



10 Ways To Cut a Tonne from your carbon footprint



Introduction

Climate change is in the news almost every day. But, as individuals, what can we do about it, and what does being sustainable look like? These are questions that more and more people are asking themselves. In this guide, we aim to provide some answers.

We'll explain the practical actions individuals can take to be on track with the global goal of halving emissions by 2030. The guide though is not just for individuals. It is also for people at companies who see the need to help employees understand climate change and how they can be part of the solutions. That's because at companies around the world people are asking themselves the same question – how can I help my colleagues cut their carbon footprints to increase awareness and knowledge about sustainability? From green teams to sustainability departments this guide is also for those people inspiring others to take action.

The steps we've included are based on cutting a tonne from your carbon footprint as this is what's needed to see the scale of emissions cuts that are needed. We've got ten different ideas, and individuals in wealthy countries should try at least one every year. Some are large, one-off, changes, and others are about making a series of smaller shifts that add up to something bigger. There's something for everyone and cutting a tonne can also save money.

The time for action is now and this guide will help you plan what to do, and how to do it, so you can be part of the solution that is so urgently needed.



Background

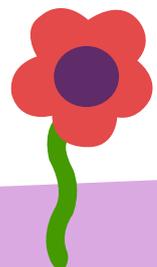
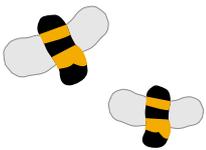


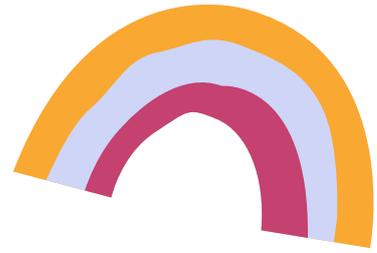
Climate change is accelerating. In 2022 we saw heatwaves in China and Europe, wildfires in the USA, drought in the Horn of Africa, and devastating floods which left one-third of Pakistan underwater, destroying 2 million homes. Scientists have been clear for many years, but it's now the case that billions of people can look out the window to see the effects of climate change.

The only way to stop this is by cutting carbon emissions fast. The global target, agreed upon by the UN, is to halve emissions by 2030 and then hit Net Zero (where any carbon entering the atmosphere is removed by something else) by 2050. However, often it's difficult for people to translate these big global targets into a goal in their everyday lives. This guide seeks to close that gap.

To cut emissions by 50%, most individuals in the global North (generally the wealthier countries) need to cut a tonne from their carbon footprint every year. Globally personal carbon footprints are around five tonnes, so to halve emissions, we all need to get to 2.5 tonnes by 2030. However, individuals in wealthy countries tend to have much larger footprints, often around 8-10 tonnes in Europe and up to 15 tonnes in the USA, Canada, and Australia.

And there is real urgency. The 2022 UN Emissions Gap report, which details how the world is doing against the 50% target, highlighted that progress has been poor. We're currently on track for dangerous 2.5C temperature rises (climate change starts to get out of hand after 1.5), and we need urgent system-wide transformation starting today.





This means that the time for small steps is over. We need to be making bigger shifts and, as an individual, that means cutting a tonne.

And as well as urgency there is huge opportunity. Some steps to cut a tonne save money, others lead to better health outcomes as we reduce pollution, still more will protect nature from worsening effects of climate change. In addition, many offer business opportunities to provide people with goods and services that don't harm the planet. A sustainable future is simply a better one.

What this guide includes

In this guide, we'll look at ten ways to cut your carbon footprint by a tonne. We've got four "collections", ideas where you can combine lifestyle changes to add up to a tonne, and the "big six" which are large, one-off changes that have a big impact by themselves. We are all different, but for a typical individual, these changes should help make an important contribution to what we need to do this decade.

Part 1 of the guide covers the collections, and Part 2 shows the big six so you can quickly find the approach that's right for you.

We'll also cover carbon inequality, the growing importance of the individual, and how companies can help people cut a tonne.



Part 1

Cut a tonne, the Collections

Our first ideas are collections of steps that, taken together, add up to cutting a tonne from your carbon footprint.

Cut a tonne idea 1

Refuse, Reuse, Recycle

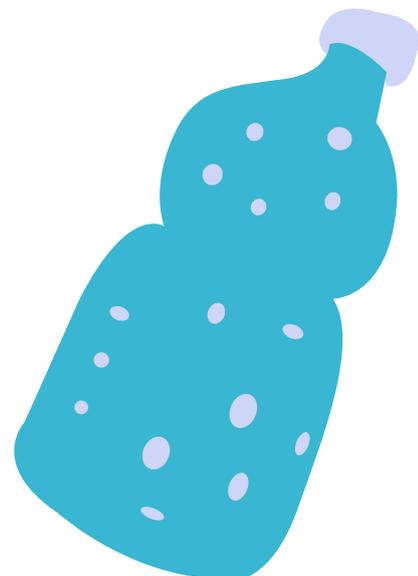
Refuse

Many people in wealthy countries feel they've got too much stuff and that whenever they buy something, whether it's in the supermarket or high street, it's covered in plastic. To cut back on the amount of stuff you have, try the [before you buy](#), to see whether you want it or need it. Even better, go for three months buying [nothing new](#) and, when you need something, avoid [next day delivery](#), which is convenient but can encourage impulse buys.

To reduce the amount of plastic you use, try a [better packaging](#) supermarket shop where you don't pick up any packaging that cannot be recycled. Finally, avoid all those single-use plastic water bottles by switching to [refills](#).

Did you know?

Bottled water has a carbon footprint 300 times that of tap water, and globally we buy 1 million every minute. But only half of those get recycled.



Part 1 Cut a tonne, the Collections

Reuse

Not buying new also saves carbon.

If you've got old clothes and toys, you can take them to the [charity shop](#) so that others can reuse them and buying [second hand](#) will mean you're extending the life of clothes. There are great apps to help you do this, like eBay and Vinted.

[Repairing your clothes](#) is a simple way to reuse what's in your cupboards.



Recycle

Recycling saves carbon because it takes less energy to use recycled materials than to start afresh with new resources that need to be dug out of the ground. This is especially true of metal which is why it's so important to [recycle all metal](#).

The aim though is to [recycle everything](#) you can from metal to plastic, paper, and glass.

However, often people forget that those big items, like appliances, and those small items, like mobile phones, contain lots of valuable materials too. The first thing is to make them last as long as possible, for example by not upgrading your mobile phone to the newest model. Then don't forget to take old [appliances](#) to your local recycling centre and [recycle mobile phones](#) too.

And finally, don't forget it's also important to [recycle food waste](#) by composting or using local food waste services if available. No food waste is best, but you're always going to be left with peelings and bits that cannot be eaten, which, if sent to a landfill, release methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Did you know?

Recycling a metal drink can takes 95% less energy than making a new one, and if we recycled every can, we could power two million more homes every year.



Part 1 Cut a tonne, the Collections

Cut a tonne idea 2

Be the most efficient you, and save lots of money too

Heating homes, powering appliances, and driving all release carbon. But you can be more efficient in all those areas giving you another way to cut a tonne. There are three main areas where you can get efficient and the less energy you use the more energy you'll save.

Heating (or cooling)

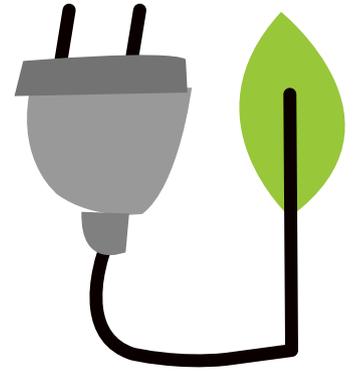
As utility bills rocket, many people want to save on heating bills. You can do this and save carbon at the same tie. [Turning down](#) the thermostat by 1C can save over 5% off your bills every year, and other actions such as [draught proofing](#), smart heating, and [turning off radiators in unused rooms](#) can save even more carbon and cost.

If you live in a hot country draught proofing, smart cooling, and turning off the air con in unused rooms all have the same carbon-cutting effect. Turn the [air con temperature up](#) though to save energy and emissions.

Electricity use

The appliances we use, the devices we rely on, and lighting of our homes all add to electricity bills and carbon emissions.

However, there are plenty of ways to cut back that although small by themselves, add up.

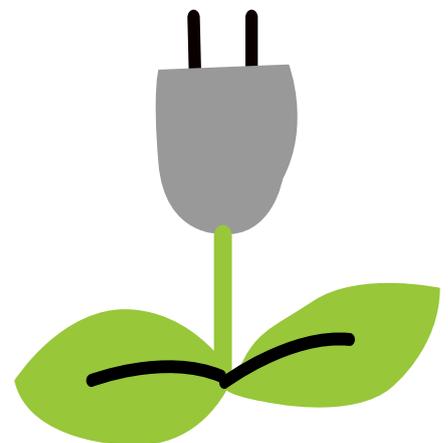


For your appliances, try [washing at 30C](#) and always use the Eco Mode for your dishwasher. Make your [fridge as efficient](#) as possible, and try to [avoid the tumble dryer](#). Also, make sure you [turn off devices](#) and [lights](#) when you leave the room to save even more.

Finally, if you are looking to buy a new appliance this year (because your old one is beyond repair) make sure you go for the most [Efficient Appliance](#) possible.

Driving

It's not only at home where you can be more efficient. [Driving more efficiently](#) can save 20% on fuel costs as well as cutting back on air pollution. [Not idling your car](#) is another way to cut back on wasted energy.



Cut a tonne idea 3

A menu of food steps

Food footprints make up around one-third of the average total carbon footprint, offering opportunities to cut carbon. Switching to a plant-based diet will see big carbon savings, but this is not right for everyone so here's a menu of food steps that, if all completed, can take a big bite out of your food footprint.

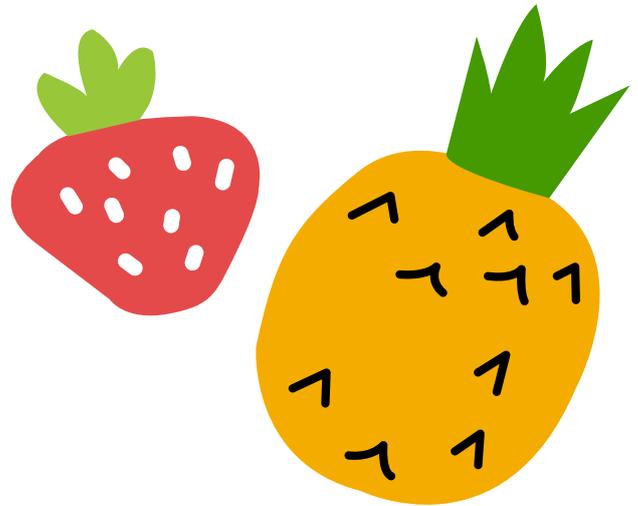
What you eat

Red meat has a much higher carbon footprint than chicken, pork, and fish which, in turn, have higher carbon footprints than fruit, vegetables, and grains. [Cutting back](#) on red meat or eating [animal products](#) once a day, gives good carbon savings. For your fruit and vegetables [eat with the seasons](#), which helps even more as seasonal produce is more likely to be grown using nature's support and is likely to come from closer to home.

As you cut back on meat, try some of the [new plant-based](#) products and test an [eco-meal](#) to save money. If buying meat and fish go sustainable, for example by looking for [responsibly sourced](#) fish.

How you cook

It's not just what you eat that matters. You can save energy in the kitchen by [putting a lid](#) on saucepans, using the [microwave more](#), and always using the [dishwasher eco](#) settings.



Did you know?

Pets have a food footprint too. Switching to [insect based](#) pet food, which is just as nutritious as meat and fish, can cut your pet's food footprint by 90%.

What you throw away

The average person throws out their body weight in food every year. Cut right back on food waste to save carbon and for the left overs (like peelings and other bits you cannot eat). If possible, make sure you compost or use local [food recycling](#) as this avoids food going to landfills where it releases methane.



Cut a tonne idea 4

New Year Resolutions list

Many of the different ways to cut a tonne are about developing new habits, and what better time to start than at the beginning of the New Year?

Our final idea to cut a tonne has ten habits to build this year. In Giki, some are 4 or 5 week challenges to get you started but to cut a tonne, you need to keep these habits throughout the year. The steps are spread between the home, what you eat and how you get around.

At home

Try to [recycle everything](#) you can. Save on heating bills by taking a [shorter shower](#), and for a big carbon and cost saving turn [the thermostat](#) down. Finally, always make sure you [turn the lights off](#) in unused rooms for small electricity savings but one that will keep you thinking about when you really need to be using power.

What you eat

[Eating with the seasons](#) helps to reduce your food carbon footprint as in-season food is more likely to be grown using nature's help and closer to home. It may well taste better too.

For an even bigger saving cut back on [red meat](#) because beef and lamb have very high carbon

footprints compared to other foods. You can also avoid [palm oil](#), or look out for the sustainable version, which will help protect the rainforests as these are often cut down to make way for this productive but destructive, crop. Many foods that contain palm oil are unhealthy too.

Getting around

Getting [public transport](#) means lower carbon because you are sharing emissions with others. Trains are low carbon especially if they're electric as well, allowing you to travel long distances quickly.

[Walking short distances](#) is good for your health, and as lots of journeys are under one mile (1.6 km), there are plenty of opportunities to do it. If you do drive, then [drive more efficiently](#) to save up to 20% off your fuel bills.

As a final bonus step, try the [before you buy](#) checklist as often as you can. The amount of carbon and cash you save will be all about how often it helps you make a better decision, but it'll ensure that you're thinking about all your purchases with the planet in mind.

Individually these steps help but building all these habits together will help you cut up to a tonne from your carbon footprint.

Part 2

The Big Six

Our next steps are single, big impact changes that can make a big difference to carbon footprints. Big impact usually means that they also take more effort and planning but, in climate terms, they are worth it.

Cut a tonne idea 5

Switch to a mainly Plant Based diet

Switching to a mainly plant-based diet is a great way to cut your carbon footprint, and you can get started with your next meal. You don't need to give up meat entirely, but cutting out as much red meat, chicken, pork, and dairy as you can will have a real impact.

The reason is simple. Growing meat creates more carbon emissions per kg of food than plants, so the more plants in your diet the lower your carbon footprint.

As an example, the carbon footprint of beef can be 20–30 times higher than potatoes, cereals (e.g. durum wheat for pasta), and seasonal fruit and vegetables. There are two main reasons for this.

1. Animals need food to grow, and growing that food creates more carbon emissions. This is especially true if the meat is fed on soy feed, which may come from deforested areas. This affects the carbon footprint of all animal products.
2. For beef there's another factor which is that cows emit methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, due to the way they digest their food. This adds an extra source of emissions to the carbon footprint of red meat.



Top Tip

Start by trying to eat animal products just once a day. It'll get you thinking about the meat you really want to keep and the bits you can skip. Try some new plant-based meats and milk, so you've got lots of meal options.

Using challenges at work to help employees cut a tonne

One person cutting a tonne is progress but a community doing it together is real change.

At Giki we use Challenges to bring people together to take steps, and cut carbon, as a group. We see that working together makes people more likely to commit to a step, more likely to complete the step, and is more fun too. As employees learn more about carbon they'll also bring sustainability thinking back into the company they work for.

When we work together we see over 100% increases in engagement and 90% of people saying that they are more likely to take action on climate change. We are stronger together.

A more sustainable life is where we not only look after the planet but can also form relationships with people who share our need to take climate action.

[Talk to us](#)



Quote

"We all need to do everything we can as quickly as possible, and a challenge is a great way to kickstart that."

Jo Hand, Giki

Cut a tonne idea 6

Switch to renewable electricity

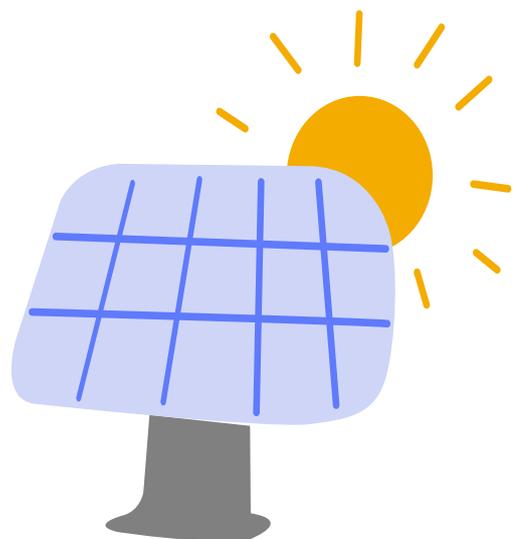
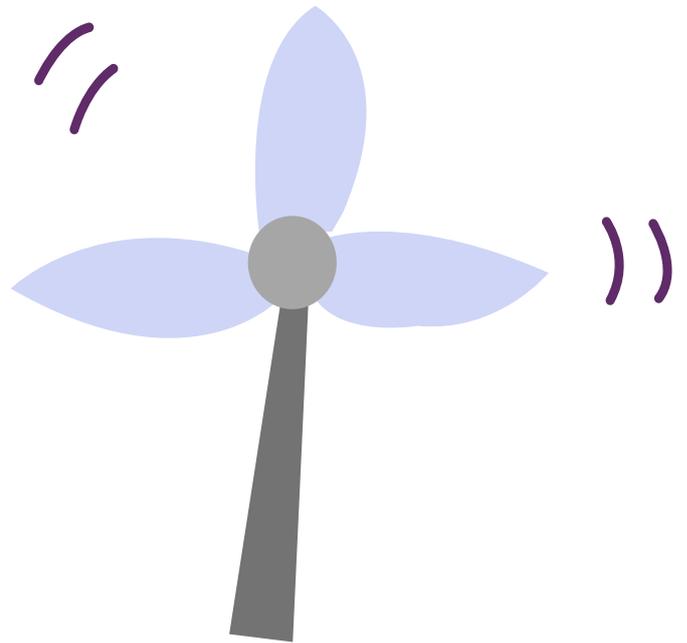
The way electricity is generated makes a big difference to carbon footprints. A grid powered by high emissions coal will create a lot more carbon dioxide than a grid powered by renewables like solar and wind. By switching to 100% [renewable electricity](#), you can dramatically reduce your carbon footprint for yourself and everyone you live with.

If you're looking to do this, you can find a handy to-do list on Giki Zero. Switching to renewables is one of the fastest changes you can make and the greenest change you can make is choosing a company that is 100% renewables rather than one that offers green tariffs as part of their overall offering (although that's still better than doing nothing).

Did you know?

In many countries, generating renewable electricity is even cheaper than fossil fuels.

The largest wind turbines can generate enough power for a home for a day with just one rotation.



Carbon inequality

Rich countries have been steadily increasing emissions since the Industrial Revolution, and the growth has been a key factor in the increase in wealth and living standards seen across the developed world. However, these changes have not been equal, and now a deep-seated carbon inequality exists within and across countries.

This can be seen in the difference in personal carbon footprints. Whilst the global average is around five tonnes, there are big differences between individuals. The bottom 50% of people (almost 4 billion) have a carbon footprint of just 1.6 tonnes and contribute 12% of the total. At the other end of the scale, the top 1% have footprints of over 100 tonnes, so just 80 million people contribute 17% of all emissions.

A 100-tonne lifestyle would include two or more long-haul flights every year, a big house (or houses), more than one car, high levels of daily spending, multiple holidays, and more than £1 million in pensions and investments. When 800 million people don't have access to electricity, the carbon inequality with a 1.6-tonne lifestyle is stark.



Carbon inequality goes even deeper than the standard of living differences. Often people with the lowest carbon footprints are most vulnerable to climate change. In 2022 Pakistan provided a tragic example of this as a country where the average carbon footprint is under one tonne and was ravaged by floods that devastated the agricultural economy.

However, if there is some good news, the world is starting to react with Loss and Damage, whereby wealthy countries pay poor countries for the effects of climate change disasters.

But right now, those with the largest footprints and the best ability to adapt to climate change need to shoulder the responsibility for the largest cuts.



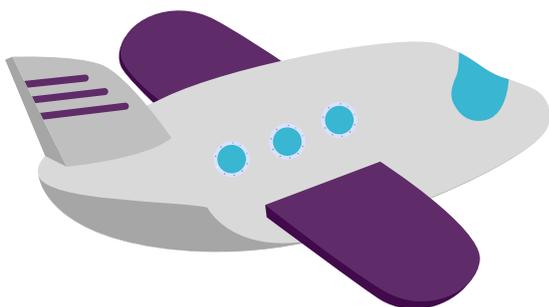
Cut a tonne idea 7

Cut back on flying, especially long haul

How we get around makes a big difference to our carbon footprint, and flying emissions can really add up because of the long distances covered in a plane. That's why cutting back on flying, especially long haul, offers another good way to cut a tonne, or more, from your carbon footprint.

Just 1% of people account for 50% of all emissions from flying so cutting back is a particularly big opportunity for frequent fliers. One return trip from Los Angeles to London can emit over 2.5 tonnes of carbon emissions, with the effect made worse by the contrails a plane releases high in the atmosphere.

Like the shift to a more plant-based diet, this is not about giving up all flying immediately. The key is to keep flights short and once a year to see big carbon cuts. One day sustainable aviation fuel will be able to reduce the carbon footprint of flying, and then people can take to the skies again.



Did you know?

Aviation emissions are not included when countries add up their greenhouse gas emissions, so the whole industry gets to sit outside of the annual negotiations on climate change and come up with separate rules and goals!

About offsetting

Unfortunately, offsetting does not cut emissions from flying. The carbon is still emitted when you fly, and there have been many issues with carbon offsets used including measurability (how do you measure the carbon not emitted on your behalf), additionality (would it have happened anyway), and permanence (is the carbon really removed forever). Right now, we all need to cut emissions with offsets reserved for any small residual emissions that are left over that we cannot cut yet.



Cut a tonne idea 8

Green your finances

Money saved in your pension, or left in the bank, may be used to finance carbon emissions. For many people, this feels wrong as they work hard in their own lives to cut their carbon footprints. By moving to [greener finance](#), especially for people with higher levels of saving, you may have the potential to cut more than a tonne from your carbon footprint.

How does this work in practice? Banks take deposits from customers, which they lend to companies to earn a profit. The 60 biggest banks have lent \$4.6 trillion to fossil fuel companies since the Paris agreement, which those companies use to explore and extract oil and gas.

In a similar way pensions are often invested in the stock market, which provides another source of funding to fossil fuel companies who, over time, have become very efficient at turning every pound, dollar, or euro into carbon that they can sell. As an example, if you invested £10 in the FTSE 100, then more than £2.50 of this would go to energy and materials companies.



Quote

“It is crazy that our banks and pensions are investing in fossil fuels when these are the very things that are jeopardising the future we are saving for.”

Sir David Attenborough

What can you do to green your finances?

1. Look at your pension and investments and divest from all fossil fuels. You'll be following 100 UK universities and according to the Bank of England, it will not affect your returns either.
2. Switch to more sustainable funds including ESG funds. Look out for funds investing in line with cutting emissions by 50% this decade.

The more you save, the more you'll reduce the emissions you are financing with these steps.

It's not all on the individual

In 2022, more and more people have written about the importance of the individual. The UN's IPCC report on mitigation dedicated a chapter to individual action and even the final text at COP27 talked about the need for individuals to shift to sustainable lifestyle and consumption which follows on from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. However, whilst individuals need to cut carbon, solving the climate crisis it not all on them.

Companies need to provide low carbon goods and services and governments need to set clear, long term policies that allow people, and organisations, to plan ahead so they can make the transition to a low carbon economy. There is no single group that can solve the climate crisis, it's only by working together that we can tackle the sheer scale of the change that is needed.



Cut a tonne idea 9

Get an Electric car (or go car-free)

For most people driving a car is the largest part of the transport footprint. [Switching to an EV](#), or even better, going [car free](#) is another way to cut more than a tonne from your carbon footprint.

Although EVs do emit more carbon when manufactured, because of the battery, they are efficient when they get on the road transferring a lot more energy into the distance covered.

The amount of carbon saved depends on four things:

1. How far you drive
2. How old your fossil fuel car is (older usually means less efficient)
3. The size of the car (smaller is better as larger cars usually have bigger engines or batteries)
4. How you power your EV (renewables the best)

Did you know?

Over the life of an EV powered by renewables, you can save 40 tonnes of carbon emissions. Buying an electric vehicle is a big investment and costs more than a conventional car. However, over the life of the car, cheaper running costs and maintenance mean that an EV should be cheaper. An increasing number of governments are banning the sale of new fossil fuel cars help build the case for making the switch.

Going car-free will further reduce carbon footprints, but this is usually only an option for people who live in urban areas or have access to good public transport.



Should I drive my old car into the ground?

Is it better to drive an old car for longer or to switch to an EV? The answer is probably not.

A new EV takes more carbon to make but as soon as you start driving it the carbon savings start coming. The further you drive and the older your current car, the quicker those savings will outweigh the additional embedded carbon.

If you think your current car will be the last you ever buy, it could be worthwhile not to replace it as that would mean one less new car built. Also, if you drive a very small, super-efficient car only short distances then the payback period could be up to ten years, so it might be worth waiting as new battery manufacturers get more efficient.



Cut a tonne idea 10

Electrify your heating and hot water

There is no way we can limit global warming to 1.5C if heat and hot water in homes are created by fossil fuel boilers running on gas or oil.

So, our last idea from the big six is to electrify all heat and hot water at home. This can be done by installing a [heat pump](#), [solar panels](#), solar thermal, or a combination of all three.

This is another step that requires a large upfront investment and time to manage the project but, even if it's not for 2023, it's time to start thinking about how to make the transition this decade.

Although installing a heat pump does cost more, they are 3-5 times more efficient than gas boilers, so you'll save money on your bills over time.

As gas prices increase, the yearly savings go up.



Did you know?

Over one-sixth of global natural gas demand is for heating in buildings – in the European Union, this number is one-third. Heating in buildings is responsible for 10% of global emissions. Heat pumps run on green electricity can cut carbon emissions by 80%.

With home heating accounting for more than half of the carbon footprint of a typical home, this could save much more than a tonne every year. With a switch to renewables, it can save even more.

Did you know?

Do heat pumps work in cold climates? In Norway, 60% of buildings are equipped with heat pumps, and in Sweden, it's 40%, so clearly, they do!

Conclusion

As we enter 2023, the need for individuals to cut carbon has never been greater. The time for small steps has passed, and it's now time to think about how we can all cut a tonne in 2023 and then keep going beyond that.

In 2022 the UN's big climate report talked about behaviour change, it was included in the final text from COP27 and, as policy lags where actions needs to be, people are also becoming aware that they need to play a big part in cutting emissions. Personal responsibility for climate change is here and it all starts by looking at our own lives.

These ideas will help you to get started and, we hope, ensure that you are thinking about carbon every day.

As well as these steps you can also sign up to [Giki Zero](#) today, find out what your number is and immediately find some steps to start cutting carbon. Then you can amplify your impact by getting your friends, family and colleagues involved.

[Sign up for free](#)



Your employee sustainability programme

Giki Zero helps companies who want to educate and engage staff on sustainability and measure the impact of their actions.

[Talk to us](#)

Want to take action now?

Giki Zero helps you keep track of everything you're doing for the planet.

[Sign up for free](#)



Combining our science-based platform with a comprehensive engagement programme Giki Zero Pro brings people together to learn what they can do for the planet.

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