



# dirt bags & clean living

## Live wisely with Mother Earth News

If you want to know which cars are the greenest, what herbs will relieve your headaches, or how to build a structure out of bags of dirt, you need not look any further than **MotherEarthNews.com**.

The site, which is the online presence of the magazine that bills itself as “the original guide to living wisely,” is full of information designed to help you be at one with the world. The subjects covered include organic foods, country living, green transportation, renewable energy, natural health, green building and other sustainable-lifestyle issues.



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InSites

### Middle of the road

The personality of the site is an interesting mix of what many people would identify as conflicting liberal and conservative values. On the one hand, it concerns itself with sustainability and conservation issues, which are usually associated with a liberal agenda. On the other hand it emphasizes self-reliance and individualism. The site has a joke section with a very middle America, Reader's Digest-type sense of humor. These traits are usually associated with a conservative agenda.

After reading many of the articles on various subjects, it appears that Mother Earth News doesn't lean either left or right, it just reports the facts as it finds them. It's kind of refreshing considering the current

highly partisan media environment. This site seems to live comfortably in the middle, where most of America also happens to live.

The site does have a distinct rural feel to it. Despite that, there are plenty of useful articles for urban and suburban dwellers as well.

### Everything under the sun

Spending an afternoon meandering through the eclectic articles on this site is a pleasant way to pass the time. One writer explained how to build your own desk, complete with diagrams. Another gave detailed instructions on how to build a house out of dirt. The site's Ultimate Green Car Buyer's Guide, 2012 compared the cost, mileage and other amenities of dozens of cars. It was accompanied by a graphic detailing the benefits of the new automobile gas mileage standards.

I watched one video explaining how to reduce electromagnetic fields in your bedroom, and another of a farmer herding sheep with a Toyota Prius Plugin.

There are acres of information useful to farmers and serious gardeners. I browsed articles on planting cover crops, the Farm Bill, compost tumblers, sequestering carbon in soil and how to keep destructive rodents out of your barn.

Articles from the current print edition of Mother Earth News are available on the website. There's also a variety of blogs covering everything from milking goats and raising bees to making a solar hot tub. Many pages also have interactive polls in which viewers can participate.

### Clean up the clutter

The home page of Mother Earth News is a busy mish-mash of type, photos, videos, links and graphics. There is some organization imposed on the overwhelming collection of content. The page is divided into three columns, and there are headings separating information into different categories.

I see this a lot on websites that have a large amount of interior content. The site's creators seem to think they need to have a presence for everything in the site on the home page.

I think a better solution is to have the page anchored with a strong image, and use a series of well-designed drop down menus. This allows you to consolidate a great deal of information into a clean, organized presentation.

The second tier and — to a lesser degree — the third tier of pages also are busier than they need to be. Websites don't have the same strict limitations as magazines, newspapers or books do on the number of pages they contain. A good Web designer will spread things out a little for a more aesthetic presentation, rather than trying to cram as much as possible on every page.

Design issues aside, Mother Earth News is an interesting and informative read. It authoritatively covers a wide variety of topics that relate to a wide variety of people.

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