

# Earth Day 2020: Taking care of ourselves also means taking better care of the planet

- by **JUDY BENSON**
- **APRIL 21, 2020**



JUDY BENSON | CONNECTICUT SEA GRANT

The Simonds-Dickinson family takes a noontime walk on Ocean Avenue in New London on a warm April day.

---

No beach cleanups or parties for the planet will mark Earth Day tomorrow, April 22. But on this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event that began the same year as the passage of the Clean Air Act, we shouldn't forget its purpose. It's to remind us that we all depend on a healthy planet — just like we depend on healthy doctors and nurses to get us through the coronavirus crisis.

Connecticut Sea Grant had planned to be part of two Earth Day celebrations – one at the University of Connecticut and the other at Mystic Seaport. Now that the pandemic has upended everyone's professional and social calendars, Earth Day could easily pass unnoticed, the preparations that Sea Grant and so many other groups were making to give it special emphasis seeming irrelevant. Even without public gatherings, though, there are plenty of beacons calling us to rethink our relationship with the natural world. Rising sea levels, species shifts and warming temperatures are just a few.

These days, walking in our neighborhoods, parks and public forests has become the main form of exercise and respite from long hours at home and on computer screens. With it, perhaps many of us have also gained renewed appreciation for the outdoors, seeing the beauty of blue sky, bulbous clouds and sun pouring through budding branches with fresh eyes. Maybe we also notice more trash accumulating on roads and sidewalks, as reasonable fear of contagion makes even the most obsessive litter collectors refrain from their good habit – at least for now.

These may seem like contrary experiences, but really they're opposite sides of the same coin. The more positive feelings are evoked by being outside, the more we are likely to start caring about it. The more we start caring, the more troubled we become when Styrofoam take-out containers, crushed plastic cups and empty beer cans mar the view. Now isn't the time to organize a neighborhood clean-up, but we can resolve to let the trash remind us to be more conscientious in our own lives and choose items with less packaging. And we can view it as a symptom of the broader societal change needed towards consumption – of fossil fuels, of plastics and all sorts of material goods.

The spring of 2020 will long be remembered for all the challenges and tragedy brought by the pandemic. Could it also be a time when Earth Day's arrival came when we had the time and inclination to think about how to make a better future? Economist Kate Raworth offers a refreshing perspective on what a world not obsessed with ever-increasing growth but with human thriving that doesn't wreck the environment might look like.

“So this double-sided challenge to meet the needs of all within the means of the planet, it invites a new shape of progress,” she says, “no longer this ever-rising line of growth, but a sweet spot for humanity, thriving in dynamic balance between the foundation and the ceiling.”

You’ll find this quote in her TED talk:

The 15-minute presentation might be some of the most meaningful time you can spend on or before Earth Day, if you’re hungry for inspiration about the future beyond the pandemic.

 Click Here	<b>C O V I D - 1 9</b> <b>Resource Page</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Articles</li><li>• Viewpoints</li><li>• Podcasts</li><li>• Resources</li></ul>
---	--	--

After that, go outside as soon as you can. Be grateful for the gifts nature is offering – birds singing, violets blooming, breeze tossing your hair. Take none of it for granted. It might be the best way to celebrate Earth Day 2020.

*Judy Benson is the communications coordinator at [Connecticut Sea Grant](#), based at the UConn Avery Point campus in Groton. A federal-state partnership organization, Sea Grant programs and research focus on four main areas: coastal ecosystems; environmental literacy; resilient communities; aquaculture and fisheries.*