

Celebrate Mother Earth

By Susan Camp

On Monday, April 22, 2024, Earth Day celebrations will take place around the world. Is it enough to celebrate our glorious planet one day each year, or should we honor and protect her every day?

The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970 as an early manifestation of a budding environmental movement founded by United States Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. Nelson, an early environmentalist, envisioned the first Earth Day as a nationwide “teach-in” to educate Americans about the environmental dangers of the time, which included air and water pollution from factories, highways, and commercial shipping; toxic dump sites; and wildlife extinction.

Twenty million Americans across the nation participated in the first Earth Day rallies, garnering support from both major political parties. By the end of 1970, Congress had passed the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Endangered Species Acts, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had been created.

The celebration of Earth Day is now a global initiative, with participants from more than 193 countries. Each year, EARTHDAY.ORG, the global organizer for Earth Day, develops a theme for all participating nations. The theme for Earth Day 2024 is “Planet vs. Plastics,” calling for the commitment by all nations, groups, and individuals to work toward a 60 percent reduction in the production of plastics by 2040, a seemingly insurmountable goal, considering the pervasiveness of plastic usage in our lives.

As I glance around my work space, I notice plastic storage bins and trays, 3-ring-binders, a watering can, all of my computer equipment, my cell phone, and an empty soda bottle, just for starters. I don’t even want to think about the plastic items in the kitchen, bathrooms, garage, and tool and garden sheds. Where and how can we begin to wean ourselves from dependence on plastic? Can we possibly decrease plastic production by 60 percent by 2040?

In order to reach the initiative, EARTHDAY.ORG has proposed four goals for 2024: 1) Increase public awareness of the harmful effects of plastics on all life forms and the planet itself. 2) Phase out all single-use plastics by 2030, a monumental task, when we consider how many single-use items we employ each day. 3) Demand policies that will end “fast fashion,” an ever-expanding misuse of crude oil to produce synthetic clothing that may not last through 10 washes before disintegrating or going out of style. 4)

Invest in and implement new technologies that will decrease plastic use and introduce less environmentally harmful products.

The EARTHDAY.ORG website contains activities and events for Earth Day, including toolkits and fact sheets on a variety of topics from microplastics in drinking water to the decline of bee populations worldwide.

Can we, or will we, even try to achieve the 2030 and 2040 goals? I can't answer that, but I do know how each of us can contribute to moving forward and making improvements to the health of our planet.

Stop using single-use plastic products. Take your reusable tote bags to the grocery store. We became accustomed to using plastic bags during the pandemic, when it was considered unhygienic to carry reusable bags into a store, but it is considered acceptable to use them again. Try to avoid restaurants and coffee shops that use plastic or Styrofoam carry-out containers. Refuse plastic drinking straws. Stop buying inexpensive plastic food containers; instead, place your leftovers in glass containers that can go from refrigerator to microwave. Look for packaging manufactured with biodegradable materials. Recycle every item that you can.

April 18, 2024