

permaculture for keeping cosy



this is a must-read story. You don't have to be a greenie to appreciate **Cecilia Macaulay's** quirky style. Her ever-inventive brain has some wonderful "low-tech, no-tech, keeping warm ideas, all reality-tested and all with the Permaculture virtue of tremendously seductive simplicity".

if you have been struggling to adopt a 'more sustainable' approach to heating your home, it's time you got a big hug, permission to be extremely warm, and a generous dose of Permaculture. 'More sustainable' often means turning the heater down two degrees, living a tepid existence, and saddest of all – 'more sustainable' won't get you to 'sustainable'. A 'permanent culture' will take a complete transformation of how we now live, and in fact a quartering, at least, of our eco-footprint. It won't be a tinkering and scrimping with the way of living we already have.

Nobody yet knows how to do it. The answer will probably be a patchwork of everybody's creative, lateral thinking and have-a-go actions. The trick is, it must go with, not against, our all-too-human-nature. Unless the new culture is more satisfying than the one it replaces, only virtuous people will adopt it, and as we know, there just aren't enough of them to go around.

Here is a collection of low-tech, no-tech keeping warm ideas, all reality-tested by my kaleidoscope of housemates (saints, sinners, and susses), and all with the Permaculture virtue of tremendously seductive simplicity.

PLACE WARM WOOLLIES BY THE HEATER SWITCH

You feel chilly. The heater switch is two steps away, and a warm jumper is upstairs, in a drawer, amongst other things to be chosen from... The predictable thing is to just reach over and flick the switch. Don't feel bad; you are saving your own energy, which is also a precious resource.

Put some woollies where the switch is, and then at least there is a level playing field from which to make your next choice about which source of warmth you prefer. To make life interesting, you might get a collection of vintage sweaters, or the padded satin boleros the 40s movie stars wore for their boudoir scenes. You can re-cycle the lot on

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e-Bay at the end of one winter, and select garments with a different spirit for the next year. Offering guests something precious and beautiful to wear makes them feel cherished. A warm feeling.

Just as a blanket won't warm up a stone, jumpers on stony-cold limbs will take a long, miserable time to have any effect; so wrap up early to keep the warmth you already have, and have a list of instant-warming activities at hand for when you leave it too late.

Time investment: 3 minutes

Cost: free

Hours of warmth per winter: 300 plus

INSTANT SELF-WARMING

Vacuum the floor. Wrestle and laugh. Put on some irresistible dance music. Tickle someone. Dishwashing has an upside when cold hands are grateful for warm water. Drink warming tea: cinnamon, liquorice, and ginger are good. Peppermint tea is only for summer, so I am told.

SLEEP MORE

When you are sleeping, you aren't shopping, arguing, worrying, or turning on the heater. If you can persuade someone to do it with you, there are two troublesome humans temporarily out of action: double benefit.

The trick is to decide which hours you will take the extra sleep from: work, play or squander. One recommendation is to walk over to the corner, pick up the television, and walk it gently to the garage. Or throw a nice, stylish rug over it, with a pot plant on top. It only takes 10 minutes to send a TV on holiday, it can come back any time, and amazingly, everyone who has done this finds the urge to watch it just disappears. Rearrange the sofa so it won't be so missed, and maybe light candles for the family to stare into at night. Much of the TV's seductive power

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might be an echo of the comfort and safety of ancestral bonfires, a joy that is quite hardwired, but can be tricked.

Another trick to harvest more sleeping time is to set the alarm clock so instead of ringing at 7am, it rings at 10pm, to tell you to start settling down for the night. Some of us just don't have an 'off' button.

Money cost/gain: varies widely

Time cost/gain: varies widely

MIGRATE FOR WINTER: IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FAR

Be proactive, and find ways to spend your active winter hours into the sunniest room. You could rearrange bedrooms and sitting rooms, converting one into a winter atelier for your sewing projects, your dissertation, or writing your memoirs, with the afternoon sun streaming in to encourage and warm you. If you have a spot in the hall where the morning sun streams in, you might have fun putting up a breakfast table and make-up mirror there, just for a few months. Winter sun makes you happy and active, and the generosity of its soft warmth on your skin reminds you that life is full of gifts. If you are depressed, anxious or considering divorce, count how many hours of sunshine-sitting you are doing each week, and see if making any changes makes a difference.

If your house doesn't have any sunny rooms, sell it.

Money cost: free. **Financial savings include heating, counselling and lawyer fees**

Time cost: One hour with a friend for rearranging the furniture. This is quite fun, so really counts as entertainment, not work.

INVITE A FRIEND TO ATTACH WINTER WINDOWS WITH YOU

A Winter Windows kit contains big sheets of special clear plastic, and double-sided tape. The tape goes on the window frame, the film

carefully stretched over that, and then you shrink it with a hairdryer to smooth out any wrinkles. The whole thing is invisible unless you are told it is there. Between the window and the plastic are a few centimetres of trapped air, one of the best insulators there is. This will reduce heat loss by around 30%, which will probably be repaid the first winter. For something as delicate as plastic, it is quite flexible when accidentally poked, and could keep on looking good for 10 years, but that would depend on pets, party animals and other agents of destruction in the house. Since heat rises, borrow a ladder and do the highest windows as a priority.

Although a simple job, it is a prime candidate to put off, since it takes complete concentration to put on straight, and the chance of messing up the first time is high. People who are into saving the earth generally love being right, hate messing up, and prefer to do projects like this in their mind. Me too.

Even though I had done it before on other houses, I had a Winter Windows set kicking around my house for a whole 12 months, until wonderful Sayuri stayed as my WWOOF guest, and I delegated the job to her.

Whether it's cooking a new dish, or Permaculturising your house, it's always good to separate 'deciding to do something new' from actually doing 'it'. You do the shopping and paying, someone else launches into it, confident that you will forgive them their first-timer's mistakes. I've got a bevy of tricks for getting high-quality results with delegating. One is telling them a 10-minute job, such as installing one Winter Window, will take 30 minutes. It doesn't, but it re-defines the status of the job, and the care they decide to take, and success follows.

Plan to have enough film left over to do your helpful friend's windows, if she wants. You will be saving your planet from her house's wasted heat, as well as your own, and making fun memories together.



How to make a wheat-bag warmer

Find some cotton. Something recycled from a torn 50s dress would be beautiful. How do you know if it's cotton or not? Set a match to a few threads and see if they burn (natural), or melt (petrochemical). You really don't want to be microwaving polyester.

Cut out a big rectangle. Fold it in half, right sides together. Sew one side almost halfway, the other side almost halfway, then turn it right side

around through the gap you left in the middle. If you want to make it really nice, pin some contrasting piping in before you begin sewing. My first bag with piping took me 45 minutes to cut and sew, with lots of unpicking. My second took 10 minutes. That's the way it is for EVERY creative endeavour – so just keep on going.

Fill your bag two-thirds full with whole wheat grains, and hand sew the opening. You may want to experiment with other fragrant, hard, and free materials, such as dried orange peel, lavender, or gumnuts. I haven't – so don't blame me if the oils ignite or anything. Just use observation; test on a small scale first.

When you get into the swing of it, make more for family and friends, or invite them to a wheat-bag making party. A festival of wheat-bags. Merry winter!



Money investment: \$180 for a 10 metre set. \$20 for a one-window trial pack.

Time investment: 10 minutes to 10 hours, depending on your ambitions and carefulness. The more mindful your actions, the quicker you will proceed.

WHEATBAGS & HOT WATER BOTTLES

My hot water bottle habit got started so I could continue enjoying leafy balcony garden breakfasts when autumn turned to winter. The freedom to be cosy wherever I chose was so appealing, I arranged for all my housemates to have one each, and we later upgraded to wheat-bags, which I taught them how to make themselves. Wheat-bags fit snugly on your lap or shoulder as you write and work, nicer to wake up to in the morning, and have a wonderful 'bakery' smell. Hot water bottles have good points too: they remind you to water your pot plants in the morning.

Happy housemates were so impressed, they set about making and sending batches of wheat-bags back home, as 'traditional' Aussie eco-warming souvenirs. It can't have been a long tradition though, as the way you

heat wheat-bags is in the microwave, right? Well, the fewer excuses for owning a microwave, the better. In Permaculture, there is always another way; sometimes you just have to search for it. At the demand of adamant non-microwavers, and no help from Google, I asked around my network of Wise Ones, and discovered... electric rice cookers are the way to go. The Japanese ones with timers arrange for you to wake up, or arrive home to, a bundle of warmth at a pre-set time. When you decide on 'never give up' and persist in looking for alternatives, you soon learn to start expecting unexpected benefits.

A few minutes of electrical energy for an hour or so of being warm is an undeniably good deal. While everyone else is heating the air around their bodies, the air around their ceilings, the air around their houses, we are heating just ourselves, and that's exactly as much as

we need. Our bodies and minds may be infinitely greedy for certain pleasures and acquisitions, but as far as warmth goes, 37 degrees is quite enough.

I was surprised at first to see housemates would use wheat-bags in their cold rooms, and ignore the heaters they were free to use. Now why was it so?

The reason is the warm-body/cold breath effect. Breathing unheated air keeps you alert and productive, while the friendly little wheat-bag keeps your body toasty warm, leaving your mind fit for doing the creative work it wants to do: learn a language, designing a garden, invent those inventions. You work steadily with less temptation to wander off, because the most comfortable place to be is exactly where you are.

It is an elegant solution, when the saving of fossil fuel energy is merely a side-effect of finding a way to masterfully use our own energies. In the upcoming decade, the tipping point decade, the world dearly needs the services of our alert, cool minds and passionate spirits to bringing dreamy new things into being.

Wheat-bag: \$2 - \$30, make or buy

Hot water bottle: \$2 from your local supermarket

Benefits: exponential

TWO SIDES TO EVERYTHING: THE NARCOTIC EFFECT OF HEATERS

One reason I'm attached to my fan heater is its narcotic effect. Breathing warm air makes you drowsy. You can't work well, which means you have no choice but to procrastinate the things you wanted to procrastinate all along. Obsessive thoughts get fainter, and you feel safe and relaxed. This might be just what you need. Or not. But getting clear that a desire to be sleepy is separate from a desire to be warm allows you to control your moods and energies, rather than the default technology doing it for you.

If you want a really sophisticated alternative to quelling mind-chatter, arrange for yourself to fall into 'flow'. Flow is that happy state when you are absorbed in a task that is both demanding of your talents, and do-able. Setting up your pens, paper, or tools in a seductively comfortable spot, in advance, will help trick you into getting started when the time comes. If you don't come from a 'flow-rich' family, it will take heroic effort to get the hang of it, but it is possible, and could be the best energy investment of your life.

GO SHOPPING FOR WARM HOUSEBOOTS, OR GET RICH MANUFACTURING THEM

You are cold because your feet are cold, and they are cold because cold is better than ridiculous: thick socks slip down and give you bunny feet; slippers aren't sexy, and everyone knows sexy is warm.

One year I was lucky to find dainty rose-coloured woolly boots, like Eskimo maidens might wear. But the next year I put them on, I heard a crunch like potato chips underfoot – the cheap plastic sole had gone brittle. My search continues, and I will be very happy and warm when I find the perfect pair.

Next, find some warm indoor clothes.

You don't want to be sitting at home in a coat, or wrapped up like a snowman, but most indoor clothes are designed with heaters in mind. So you need to be a creative shopper.

Ballet shops and hiking equipment stores are a good place to find layers that are sleek, stylish and light. At home is where you wear your best clothes, as that's where you see the people in the world that matter the most.

DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Winter Dream #1: A Japanese style bath for sitting in, made of fragrant cedar wood, and only entered after a complete scrub and rinse. Insulated, and constantly reheated, and jumped into as soon as you get home in the evenings.

Permaculture principles

Permaculture design principles are not just for Permanent Agriculture. Look through the article, and see which ones you can find in action.

1 Put the right thing in the right place (relative location and zones) = put the jumper where it will be at hand.

2 Three birds with one stone (generate value by arranging for multiple functions) = warming yourself by vacuuming the floor gets you exercising, staves off depression, makes your housemates happy, brings clarity to the house, and makes you feel you are someone who does as you CHOOSE to do – not someone chased by things you HAVE TO do.

3 Backup backup backup (each important function is carried out in multiple ways) = a combination of conserving, consuming, and self-generating heat is used.

4 Animal or vegetable, not mineral (use biological resources) = human beings ARE heat generators. We just have to manage it well.

5 Keep it in your system as long as possible, before its value is lost (energy cycling) = insulate.

6 Maximum benefit from minimum space (small-scale intensive systems) = small house, many calm residents.

7 The richest place is where two different environments (or cultures, or systems) meet (increase edge) = Japanese and international ideas brought to an Aussie home make something new and useful.

8 Plan for things to change (accelerate succession) = these keeping warm methods are worthwhile for people who rent, rather than own their house.

9 Cherish useful diversity = being warm is only a pleasure if you also know cold.

10 Nothing is wrong; nothing is right (everything works both ways) = heaters' narcotic effect is less beneficial than flow, but more beneficial than taking drugs for quelling mind-chatter.

11 Use information and imagination, rather than energy and resources – we are all rich, and already have way more than we need.

Three Permaculture ethics: care for the earth, care for people, share the surplus = the most human-friendly ways of heating are serendipitously the most earth-friendly. We are swimming in surplus heat – invite others in.

Winter dream #2: A Japanese Kotatsu: It's a low table the whole family sit around, on their cushions. It has a heater built in, and a quilt all around the edge, to keep the tangle of legs warm. Who can I persuade to make me one?

CONTAIN YOUR VIRTUE

A room of cold air makes you shrink into yourself, good for concentrating. A warm room expands and relaxes you, connecting you to others. There is a time and a place for both. It's lovely to come home to a warm welcome, and the heated downstairs area at my house in the evening encourages us to spend time together. There is a Permaculture principle 'get maximum yield from minimum space'. You might re-interpret that as minimising the number of rooms that get heated, and warming them luxuriously. This can be done by blocking some central heating outlets, or installing self-closing door springs – to close interior doors doesn't come naturally to most of us, and nagging others is a sign of bad design. Warming some rooms to the max can be especially good if there are heater-loving teenagers in the house. It's so hard being a teenager, and every comfort counts. If you have (temporary) power over anyone, and you choose to be a low-energy user, you might consider letting them make their own choices. If they see you getting joy out of the way you do things, they may choose your way too. In Permaculture force is never used. You soon learn that 'should' is an illusion, and clinging to it almost always takes away your effectiveness.

DO IT WHILE IT'S HOT

I have found that reading about change, imagining change, gives me a similar feeling to actually doing something, but without the effort...or the effect. An impetus to act quickly fades, and two years later I will still be proudly claiming, 'Yes, that's the idea I'm going to implement one day, when I get around to it. I'm such a marvellous woman, intending to do that!' Maybe one of these warming ideas has appealed to you, or you have come up with an even better one yourself. Right now, this moment, is the perfect time, the optimal time to go and get it started – before you finish this article.

So, maybe you have defied gravity, made a call to a friend or a trip to the shops, and participated in the evolution of the world. Or maybe there has just been a subtle shift, a readiness for action next time, in another area. Even if there is nothing but a softer, more accepting way of seeing the inactivity of others and yourself, that's great too. Being gentle with yourself is a very powerful start to being gentle with the world.

THE ULTIMATE HEAT MAXIMISER: ADD MORE PEOPLE

An instant way to heat your home 100% more efficiently is to add another person. Add two more for a 400% saving. The planet ends up heating one instead of four houses, and we get to enjoy each other's jokes and advice and cooking. I always feel bemused when I hear (blokey) storytelling about revolutionary technological innovation, 'Mate, you won't believe this engine: 9, maybe 10, percent more efficient!' With some (ladylike?) social innovation, we can increase tenfold the time and energy available for us to enjoy.

Sharing a house successfully with others is one of the most upstream actions you can take to creating a culture worth sustaining. It sets you up with so many chances to 'share your surplus' with just one of those being warmth. It's just a matter of pinpointing the kind of people you want to live with, and learning the skills of living harmoniously with them. No more 3am worries about being 'old and alone'. There is endless need in this world for people who can 'make life work' on a day-to-day basis. Homes are actually gardens of people, and everything you need to know about making them lush, restorative and weed-free you can learn through Permaculture design. That, however, is a story for another day.

For now, count your blessings, think warm thoughts, and bless the winter. **D2D**



Cecilia is an illustrator and designer specialising in 'intimate' Permaculture; transforming homes, gardens and workplaces into places that amaze, nurture and delight. She spends part of each year in Tokyo, and runs a creative-living sharehouse in inner Melbourne. Her hobbies include balcony gardening, blogging, and Japanese tea ceremony.