

Yes, Earth Day is still happening – here's how to celebrate at home

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While in the midst of a global pandemic, we can't forget the ongoing climate crisis.

From the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo to the 34th annual SXSW festival in Austin, TX, to the Major League Baseball season, just about every big spring event this year has been canceled or postponed. But the annual event that occurs on April 22, Earth Day, is one we cannot afford to miss.

After all, it's the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, which began as a "youthquake" in 1970 with a Wisconsin senator at the helm. Senator Gaylord Nelson had hoped to organize a "nationwide environmental teach-in," but left the planning up to local organizers who had roots in the recent civil rights movement. In a beautifully organic way, the grassroots attempt led to millions of young Americans protesting and hosting active discussions all over the nation on April 22. Less than a year later, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was formed. (Something to keep in mind when individual actions feel futile.) Though Earth Day has since evolved to something more...corporate, it lives on today as a well-funded international campaign, presented by Earth Day Network, its global organizer.

Last year, Lloyd wrote that Earth Day looked like "tired baby boomer nostalgia." Instead, he suggested we put our focus on the big green wave that was in our midst, **Extinction Rebellion**, the global environmental movement that has outposts all over the world. XR, as they're called for short, believes in non-violent direct action and mass civil disobedience.

XR made the news cycle rounds last April, when they coordinated a series of activities in London to draw attention to the fact that our planet is currently on fire while our public officials stand around wringing their hands (or writing it off). Writes Enrique Dans in **Forbes**, "It is the logical result of our governments' breach of the social contract in doing nothing about global warming, and justifying their inaction by saying that nothing can be done or simply doing too little, too late."

Which brings us back to Earth Day. In a **recent press release**, Earth Day Network noted that they are shifting their actions from massive worldwide cleanups (Paris was expecting 20k+ volunteers for just one event) to a strictly online campaign. "Whether it be coronavirus or our global climate crisis, we cannot shut down," said Kathleen Rogers, the President of Earth Day Network. "Instead, we must shift our energies and efforts to new ways to mobilize the world to action."

These efforts include a smartphone app for citizen science and **teaching toolkits** for caregivers and children to use while schools are closed. While these virtual protests and social media campaigns are important for spreading awareness, they lack the powerful punch and headline-grabbing actions of **semi-naked protestors** interrupting a Brexit debate at the House of Commons. But, as we've written before, even in the midst of something as frightening and all-encompassing as this global outbreak, we must remember that individual actions matter, and we cannot let this pandemic thwart the **fight against single-use plastics**. Now, more than ever, those of us who are able must hold our public officials accountable and remain vigilant of how powerful interests (cough, the fossil fuel industry, cough) will try to exploit this pandemic.

How to celebrate Earth Day at home

While none of us are sure how long this pandemic will last, each of us can take steps to ensure we don't turn one crisis into another. Strive for **sufficiency over efficiency**, avoid the urge to panic-buy, and keep fighting the good fight. Below are a few ways I'm holding my own Earth Day "sit-in." (Note: As a person who is privileged to work from home and able to avoid most human contact, I realize some of these actions aren't realistic for everyone.)

Keep reusing

Properly **clean, disinfect** and use your reusables whenever possible. Learn how to grocery shop when you **can't bring your own containers**. Embrace the **bar soap**, from your shower to your kitchen to your pets.

Stop buying

Consider a **no-plastic buy challenge** like Melissa did. If it's too overwhelming, focus on one item at a time (like these **solid shampoo tablets**). You don't have to be a total martyr, there's lots of **DIY beauty products** you can whip up from your fridge and pantry. See what **20 foods you can make yourself** to cut back on plastic.

Cut way back on water

Since you're not going out, consider **cutting back on showering** to save water and energy (but keep washing your hands!). Unless you're in direct contact with medical professionals or constantly out in the world, try showering once or twice a week. The same **goes for your kids**, too. There's never been a better time to try the **no-poo experiment**, too. Give up **fabric softener**.

Embrace frugality

Try eating the **same soup every day** for a week (or 17 years!). Keep your **pantry stocked** with humble ingredients that are also delicious. Now is a great time to pass your **frugal life skills** onto your kids. Eat more **soup**.

Let your yard go wild

Turn your lawn back into a **productive plant community**. **Plant clover**. Stop **raking your damn leaves** and use them as a home compost pile instead. **Grow vegetables** in your yard. **Plant a wildlife hedge** instead of building a fence.

Stay healthy

Help overloaded healthcare professionals and hospitals by keeping your own **immune system strong**. Go on **solo walks** for both mental and physical breaks. **Reduce your consumption** of meat and dairy. **Go outside**, if it's safe. If you're unable to go outside, try one of these **"visual soundscape" videos** to relax.

While I remain skeptical of the Earth Day that was sponsored by a car company and airline last year, I applaud President Rogers' plea that our governments **must** listen to science:

Our current pandemic demonstrates that governments must embrace science early. As we see now, many governments were slow to respond or even indifferent about the science of the coronavirus pandemic. But the last few weeks have also demonstrated that our society, even at the international level, is capable of mass shifts across all sectors to meet a crisis head-on. We must apply the same scale and urgency of our response to climate change.

We need individual actions as much as we need XR and its explicit actions to get our government's attention. As one activist so succinctly **told Rolling Stone**: "You can have a million people marching each week and no one cares. But you block a road, people take notice."

But I worry, as so many of us do, about life post-pandemic. While it is hopeful and inspiring to look at the clear waters of the Venice canals flourishing with fish or Welsh goats **frolicking in the streets**, this brief break for our planet is just that — temporary. Our planet will go back to its unlivable levels if we don't implement new policies and systemic change.

In a **Twitter thread**, professor and climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe cautions that this brief respite in carbon emissions, while amazing to see, is not the permanent answer. She writes, "The real question is this: will we use our response to the pandemic as an opportunity to innovate for the future, or to increase our grip on the past? That decision is the one that will most profoundly impact our ability to tackle climate change."

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