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## The Eco-Thrifter's Medley: Designing a low-waste lifestyle guide that seeks to address and overcome common barriers to sustainable living

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# The Eco-Thrifter's Medley

Designing a low-waste lifestyle guide that seeks to  
address and overcome common barriers to  
sustainable living

**By Laura Raufi**

# Project & Objectives

# Project Concept and Primary Objectives

- Create guidebook/zine on how to adopt a more ecologically conscious lifestyle, with an emphasis on affordability and accessibility for students and working people
- Based on research and personal experience, the guidebook will include tips on greener cooking, shopping, and energy usage, with integrated principles of personal health and well-being along with community involvement toward larger sociopolitical change.
- My goal with this project is to identify and offer solutions to common mental, physical, and cultural barriers when it comes to adopting more environmentally sustainable habits.
- Emphasize on creative written communication and visual design, allowing me to synthesize and apply what I have learned over the course of my studies as I progressed through my Fairhaven Concentration, “Accessible Communications and Design for a Sustainable, Community-based Future”.

# Book Layout

- Parts of the guidebook are written and released in different volumes, all in zine form, which will be compiled at the end of the project

Volume 1: Food & Cooking

Volume 2: Travel

Volume 3: Wardrobe

Volume 4: Household

Volume 5: Personal care

- Each volume will be laid out in sections as seen in first volume, which we will look at later

# Definitions

## **Sustainability**

- National Geographic Encyclopedia entry: “Sustainability is the practice of using natural resources responsibly today, so they are available for future generations tomorrow”.
- Merriam-Webster: “of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods”
- Personal definition: a broad set of principles and practices that seeks to minimize negative impacts on the earth and its finite resources (such as plastic and chemical pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, overexploitation of natural resources for human consumption, etc.) on an individual, group, community, societal, or global level.

## **Greenwashing**

- Merriam-Webster: the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear to be more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it really is (i.e. “green” fast fashion marketing)

# What sets this book apart from other sustainable lifestyle guides

- Emphasis on affordability and accessibility aims to address most common barriers to personal sustainability.
- Addresses recent concerns of emphasis on individual sustainability as a backlash to “carbon footprint” rhetoric of several years ago, which I will outline in the next section of the presentation.
- Incorporates multiple ways of knowing: community info sourcing as well as found written resources
- Emphasis on imperfection
- Inclusion of community involvement in every volume
- Includes swaps and alternatives that can be adjusted to reader’s finances, time available, or energy levels. Notable feature of food volume: zero-waste, “working-backward” substitutes to packaged foods for those who have time

# Research



# Sustainability Communication Survey

This survey is intended to gauge the effectiveness of popular rhetoric and education when it comes to environmental sustainability on an individual level, and to pinpoint common barriers to sustainable living habits.

This is an informal and anonymous survey that will be used to inform the final iteration of my Honors capstone presentation, which will take place on Monday, June 5th at 9am. Please answer whichever questions you feel apply to you. Thank you for participating!

raufilaura@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



Not shared

## Part 1: Agree/Disagree

Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5.

I consider myself to be an environmentally conscious person.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

**\*Survey was posted to my personal Instagram story and the WWU subreddit**

# Key Findings

Disclaimer! These are the biased findings of a non-sociologist doing her best to make sense of informally collected data from 52 random friends and strangers. More research is definitely needed to confirm these findings.

- Most survey respondents considered themselves to be environmentally conscious (78.9%) and at least somewhat conscious of their waste habits (76.9%). Most also expressed a desire to live a more environmentally conscious lifestyle than they are currently (86.6%).
- Most survey respondents considered themselves relatively environmentally literate: most were familiar with the concept of “greenwashing” (76.9%) and a slight majority (59.6%) felt confident in their abilities to spot instances of greenwashing in the media.

# Key Findings

- The highest barriers for most people when it came to adopting more environmentally friendly habits were Unaffordability and Feeling that individual habits make no difference (both were selected by 63.5% of respondents), although in relation to the latter, 71.1% of respondents still expressed that they thought it was important for individuals to minimize their own environmental footprints.
- Most people found food/cooking to be the most difficult area of their life to develop more sustainable habits in, followed by transportation (this informed my choice of food as the subject of my first volume).

# Key Findings

- When considering the ideas of “eco-friendly” or “sustainable” living, the first things that came to mind for most respondents were:
  - Frequently marketed zero-waste products like mason jars and bamboo toothbrushes
  - Recycling and composting
  - Buying secondhand and thrifted goods
- The most commonly adopted eco-friendly habits by survey respondents were:
  - Carrying a reusable water bottle
  - Using reusable shopping bags
  - Properly sorting recycling
  - Buying secondhand when possible
  - Saving energy in household
  - Saving water in household

# What I gathered from these results

- Much of the crowd that I surveyed felt turned off by mainstream sustainability marketing; often perceived current popular rhetoric as corporations telling individuals that they were personally responsible for environmental issues, and generally perceived the popular sustainability movement to be largely aesthetic and ineffective at making real change.
- Many respondents agreed we needed “systemic change” over individual actions, but few expressed specific ideas for how an individual would help to create that change (or perhaps simply didn’t believe that they could)
- The most important things in getting people that are environmentally conscious on any level to adopt a sustainable practice is to find a way to make that practice affordable, easily achievable, and to effectively communicate to individuals that they would be making a tangible difference if they adopted that practice.
- The most successful environmentally friendly habits were ones that have been thoroughly ingrained in our culture after consistent, effective, and widespread educational and media campaigns.

# Notable survey comments

- “I still think that looking at sustainability through a personal lens is incomplete when steel manufacturing can output more pollution in a day than I can in my lifetime.”
- “Too much of the conversation surrounds personal liability. Yes, to a certain degree, we should do what we can as individuals, but the science is clear that it is not the individual who is to blame. Corporations and systems need to change for the consumer to actually be able to live sustainably.”
- “I'm taking issue with the focus on this survey. I'm a huge proponent of sustainability. But individual offsets cannot dent the environmental impacts of corporations. The pressure needs to be on them, not our 10 minute showers imo. I would love to hear some other opinions too”
- “I think both personal sustainability and system sustainability are important. But it is necessary to realize that personal sustainability was pushed onto people intentionally by companies who do the most damage in order to shift the blame and to escape responsibility.”
- “Large corporations need to take more responsibility!”

# New project goals that I developed in response to these concerns

- Address learned helplessness from a reactionary backlash to the one-sided “personal responsibility” narratives of the early 2000s to mid 2010s (think Carbon Footprint rhetoric)
  - Plan to address this by emphasizing the need for both individual sustainability practices AND community involvement
- Emphasize the importance of individual habits contributing to a *cultural shift* in how we in the global north think about how we consume and dispose of consumer goods: promote a culture of collective obligation toward the health and wellbeing of our planet (especially in the Global North) rather than reinforcing the narrative that personal sustainable habits act only as small standalone behaviors.
- Combat the idea that sustainable behaviors are only accessible to those with disposable income by emphasizing affordability, time-efficiency, and accessibility.

# New project goals that I developed in response to these concerns

- Continuing to center my guidebook around individual actions – there are enough books providing large scale, purely philosophical solutions to environmental issues that do not offer ways people can get involved individually beyond simply voting every couple of years.
- Focus on individual actions as tools of empowerment that are integral to community and societal movement toward sustainability, not as something mutually exclusive to organizing and getting involved with mass movements.
- If readers aren't given specifics on how and where to get involved, a freeze response is pretty much inevitable; no collective movement for change can begin in this way.



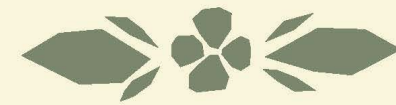
# Mini Medley Sample: Zine Volume 1

The Eco-Thrifter's Medley

VOLUME 1

# THE ECO-THRIFTY KITCHEN

Food, Cooking, &  
Affordable Sustainability



By Laura Raufi

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## In-Season Produce Summer, Pt. 1



AVOCADOS



BEETS



BELL PEPPERS\*



BLUEBERRIES\*



CANTALOUPE



CHERRIES\*



CORN



CUCUMBER



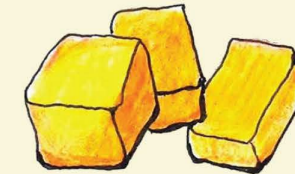
EGGPLANT

\*Dirty Dozen: Buy organic to avoid higher concentrations of pesticides

## Mango Chia Pudding

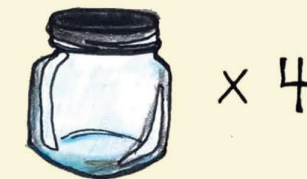
### Ingredients

1/2 pound fresh or frozen mango chunks  
1 13oz can lite coconut milk  
1 tsp sugar or other sweetener  
6 Tbsp chia seeds



### Instructions

1. Chop mangos into 1/4-inch pieces. Place half of the mango chunks, the coconut milk, and sugar in a blender and process until smooth.
2. Divide the remaining mango chunks between 4 small containers, preferably 10-12oz glass jars. Add 1.5 Tbsp of chia seeds to each container. Finally, pour the mango coconut milk mixture into the containers, dividing it evenly between all four.
3. Stir the contents of each container to make sure all the chia seeds have adequate exposure to the liquid. Place lids on the containers and refrigerate overnight, or up to 4-5 days.



# Things I learned in the process

- Researching, writing, and designing an interdisciplinary booklet is an extremely lengthy process!
- Learned to argue effectively with contrarian college kids on Reddit (at least on this subject)
- If I want to continue this process, I would definitely have to sell the end product to make it worth my time, but I still want to get this information out there.
- Talking to people was the best form of research for this project: I got so many ideas for book topics and sections from other Fairhaven students who had done similar things, and I learned a lot from my survey responses as well.

**Thank you for listening!**