

Earth Day Review for 2025

By Susan Camp

By the time you read this column, April 22nd, Earth Day 2025, will have passed, but no matter, because every day is a day to cherish and protect this lovely blue planet that we all call home. Unfortunately, we don't always practice good stewardship of the earth.

We all need a review, and Earth Day is the ideal time to remember that American cities once were covered in choking, gray smog, and the country's waterways were polluted with mine tailings, deadly chemicals, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and animal waste.

A few writers and activists, like Marjorie Stoneman Douglas ("The Everglades: River of Grass," 1947) and Rachel Carson ("The Silent Spring," 1962) spoke out about the land and water pollution caused by huge conglomerates and the indiscriminate use by the U.S. government of deadly pesticides like DDT. Initially, their voices barely were heard, but over time, more and more people began to listen and pay attention to what they had to say.

Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin was an early environmentalist, who, with a few others, envisioned an annual "Earth Day," a nationwide "teach-in" on college campuses 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. April 22nd, 1970 was the first major manifestation of the budding environmental movement.

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.

Earth Day has since grown into an international effort to combat global warming; increase the production and use of clean energy; and educate the world's citizens about sustainable living.

Major shifts in consciousness in the 1970's resulted in changes that we now take for granted. Raw sewage spills rarely occur. Factories face oversight and huge fines for release of toxic waste materials into the air and water. We no longer use leaded gas in our cars and trucks. We recognize the hazards of indiscriminate fertilizer and pesticide use and try to prevent toxic runoff into our nation's waterways.

Interest in Earth Day and environmental protection has waxed and waned since the early years of the movement, when many major advances were accomplished. Complacency and cynicism have affected the enthusiasm of some Americans for protection of the earth's natural resources, yet many of us remember those hard lessons of the past when pollution of the air, water, and land presented battles to be fought every day.

Occasionally, I am asked, “What can I do to keep the land and water clean and safe? What can I teach my children to do?”

This is how to begin:

Reduce or eliminate the use of harmful chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers in your garden. Build a compost bin and recycle kitchen scraps, leaves, and grass to create a nutrient-rich diet to feed your plants. The vegetables and fruit you produce will far surpass anything bought at the supermarket, and they will be free of toxic chemicals.

Plant native flowers and trees for the pollinators. Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds will flock to your garden. Native plants encourage beneficial insects that help with pest control.

Install a rain barrel, which will collect rainwater for the thirsty flowers and vegetables and decrease runoff that causes erosion and carries waste and toxic chemicals into our creeks and rivers.

Continue to recycle and reuse no matter how frustrating you find the process. Refuse plastic bags at the store, and keep reusable shopping totes in your car. At home, recycle plastic food containers, if possible, and return to using glass containers.

If each of us alters in a few small ways our interactions with the environment, we can create a cumulative impact that will improve the lives of our children and grandchildren.

Make every day Earth Day!