On August 1, we'll have consumed more resources than the Earth can regenerate in a year — here's how you can reduce your ecological footprint

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Deforestation at a logging camp in Mandalay, Myanmar. Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

The Global Footprint Network, an international nonprofit, takes a number of factors into consideration when it calculates Earth Overshoot Day, including the earth's capacity to sequester carbon and how much food and other natural resources can grow in one year.

Earth Overshoot Day is like a report card. Are we using our natural resources wisely and sustainably? At the moment, not so much. In 2018, it would take 1.7 earths to replenish the natural resources we will collectively use up as a planet. Unfortunately, we only have one.

By August 1, 2018, we will have consumed a whole year's worth of the planet's bounty. Starting August 2, we begin to drain the earth's savings account. We can only deplete our natural resources for so long before the reserves are gone.
Country Overshoot Days 2018
When would Earth Overshoot Day land if the world’s population lived like...

When Earth Overshoot Day would land if the whole global population lived in each country. Global Footprint Network
United States Overshoot Day

If you live in the United States, you may consume more than your share of natural resources. According to 2017 Global Footprint Network data reported by the World Wildlife Fund, the US is close second to Australia in being a resource hog.

The WWF report shows that it would take five planet earths to support humanity for a year if everyone lived the way Americans do. Country Overshoot Day for the US came less than a quarter of the way through the year — on March 15, in 2018.

Reversing the trend

Earth Overshoot Day has come earlier and earlier over time, as the global population grows and we consume more resources. In 1970, humans didn’t use up more resources than the earth could renew until late December. By 1997, the overshoot date had moved back to late September.

The good news is that the date has not moved much since 2011, despite population growth. This is an encouraging sign that we can reverse the trend. The experts at Earth Overshoot Day have lots of ideas how you can make a difference.
4 things you can do to #MoveTheDate

What change can you make to reduce your ecological footprint? Take the quiz to find out your footprint, then take some steps to make it smaller.

1. Take the carbon out of your commute

More than a quarter of US greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation, according to the EPA. If you live close to work or work from home, that’s a fantastic way to reduce your ecological footprint.

But even if you have to go into work every day, you can green your commute. For a zero-carbon commute, switch from four wheels to two and go by bike. If pedaling is not your thing, try a train, a bus, or carpooling with coworkers. If you drive with even one other person, you’re both cutting your commuting carbon emissions in half.

2. Strive for zero waste

One of the ways we put stress on the Earth and its resources is the amount of stuff we buy and then waste. You can take out the trash, but ultimately, it’s never really gone. Can you be more like Tippi Thole, who reduced the weekly trash she and her son generated to almost nothing? If you’re up for a challenge, try for Zero Waste.
3. Eat less meat and more veggies

A significant amount of our ecological footprint comes from the food we eat. Livestock-related activity uses more global land surface than anything else, and accounts for 14.5% of the greenhouse gas emissions produced by humans, according to the UN.

If you are serious about treading lightly on the earth but aren't able to give up driving, moving to a more plant-based diet is a great step. You don't have to be all or nothing; start with Meatless Monday and find more yummy vegetarian recipes here.

4. Tread lightly when you travel

You might commute every day by bicycle and eat only fresh veggies from your garden, but a few long plane trips a year can really add to your ecological footprint. To reduce the damage, choose a more fuel-efficient airline when you book a flight.

Then follow the Global Footprint Network's tips to have an eco-conscious vacation once you arrive, including not renting a car and eating foods that are local to your destination.