



Photography courtesy of Rebecca Tull

deborah tull

by maryam henein

on becoming a better eco-citizen

Sustainability coach Deborah Tull makes her living teaching people how to green their homes, businesses and lifestyles in a way that will make a difference. She is certified in permaculture design, bio-intensive organic gardening and compost education and has traveled the world studying sustainable communities. She offers public workshops two to three times a month and also shares her knowledge with schools and organizations.

Yogi Times: How did you first get into sustainability?

Deborah Tull: I grew up in LA, in a family of people committed to service/

activist work, and we also spent a lot of time outdoors. After high school, I left LA and attended Hampshire College in Western Massachusetts. This was an environment that was incredibly eco-aware, had an organic farm onsite and some amazing teachers and thinkers in the field of sustainability. I basically chose to immerse myself in creative solutions to the environmental crisis from then on, I traveled and studied sustainability projects around the world and the inspiration of what's possible when we work with nature has been feeding me ever since.

YT: You spent seven years as a monk at the Zen Monastery Peace Center in the Sierra

Foothills. What prompted that move? And what, if anything, did it teach you about sustainability and our environment?

DH: I had been involved in various sustainability projects, ranging from a focus on organic agriculture and education, to green architecture, to an urban permaculture project, etc. I was struck by the fact that in the green movement, there was still a lot of “us versus them” finger pointing, judgment and competition; and these were things I didn't want to participate in. I witnessed the whole “activist burnout” syndrome around me and I thought this is not my deepest heart's desire. I knew there was

another way to be in the world. I had begun a meditation practice in college, and I just reached a point where I realized that the practice of compassionate awareness was the “place” I wanted to be.

The Zen Monastery Peace Center is really a model for the practice of peace and sustainability. Here’s a group of people committed to practicing awareness in every moment and every aspect of life, and to sticking it out no matter what. There’s the opportunity to truly let go of all the habits and beliefs that don’t serve us (or the earth) and learn to find well-being inside of ourselves. From interconnection, it’s just natural to make kind, sustainable choices with each step we take.

YT: Can you give us some simple ways we can reduce our footprint?

DH: Some simple things that city folk can do are:

- Pick one or two days per week to be “no driving” days. Our automobiles are our biggest carbon imprint and in this city we have a bizarre addiction to our cars. Take a risk, hop on the bus.
- Take yourself off the junk mail list at dmaconsumers.org/cgi/offmailing and cancel your phone book. It’s not necessary and makes up ten percent of our landfill waste.
- In our homes, forty percent of our water gets flushed down our toilets, so save a flush, invest in a Caroma dual-flush toilet, or put a jug of water in your toilet in the interim to save water.
- Choose to not participate in a culture of disposables. Reuse, recycle, see how little trash you can create, and don’t support businesses that use excessive packaging, paper, etc.
- Choose non-peak hours (after 8 p.m., before 7 a.m., or middle of the day) to use your dishwasher or washing machine.
- Cut back as much as you can on watering your yard, and take responsibility for your landscaping/water use. If you’re attached to having a lawn, cut back fifty percent on how often it’s mowed, and leave the clippings as mulch.
- See if you can consume just a little less stuff. It’s helpful to ask ourselves “What’s my motivation?” when we think we need to add more “stuff”

to our lives. And if we need to consume stuff, there’s a whole world of eco-friendly products, gifts and clothing available now from sustainable and fair trade sources.

- Also, support sustainable agriculture; not just organic, but small, local farms that actually walk their talk, take care of our topsoil and cut back on fossil fuel consumption.

YT: What are the reasons people hire a sustainability coach? What are some of the basics you cover?

DH: Individuals, families and businesses hire me because they want to take steps to live a more eco-friendly lifestyle, and they feel they don’t have enough time, knowledge or money to do it on their own. Areas I look at with people include waste reduction/radical recycling, energy and water efficiency, how to support sustainable agriculture affordably, the nontoxic home, lowering your carbon footprint, organic gardening/water-wise landscaping, how to change all your products to eco-friendly products, green concerns in raising children, etc. Basically, I want to help people set up their lives so that it is easy, efficient and cost-effective to live in a way that matches their concern for the world.

YT: Tell us how going green can truly be a fun, eye-opening and creative process?

DH: One of the most important things I hope people get at this point is that instead of getting depressed about the state of the world, they can choose to engage and have a great time learning how to make simple powerful changes in their lifestyle. I recommend that people replace their addiction to “bad world news” with news of the inspiring people and projects in the world making heroic efforts toward a sustainable future, and let their enthusiasm, rather than their fear, guide them in going green. Lots of people are used to taking good care of their bodies, but when we take the next step to include the earth in our awareness, it expands our lives even more.

YT: What is an urban “eco-pack?”

DH: Everywhere I go, I carry with me a travel mug, cloth napkin, utensils, a stainless steel/glass water bottle, a cloth

bag I can use for any unexpected errands I might have and even my own container to bring for takeout and my own stirrer. I don’t want to participate in a disposable world mentality, or add a bunch of toxic stuff to our landfills.

YT: Do you feel Angelenos are on the forefront of the green movement? What are some changes you envision happening in the city?

DH: Right now I think it’s great that so many people are opening their minds to this stuff, and I think that if we can build momentum and really make big changes in LA, then it can be done anywhere. In my experience so far, the real environmentalists of LA are schools—teachers, kids and concerned parents who are committing to making a difference. Face it, our kids are the people we most need to consider in our every single action right now because we are trying to ensure a healthier world for their future. I love the Iroquois quote, “In every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decision on the next seven generations.”

In this city, I hope we see major steps toward energy and water efficiency; bike paths and public transportation options; massive tree planting; a move away from plastics, trash reduction and the implementation of more radical recycling systems; urban composting; and strong support for local sustainable small-scale agriculture. I see a major move away from traditional lawns and towards drought-tolerant landscaping, which is so much more beautiful in my opinion.

We also have sun most days of the year, so I hope that solar power becomes huge in this city and that all new building projects will be one hundred percent green. Most importantly, I hope that thirty years from now, people will smile at each other more genuinely in this city, make an effort to take care of stray animals, enjoy living more simply and take the time to really listen to one another.

For more information about Creative Green Sustainability Coaching or to invite Deborah to offer a workshop in your area, please email creativegreen@hotmail.com. Her next public workshop is on November 17 at Liberation Yoga.