

Eco coaching

Confused about how to go greener at home? Calgary's eco-coaches can help

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Calgary Herald

Saturday, November 03, 2007

Lauren Mangion and Sarah Franklin are standing in the bathroom of Franklin's northwest Calgary home, staring at the bright blue water in the toilet bowl.

"What do I do?" asks Franklin, slightly horrified.

The blue hue to the otherwise clean water is the result of a dye tablet that Mangion, an environmental consultant, placed in the toilet tank half an hour ago and it means that water is sneakily leaking from the tank into the bowl.

"Usually it's just the seal that's not fitting properly in the tank," Mangion reassures Franklin. "But some of these undetected leaks can cost you 200,000 litres a year."

That can get expensive, both for the homeowner and the environment -- but a quick adjustment of the plastic connector that stretches between the flush mechanism and the seal immediately slows the leak down.

With her green "guilt" factor inching up the scale, Franklin recently called on Mangion's Conscious Home eco-coaching service to help her find where she could improve.

"I do zero and most of the people I know do something," she says, explaining that recycling and other conservation efforts just weren't part of her childhood. Now, she wants to raise her children with more concern for the environment.

She's horrified again when Mangion calculates her ecological footprint (the amount of land needed to sustain a person based on lifestyle factors such as home energy efficiency and transportation choices). It's 7.2 global hectares - well above the average Canadian footprint of 4, but less than the average



CREDIT: Lorraine Hjalte, Calgary Herald
Eco-coach Lauren Mangion, left, advises Sarah Franklin on composting.



CREDIT: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald
Lauren Maris just released a book called Live Green, Calgary!

Calgarian's footprint of 9.6.

"Calgary has the highest footprint of any Canadian municipality," notes Mangion, adding that Franklin's figure includes some of her family's costs, boosting it higher than Franklin really deserves. And to be fair, Franklin is doing more than she realizes: she and her husband chose energy-efficient appliances for their home, and their toilets are already low-flow.

Still, she'd like to reduce her footprint as much as possible.

"For a lot of people in Sarah's position, there's just so much information out there, and that's overwhelming," says Mangion, explaining that her "in-home greening" service focuses on raising awareness and helping people connect with the environment.

The service costs \$300, and includes calculating your ecological footprint and the tonnes of carbon emissions that you're generating each year, and then going through your home with you to uncover where you can go greener.

She'll check, for example, that you have low-flow toilets, water-conserving aerators on your faucets and low-flow showerheads. If you don't, her basket of goodies includes a water conservation kit with a starter supply of water conserving fixtures -- along with environmentally friendly cleaning products (from Calgary-based Small Planet) and even a composter.

Mangion gives her clients detailed suggestions to follow after the coaching session, from recycling and composting to choosing local food and reducing packaging -- but it doesn't all have to be done in a day.

"It's like training for a marathon," says Mangion. "You wouldn't go out and run the full distance the first day -- you'd start smaller and work up, and that's probably more sustainable."

Lauren Maris agrees. The sustainability strategist owns Calgary-based EarthWise Solutions, an eco-coaching service that helps people use less energy, produce less waste and save money.

Her approach echoes what a boss in a former job used to tell her: "You do what you can as time and money and resources allow."

For \$300, Maris meets with clients for a two-hour consultation, including checking out the home. Then she researches the client's priorities and comes up with a plan that's specific to their needs -- taking into account what they're already doing that's green.

She says that her clients tend to be busy people who want to make changes.

"They just want some help and some direction, so it's not so time-consuming to do the research," she says. One of her clients was a family building a new home -- they wanted to know what they could do to make the new house as energy-efficient as possible, along with adding greener practices to their lifestyle before making the move.

Once Maris completes the research and the plan, she returns to her client, going through the list of potential actions and prioritizing it. The plan ends up broken down into six-month intervals, with easy actions to take right away, and a range of options to consider for bigger, longer-term issues.

"It's a holistic approach, and it's not overwhelming -- you don't have to change everything right away," she says.

She might offer suggestions to make their next vehicle greener, or provide a list of local food sources.

"I'm not extreme in anything -- I'm all about everything in moderation," she says. "People might not be willing to reduce their meat consumption, for example, but they might be interested in acquiring meat from a more sustainable source. People tend to have lots of lawn, so I might ask if they have any time and desire to take just a little and grow some of their own vegetables."

Maris has taken her work into print, releasing *Live Green, Calgary!* (EarthWise Solutions, \$19.95), a guide to local green programs, products and services.

"I wanted to destroy the myth that green products and services don't really exist in Calgary," she says. "They are available here. CMHC, for example, has a 10 per cent refund on mortgage insurance premiums when you're buying or renovating an energy-efficient house. The City of Calgary has so many programs -- plus there are independent retailers like Mountain Equipment Co-op, which has lots of organic cotton clothing."

Ideally, she says, the greenest way to improve your home's sustainability is simply to reduce your consumption.

"But we live in 2007 . . . for me it comes down to knowing your options and making environmentally sensitive choices. I'm not a believer in throwing something away that's functioning to replace it with something that's more efficient -- just replace things as they need to be replaced."

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Green resources

- Calgary Herald's Green Guide: calgaryherald.com (click on "green guide" on left side of page)
- City of Calgary: calgary.ca
- Clean Calgary Association: cleancalgary.org
- Conscious Home: conscioushome.ca
- EarthWise Solutions: earthwisesolutions.ca
- Live Green, Calgary: livegreencalgary.com

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