



Action in Our Neighborhoods and Communities: Overview

Climate change has the power to disrupt and endanger every natural and social system that we're part of: our food, our health care, our homes, our surroundings. These systems can also help us survive the strains that climate change will place on all of us. Many of these relationships have to do with how we interact with the landscape and the layout of the places we live.

Plants and healthy soil sequester carbon—that is, they hold it within themselves instead of allowing it to enter the atmosphere and trap more heat on earth. They also “exhale” oxygen, provide shade, help manage stormwater, and support our physical and mental health. This is true of the plants we nurture in gardens and parks and to the woodlands that cover half the state. Composting our food waste, in addition to reducing methane emissions, means we need to use less land for landfills.

Continuing to use existing structures does more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions than building new ones, even when the new ones are designed to be energy-efficient. Maintaining the buildings we have—especially for housing—can create jobs, as well as more livable housing and safer workspaces for more people.

As we build into, move within and repair our communities, planning where we live and

how we get around to minimize our fossil fuel consumption can ultimately increase our convenience, community feeling and quality of life as well. This section offers ways to invest our relationships, making us less dependent on systems that harm, and better supported by one another.



Yard, Garden and Public Green Space: Human-Plant Relations

Seven ways to literally make Rhode Island greener



- Plant and nurture shade trees to cool your house and yard
- Convert grass lawns to native plant beds and ground covers
- Grow fruits, vegetables and herbs among your flowers
- Use a push mower instead of a power mower and shears instead of a weed whacker
- Offer to help your neighbors in their gardens, and ask for help in yours

- Tend a plot in a community garden, or join a Friends group for your city or town park
- Vote yes on ballot measures, and support budget initiatives, that provide for the creation and maintenance of city and town parks

We can work with our plant neighbors to slow down climate change. Those of us with yards or gardens find in them a connection with the ecosystems where we live. Those of us who live in cities may find that connection in our nearby parks.

Household action: Plant and nurture shade trees to cool your house and yard and reduce the need for air conditioning in summer—as much as a 20-degree difference! [Find hardy native tree choices](#) such as dogwood, cherry and birch for the sunny/southern side of your house. Conifers like eastern red cedar or white and red pine provide a windbreak on the northern side year-round. Converting grass lawns to native groundcovers, [beds of native perennials](#), and walks or patios of stone or wood can reduce or even eliminate the use of mowers, pesticides and fertilizers. See the [“Compost, Grease Recycling and Food Waste” section](#) for more about composting your food scraps for fertilizer.

There are lawn and garden practices that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions—especially those that use gas-powered equipment. But many gardening practices actively help manage greenhouse gases, support the local ecosystem and improve quality of life for people nearby. Planting trees on city streets filters air, cools sidewalks, and absorbs climate-warming carbon dioxide. City and town parks with trees and grass do the same, and allow people to get outdoors and meet each other.

□Community: Support, by volunteering or donation, programs like [Lots of Hope](#),

which helps community groups transform vacant lots into spaces to grow food, and tree-planting initiatives and park-maintaining groups in your city or town.



Compost, Grease Recycling, and Food Waste: Turning Garbage Into Gold

Five ways to reduce Rhode Island's methane emissions and landfill land grabs



- Compost in your yard, or even driveway, if you have the space
- Check if a local restaurant will take your used cooking oil to recycle
- Work with a neighborhood association and/or community garden to set up a compost dropoff
- Ask your workplace to install a composting bin and contract for pickup
- Organize a letter-writing campaign or petition to ask your Town Manager for compost collection bins, to go with your trash and recycling bins, and for a cooking-oil drop-off point

Rhode Island's central landfill will reach its capacity in 2038 if we continue throwing away food waste, and food scraps that end up in landfill produce the powerful greenhouse gas methane. Composting food scraps and yard waste reduces methane production and the land used for landfills.

Household action: The basics of home composting: add vegetable matter only (vegetable food scraps, grass clippings, raked leaves), use a ventilated bin with a fitted cover if you live in the city so rats don't get in, and turn it over every so often with a shovel or gardening fork. When it looks like dirt, it is dirt, and you can use it in flowerpots or on your garden beds. See the "Further Resources" section online for more detailed guides.

Composting also reduces the fossil fuel and monetary cost of shipping food scraps and yard waste to the landfill, provides a vital resource to community agriculture, can be used to create jobs through composting businesses and increased support for farming, and helps increase the power of soils to store heat-trapping carbon. Recycling cooking oil/grease as biodiesel offers a fossil fuel replacement whose overall production creates fewer greenhouse gases. There are companies in Rhode Island that will collect both of these forms of "waste" and turn them into something useful.

Community action: Work with a neighborhood association or community organization to set up a compost drop-off, and make an arrangement with a community garden or with a composting business to collect and use it. Some farmers' markets [<http://farmfreshri.org/>] also have compost drop-offs. Join with coworkers, other parents, board members, etc. to propose the addition of a compost bin to your business or your children's school.



Conserving Our Built Environment: Working With Embodied Energy

Three ways to maintain what's working and not waste it



- Refurbish old buildings rather than tearing them down and building new ones
- Support jobs programs that offer training in weatherization, restoration, and other strategies for making buildings more energy-efficient
- Enlist your local historical society in climate action

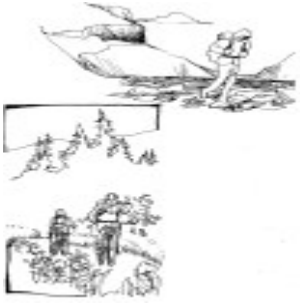
Rhode Island is thickly settled and full of old buildings. If you want to build a new building, you have to tear something else down—either woodlands and meadowlands that help absorb our carbon emissions, or an existing building. Our historic buildings are a useful tool in fighting climate change, because maintaining them causes

significantly fewer greenhouse gas emissions than building them from scratch. The Energize RI bill, described in the [“Carbon Pricing” section](#), includes a provision for creating jobs in construction and weatherization.

Household action: Maintain your house and/or the houses you own. In addition to the actions in the “Sealing and Insulating Your Indoor Space” section, keeping the building(s) you own in good repair means that you’re conserving the resources that it took to build them—their “embodied energy”—and avoiding the need for fossil-fuel-intensive new construction.

Climate change threatens the 18th century system of port towns and villages around Narragansett Bay. Failure to act sets up the flooding of Newport, Bristol, Warren, and Wickford, all of which have low-lying historic waterfronts, and multigenerational beach communities like Roy Carpenter’s Beach. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and slowing climate change is well within the mission of Rhode Island’s historical societies and preservation organizations.

Community action: Enlist your local historical society and its members to put pressure on state agencies and legislators when questions of emissions reduction are at stake—as well as using their revolving fund (if they have one) or other resources to help improve the energy efficiency and livability of historical buildings.



Woodland Preservation and Restoration: Into the Woods

Six ways to support a living system that supports us



- Learn how to take care of the trees closest to you
- Reject construction projects that destroy or fragment forests
- Volunteer with one of your area's land trusts, or a land preservation organization
- Watch your city/town, as well as the state, for green space bonds
- Participate in urban forestry
- Go for a walk in the woods

As well as absorbing climate-warming carbon dioxide, woodlands lower temperatures under their shade, protect water supplies, provide wildlife habitat, hold back erosion, and can serve to break strong winds. In New England, it takes 100 years or more for woodlands to mature. And while our woods in RI have been maturing, they have been

declining in extent. This trend needs to be reversed if we are going to maintain our quality of life in Rhode Island.

Household action: Taking care of the trees closest to you might mean volunteering with an organization that does woodlands management, like the [RI Forest Conservators Organization](#) or following the recommendations of the [Rhode Island Tree Council](#) for the trees on your city street. Your trees are your neighbors, too: the services they perform for you are vital.

Rhode Island is rich in open spaces and several kinds of ecosystems, and since 2004, Rhode Island voters overwhelmingly (about 61% statewide) approve open space. Recreational and agricultural bond referendums help to keep our woodlands lively, healthy, protected from unnecessary development, and continuous with the systems of air, water and earth that keep us alive, too.

Community action: Work with the advocacy organizations in the [“Further Resources” section](#) to keep current on which bonds and referenda for green space, conservation, local farming, and intentional land use you want your elected officials to support.