

Eco-Sexuality: How to Go Green in the Bedroom.



In a valiant effort to save our Mother Earth, there's been a strong push in the media to increase our awareness about how we are impacting the environment—from oil/gas usage to recycling paper, metal and plastics. One of my favorite commercials about becoming eco-friendly is the one where they show how far around the earth all of our discarded plastic bottles could stretch, if connected from end to end. Naturally, the first thing that comes to my mind as a sexologist is, “what if we did the same thing with all the discarded condoms in landfills?” Now, I'm not expecting anyone to start scouring landfills to collect them to find out (though, I did hear that the Discovery Channel TV show “Dirty Jobs” has run out of ideas, lol). Unfortunately, while plastic bottles can be collected curbside and recycled, condoms, personal massagers, and other items we use in the bedroom cannot. This being the case, I believe the next best thing is for us to be more mindful about the products we use and how we discard them. We have choices that are not only better for the environment, but in some cases, they are better for our body as well. This month I want to help you all to become more eco-sexual, by going green in the bedroom.

The Eco-sexual Mindset

The basic tenants of going green are: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. We need to reduce the use of harmful chemicals that are damaging our earth and our bodies. We need to reuse or repurpose items whenever possible. And when discarding items, we need to do so in such a way that the materials can be broken down and used again. When it comes to products we use for sexual pleasure, this is more difficult; however, it is not impossible. The key to becoming the best eco-sexual you can be is by paying attention to what products are made out of and purchasing goods that are non-toxic, biodegradable, and/or recyclable.

Earth Friendly Products

When purchasing products such as candles, toys, lubricants, and other accoutrements, look for items that are Phthalate and PVC free. Phthalates are chemicals that are used to soften plastic materials. The use of this chemical has been banned in the U.S. and in Europe from use on children's toys, due to its high levels of toxicity. It is now being investigated for possible links to cancer and may be toxic to the human reproductive system.

There are several companies that have dedicated themselves to selling adult products that are non-toxic and eco-friendly. Since 2007, Good Vibes has been selling Phthalate-free products and offers an all-natural and organic line of products called the Ecorotic ® Collection (see www.goodvibes.com). Some wonderful examples from this collection are: Honey Girl Organics Natural Personal Lubricant and Blossom Organics Pure Pleasure Arousal Gel. Earth Erotics is another company that offers Phthalate-free and PVC-Free products. In addition to toys, lubricants, and oils, they also offer organic cotton sheets for your bed and a variety of hemp-based body products (see www.EarthErotics.com).

When purchasing sex toys, look for products that are made from 100% silicone and do not require batteries. Since batteries cannot be recycled, opt for toys that either plug into an outlet, or have a rechargeable base. A popular choice is the Hitachi Magic Wand Massager. It will cost approximately \$50, but you will never have to purchase batteries or worry about them dying. It also has a variety of attachment options. A rechargeable cordless toy option is the LELO INA Dual Vibrator. It is made from Phthalate-free silicone and can run for 4 hours after a 2 hour charge.

For those of you who are already practicing an eco-sexual lifestyle, and are ready to take the next step in reducing your carbon footprint, there are now solar-powered products! The Solar Bullet® is a small solar-powered bullet-shaped vibrator (see www.Amazon.com). I hope that this is just the beginning of solar-powered adult toys and that they continue to improve the technology with them. Currently, the solar cell requires 8 hours of charge for 1 hour of use; which I believe may be one reason why these haven't become more popular.

Protection for You and for the Environment

In the United States, an estimated 450 Million condoms are sold each year. In addition, several million are donated to various programs around the country that provide them for free to high-risk and/or underserved populations. Regardless of how many of these are actually used, what happens to those 450+ Million condoms? Even unused, they are not recyclable; which means that one way or another, they will be disposed of and will make their way into our environment. Not all condoms are made with the same materials, and some of the materials used are not biodegradable. There are currently 5 options for materials when it comes to choosing a condom. For male condoms, there is: latex, polyisoprene, polyurethane and lambskin. The female condom (FC2) is currently being made out of nitrile.

Latex

Latex condoms are the most commonly purchased, most likely due to the wide variety of options in sizes, shapes, colors, etc. Latex condoms are biodegradable, when not under water. Let me repeat: **Latex does not biodegrade when under water.** Have you ever happened to be walking along a beautiful stretch of beach and suddenly notice a strange looking jelly fish? I digress. Please do not dispose of them in our waterways—which includes flushing them in toilets! Simply wrap them in tissue and throw them away in a trash can. ☺ Spermicide and/or lubricants used with a latex condom also affect the biodegradability of the material. A 2002 study by Ikram and Hashim found that in the optimal conditions of a composting environment (which is three times higher in the microbial growth that helps to break down materials), 42% of the natural latex condom remained **after 48 weeks**. That study did not include condoms that had spermicide or lubricants on them, and the majority of condoms sold in the U.S. are lubricated. Moreover, our landfills do not have “optimal conditions” for decomposition, and therefore we can assume that they take much longer to biodegrade there, versus a compost bin.

Polyurethane & Polyisoprene

Until a few years ago, polyurethane was the latex-alternative being used in condoms. Due to latex allergies, this was a wonderful alternative. Unfortunately, polyurethane is made from a plastic material that is not biodegradable. Recently, it has been replaced with polyisoprene. Polyisoprene is a synthetic latex material which is derived from tree sap. It is a safe alternative for those who are allergic to latex, and is biodegradable (albeit less than natural rubber latex). These eco-

friendlier versions can be purchased from Lifestyles (SKYN) and Durex (Avanti Bare). Polyisoprene condoms are marketed to be softer, stretchier, and more natural feeling than latex.

Lambskin

Lambskin condoms are derived from a thin layer of sheep intestine. Lambskin is the best biodegradable choice in condoms; however, they do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV. Due to their inability to protect against STIs, they are not recommended for use by those who have not been tested for an STI and/or are not in a monogamous relationship with a partner who has also been tested. Lambskin condoms are thin and because of the natural material, they transmit body heat more than latex or synthetic latex condoms. Some claim that they feel better and/or provide more sensation than other condoms; which may be a result of the increased sensation from body heat. In addition, oil-based lubricants can be used with these condoms, unlike latex.

Nitrile

The female condom was originally made using polyurethane; however, as of 2009, they are now being made out of Nitrile. The switch was positive in that the Female condom is now less “noisy” (the sound previously was akin to the crinkling noise of a plastic bag) and the material is cheaper, making them more affordable to purchase. They are still more expensive than male condoms at approximately \$2 each. Nitrile is a petroleum-based product and it is not biodegradable. Moreover, it is expected to not biodegrade for decades and when it does, it may release toxic chemicals into the environment.

Recycling

Unfortunately, you cannot recycle condoms of any material, new or used. You also cannot recycle the wrapper that they come in, although you can recycle the box. Many individuals have started composting at home. This may be the best way to dispose of condoms made from biodegradable materials (i.e.- latex, polyisoprene, or lambskin). Check out www.crazyaboutcompost.com for everything you need to know about how to start and maintain your own composting. One user of the site, tylerw, reported that he did an experiment with expired, never used latex condoms and they took 3-4 months to decompose in his compost tumbler. That is amazing! Especially compared to the 48 weeks reported in the aforementioned study.

Want to get rid of old toys, massagers, etc, but don't know what to do with them? Great news, you can recycle them! You heard me. There is a company called Scarlet Girl that will not only provide you with an eco-friendly option for discarding your old toys, but they even give you a \$10 online credit to be used on their website for future purchases. For all of the details of their “sexstainable” program, go to www.Scarletgirl.com and click on their “Recycle Sex Toys” link for instructions. As for any unwanted CDs or DVDs, be mindful that they are made out of #7 Plastic, and therefore will not be recycled by your regular curbside pickup. There are, however, two great online recycling options for those: www.CDrecyclingcenter.com and www.backthruthefuture.com. Both sites require that you pay for the shipping, but it is a small price to pay for a discreet way to get rid of any unwanted media materials.

 *If you have information to share about how to go green in the bedroom, send me an email through my website: www.SexTherapyInDelaware.com *

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