Sustainable Living Reading List
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My original assignment for this article was to review a few of the plethora of sustainable living books currently gracing the shelves of my local bookstore. I selected *The Green Book*, *It’s Easy Being Green*, *Sustainable Living for Dummies*, and *Green Living* because they seemed representative of the subject and because two were in list format and two were more detailed. I started by reading the two books that are primarily lists: *The Green Book* and *It’s Easy Being Green*. By the time I finished the second book, I felt frustrated. Although there is good information in these books, including excellent lists of resources, the authors rate every behavior as equally important and most of the changes they suggest have a very small impact, although they are easy to make. However, the accumulated list of suggestions was overwhelming.

Then I remembered *The Consumer’s Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*, an older title that I have recommended to people who have questions about the environmental impact of plastic bags, styrofoam cups, disposable diapers, and other consumer products. Although the book was written in 1999, it’s still relevant to today’s consumers. The authors studied a wealth of environmental statistics and determined through risk analysis which consumer behaviors are most likely to impact the environment and which do not really matter that much. They found that consumer behavior in the areas of transportation, food, and household operations have the largest impact on the environment.

The authors also detail seven rules for responsible consumption, including not feeling guilty about unimportant decisions, such as what kind of diapers, disposable cups, and shopping bags to use. To me, this is one of the most useful parts of the book. They urge consumers to consider the size and impact of their consumer choices. The size of the house you buy or the car you drive has much more of an environmental impact than whether you use disposable diapers or ask for plastic bags instead of paper at the
supermarket. The authors also discuss how people can become more involved in encouraging government and businesses to make environmentally responsible choices. The appendices include a detailed account of the statistical methods they used to arrive at their conclusions and a resource list, which includes some outdated web sites. The book is extensively footnoted.

Although the statistics in the book are older, many of the consumer trends they identified are still the same. Certainly, American houses are still getting bigger and, although gas prices have soared since 1999, many people are still driving cars that are not very fuel efficient. The authors' decision to focus on the relative impacts of consumer choices means that there is not much attention paid to the details of how to build or renovate a green house, how to install a grey water system, or where to buy eco-friendly clothing. That is why I recommend that people read this book, then choose either Green Living or Sustainable Living for Dummies for more specific suggestions. Each offers sound advice for how to shop, travel, and live with the environment in mind. Both have excellent resource lists and are highly readable. Sustainable Living for Dummies was written and published in Australia, so the resource lists and the writing style reflect that. Another difference is that Sustainable Living includes a section on corporate environmental responsibility, while Green Living focuses more on small organic companies.