

3 Simple Strategies to Create a More Sustainable Life and World

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How do you build a brighter future for yourself and your community?

For the last 20 years, we've been helping people all over the country answer this question in practical, hands-on ways.

Among our clients, one theme emerges again and again: people create the biggest impact when they work together. By lifting each other up at the individual and community level, we rise.

You have the power to create a more resilient, sustainable future. You can help our world become stronger and more vibrant. You can help yourself thrive through the challenges you face and even become stronger because of them.

In this guide, we'll lead you through three key areas where making small changes can create a more sustainable life and world. We'll give you three simple strategies you can implement in yourself, your home, and your community so you can create a positive ripple effect that increases global resilience.

Let's get started.

Part 1: Building a Sustainable Self

If you want to create a more sustainable life and planet, you must start by building your own resilience.

Building your resilience is how you thrive as a person.

You cultivate resilience when you learn from the struggles you go through and use those lessons to become a stronger version of yourself.

By building personal resilience, you become someone who doesn't just bounce back from challenges; you bounce forward. You discover what brings you joy, develop new tools and skills, and consciously practice being the best version of yourself.

When you cultivate resilience and show up as the best version of yourself, you improve the way you talk to and relate to yourself, and show up for your family and community in a way that helps everyone thrive.

On the flip side, unless you make a point to cultivate resilience inside yourself, you simply cannot sustain the focus, commitment, and energy you need to create long-term, meaningful change outside of yourself.

By building a more sustainable self, you make it possible to create growth and success in your life, work, and world.

Here's how to get started.

STRATEGY #1: Meditate for 5 minutes a day.

Meditation helps you get centered and develop a grounded core to move through the world. It allows you to observe your actions, reactions, thoughts and emotions from the perspective of a loving witness. By slowing down to observe your actions, you give yourself the choice of what you want to respond to, and how you want to respond.

Don't worry about meditating perfectly. There's actually no such thing. It's okay if you get distracted, lose focus, or find it hard to sit still.

What's most important is consistency, meaning you develop a habit of showing up to meditate imperfectly. By cultivating a practice of dropping in to pay full attention to what's happening in each moment, you will slowly build up your meditation muscle.

To get started, we recommend you commit to a meditation practice of five minutes a day. Choose a routine and time limit that feels do-able to you.

Once you are settled in your chair or sitting on the floor in a comfortable position, start your timer, close your eyes, and simply sit and notice your breath. When thoughts arise, imagine them as clouds passing by. Greet them with kindness and return to a focus on your breath, breathing in and breathing out.

For more hands-on guidance during the meditation process itself, there are a number of excellent meditation apps such as Insight Timer and Calm. Give them a try for extra support bringing mindful moments into your everyday life, and slowly expand your mediation practice.

Part 2: Building a Sustainable Home

If strengthening yourself and how you move through the world is your foundation for building a more sustainable life, your home is the next layer of influence where you can make a meaningful impact.

Building a sustainable home is about building strategies that allow you to weather storms, literally and figuratively. It's about evaluating your sources of abundance, food, energy, and shelter, and designing ways that you can be a producer, not just a consumer, of the resources in your world.

When you prioritize sustainability at the home level, you get hands-on experience with abundance. You develop a physical routine in which you create more than you can actually get back.

STRATEGY #2: Design an edible forest garden.

Whether or not you already have a home garden, you can upgrade the sustainability of your home or community garden site by designing a space for planting and food cultivation based on permaculture principles.

In brief, permaculture employs the wisdom of nature to create systems that produce food, shelter, and energy. Native nations and indigenous people are the original developers of many of the ideas utilized in the design system, though many permaculture teachings have lacked appropriate attribution and remuneration to the creators of these ideas. This is fortunately starting to change.

At its core, there are three permaculture ethics—earth care, people care and fair share. By understanding patterns in nature, permaculture students learn how to grow food, manage water catchment and storage, utilize renewable energy and build community.

To apply these principles at the home scale, you want to design your garden the same way that nature would build a garden. Researchers have shown that nature gardens like a forest, with multiple layers, diverse species and thick mulch to create healthy soil. To pump up the productivity and sustainability of your home garden, we recommend combining this forest approach with edible plants—something we call an “edible forest garden”.

To get started with planning this type of home garden, think through the layers and species of plants you want to incorporate. Viewed vertically, you might include:

- Roots – such as potatoes or carrots;
- Herbaceous layer – such as lettuce or kale;
- Ground cover—such as strawberries or chamomile;
- Shrubs –such as blueberries or raspberries;
- Low Story –such as dwarf peach trees or figs;
- Upper Story—such as apple or persimmon trees; and
- Vining—such as grapes or hardy kiwi

Of course, you'll want to design this layout in a way that works for your space, soil type and more. For example, this could be a small six foot plot in an urban space, or a much larger forest garden where space allows.

No matter what species or layers you ultimately include in your home garden, the benefits of a permaculture approach are the same. Your backyard will help lead the way to a more regenerative future across the globe.

Part 3: Building a Sustainable Community

Just as you can increase sustainability through your own mindfulness and home life, you can make a significant difference in the world by using resilience principles to help guide you to get involved and work in community.

A sustainable community is one that can weather storms or a shock of some sort and become stronger through the process – this helps build strength and resilience. Sustainable communities have a clear vision for the future, and they leverage the ideas of local leaders and community members to define and build that vision. Everyone contributes tools and resources to advance specific goals that benefit the entire community, and leaders prioritize creating a high quality of life for every single community member.

Until everyone has sufficient resources to enjoy a healthy quality of life, the community won't flourish because not everyone has the bandwidth to engage or contribute their gifts and ideas.

As we like to say, the collective is more effective—especially when it comes to creating a future where everyone can thrive.

STRATEGY #3: Gather as a Community to Create the Future you Want

You can help build resilience at the community level by leading change efforts in small-scale, achievable ways. These include seeking out other people who care about issues that you care about, finding a regular time to gather together and creating a vision for what you want to see, and connecting with local leaders to make concrete changes happen.

Here's how to get started.

1. Choose your focus.

What's one issue you truly care about and want to see changed in your community? Do you want to see more biking or walking trails in your neighborhood? Would you love to have a monthly hike, or host a kids' bike ride once a week in your neighborhood?

2. Gather with others who share your passion.

Talk to your neighbors and other community members to find out who shares your excitement for the changes you want to see, or attend gatherings where people are talking about what gets you excited. Join the dialogue, or create a series of conversations where you gather as a group to talk about what you want to see in the future of your community.

3. Create a plan to enact your vision.

Start by writing down your collective vision during a community gathering. From there, you can identify some strategies or goals to move the vision forward as a group. You can also identify what tools and resources you need to make that vision a reality. Don't forget to ask your fellow community members to share their ideas and insights and determine who is willing to organize events, attend community meetings, and speak up on behalf of the group.

4. Continue to gather as a group, and work with local leaders to create change.

Attend community meetings and meet with leaders from local non-profits or your town to understand what they see as the roadblocks and opportunities around the issue. Continue to meet as a group to move the vision forward, step by step, and you will start to see the change you want as relationships and trust are built.

While the process above may take some time, you can get started today in 15 minutes or less. Simply identify a specific change you want to see in your local neighborhood, then make it real in your mind's eye by imagining how great things will be when it happens. Use this vision to fuel your next steps as you begin to seek out like-minded community members.

If you have time to go one step further today, you can identify a community meeting to join to see what others are up to, and what your town or city is already doing around the area you want to focus on. This might be a town hall meeting, a school board gathering, a first aid training or a trail community design workshop. Check out community bulletin boards, town websites, non-profit organization newsletters or ask your neighbors about a place to plug in, so you can learn more and join others who are focused on the same issues and opportunities you are.

Remember that when local leaders like you come together for a shared purpose, they can create real, lasting and sustained change. The collective truly is more effective.

At Yes! We Rise and our sister consultancy, Dialogue + Design, we focus on empowering and guiding leaders and decision-makers to put these principles into practice. [Click here](#) (www.dialogueanddesign.com) to learn more about our work in these areas, and find out more about the Yes! We Rise [podcast here](#) (www.yeswerise.org).

What's Next?

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The Yes! We Rise podcast features solutions-seekers, change-makers, and those creating a brighter future. We share stories and strategies to inspire action to build collective resilience and community transformation.

To create change, people need to feel like they belong and that they are part of a growing movement. Our podcast helps amplify that movement. We want our listeners and guests to know that their voice matters and they have the inspiration, agency and ability to transform their lives and their communities.

You are the key to a resilient future

Join us for new episodes to get you fired up, ready to kick some ass, and create the change you want to see in the world.

You'll hear inspiring stories from fellow change-makers and discover new tools, strategies and resources to help you get started and keep the momentum going.

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