "A few simple changes around the house and yard make a big difference over the long term. We try to reduce, reuse and recycle."

For example, Laurie and John avoid buying products with excess packaging, like individually packaged snacks and juice boxes. "We make our own in reusable containers, which saves money and reduces our kids' intake of heavily processed and preserved snacks," says Laurie. She and John buy in bulk when it makes sense, shop at Farmers' Markets and buy organic food when it's on sale and in season. When shopping for clothes and toys for her children, Laurie scans garage sales and buys items that can be handed down. "It's a great way to reuse items and save money," she says.

Around the yard, the Gustafson's compost lawn clippings and kitchen scraps in a backyard composter, available at most hardware stores. Each summer, they work to convert a small area of grass to garden, with a mix of native and cultivated plants. They've replaced landscaping rock with woodchips, which allow rainwater to soak in rather than wash excess nutrients and sediment into storm drains. They've also added five trees to their property, which will add value, shade and shelter as they grow. "The goal is a low-maintenance yard that looks beautiful, requires less water and has a positive impact on our environment," Laurie says.

When it comes to lawn care, the Gustafson's "mow high" and only when necessary. By leaving their grass a bit longer, their lawn develops deeper roots, requires less water, survives drought better, controls stormwater run-off and erosion, and is generally greener and healthier. The family fertilizes their lawn only when needed with phosphorus-free fertilizer, in accordance with a new Minnesota law that restricts the use of lawn fertilizer containing phosphorus.

The Gustafson's also sweep up grass clippings and dispose of Emma's droppings, as both can be washed into a nearby wetland when it rains. "Pet waste, leaves and grass clippings add phosphorus to water, which contributes to high levels of algae," says Laurie. "Too much algae leads to green, stinky, unattractive lakes and impaired wildlife habitat."

While Gustafson's job at the Office of Environmental Assistance gives her the inside track on environmental issues, she says that anyone can live a "greener" lifestyle. "It doesn't have to be hard," she says. "A few small changes can have a big impact on our quality of life."

Will Laurie use cloth diapers with baby number three? "We're going to try," she says. "Even if we use a mix of cloth and disposable, we're still reducing our overall use of disposable diapers. For us, living green is about keeping it simple -- and realistic!"

#