



Sustainable Goals

For many people January is a time for reflection and consideration. A chance to tally up what was achieved over the past 12-months and to set goals for the coming year. 2020 was a year like no other, but I am bolstered by reviewing such a difficult year and find comfort in the tradition of setting intentions for the days and weeks ahead.

When it comes to my efforts towards sustainable living I faltered more than I would like to admit this year. Like many, I gave myself a pandemic pass, allowing my laziness to be chalked up to difficult circumstances and fear. I accepted more single use plastic bags than normal because the thought of having to wash my reusable bags EVERY time I used them seemed like too much work. I turned to online shopping and felt little resistance when clicking the “Buy Now” button, despite knowing that several of my purchases were neither sustainable or necessary. And, like most of

us, I spent way too many hours online, few of which were used productively.

In spite of these setbacks I can also proudly tally some successes. I continued to work toward reducing our food waste onboard by resisting the urge to panic buy, imaginatively reinventing leftovers and buying fresh goods in quantities I knew could be used before they spoiled. Stranded alone on the hardstand in a boatyard in the Philippines since late February, I decided to make the best out of my forced landlocked time and started a container garden. Not only did this provide a much-needed distraction, and some delicious additions to my meals, by using plastic containers that I found discarded in the garbage or washed up onshore I did it while being conscious of my environmental impact.

But perhaps my proudest achievement was realized right here, on the pages of *SisterShip Magazine* when Sustainable Sailing debuted in 2020. When I pitched this column, my intention was to challenge myself to learn more, to open a discussion around

sustainability and to encourage readers to make changes towards living a more sustainable life. I feel like I have done well on my first two goals, and hope you, the reader, feel like I have succeeded in the third.

Moving into 2021, a year that so far appears to hold many of the same challenges of 2020, I am setting my goals to minimize those obstacles. Being online has become increasingly necessary, but I want to limit my screen time. My goal is to turn my phone off at night and to wait an hour after waking before turning it back on. I am sure I will still fall down a rabbit hole and spend hours watching outdated cooking shows, but I want to be mindful of when that happens.

Hopefully, I can curb my bad digital habits. Heightened hygiene is still an important concern, but I want to also prioritize washable and reusable items whenever possible. No more opting for convenience and wasteful just because the sustainable

BELOW: An impromptu #FIXITFRIDAY electrical repair. Join me on Instagram @sustainable.sailing.



ABOVE: High tide line at the boatyard, all the encouragement I need to double down on my efforts to reduce single use plastics this year.

alternative requires a little preparation and effort. I want to lead by example by continuing to eliminate disposable and single use whenever possible.

I already know the happiness I attain from material goods seldom lasts longer than the thrill of opening a packet, and that choosing a sustainable lifestyle is also about sustaining myself. This year I intend to be more mindful about the way I find joy and fulfillment. Listening to my instincts will be key, resting when I need to restore my energy, and doing so without feeling guilty. I want to remain healthy and live with ease.

It is easy to put words on paper but there is nothing more discouraging than failing to find a sustainable way to follow through on your goals. No matter how genuine your intentions are it isn't always to easy to take action. Whether you are frozen at the starting line or frequently falter to finish, here are some tips to help you define your



ABOVE: My container garden tomatoes sheltering on the bunk during a typhoon in October.

sustainability goals and reach them.

Be Honest About Your Habits: The first step to making change is to honestly evaluate what needs to be corrected. This may mean taking a hard look at your habits, a process that isn't always easy or comfortable. There are lots of tools to track things like time spent online but keeping a written track of things such as new items of clothing purchased in a month or take away meals consumed in a week is sometimes easiest. When things are recorded on paper we can see the frequency and volume of our habits in black and white, and often it is surprising.

Be Realistic and Specific: To create a habit that is sustainable it is important to define your goal. It is also important to set a goal that is attainable. Can you eliminate ALL plastic from your life? Probably not. Can you decide to say NO to single use plastic bags at the grocery store? Definitely! Being specific about what you want to

achieve, eliminating single use plastic at the grocery store rather than just eliminating plastic, will help you take action toward your goal. Be careful not to confuse attainable with easy.

Like most challenges that we set for ourselves there will be bumps along the way. That's okay.

Focus: It is easy to get carried away with New Year's enthusiasm and write a long list of goals you want to accomplish only to find yourself feeling overwhelmed in a few weeks time. Deciding on one or two realistic goals will ensure that you don't feel exhausted by just looking at the giant TO DO list. When one of your sustainable goals becomes a habit then add another to your list. Remember, you don't have to wait until New Year rolls around again to set an intention, but you do have to stay focused.

Make Do: When first trying to make sustainable choices many people feel the need to buy new "sustainable" things – a stainless travel mug, a reusable straw, a fancy shopping bag. They believe that having something new and shiny means they'll love it more and use it more. The only problem is those new and shiny things become used things soon enough, and when their sparkle goes so does their allure. Learning to use and be content with what you have is one of the most sustainable actions you can take. A plastic yogurt container can be used to store leftovers, a worn-out t-shirt cut up into cleaning cloths, a plastic Ziplock can be washed and reused several times. Take a few weeks to make do with what you have, and if you still feel the need to buy that special sustainable something, then go for it.

Friends and Community: Staying inspired to live sustainably can sometimes be a struggle. One great way to keep motivated is to find people who are trying to achieve similar goals. Whether that is a friend who is also making positive changes in their

life or an online community that you can draw encouragement from, surrounding yourself with like-minded people will make the journey easier.

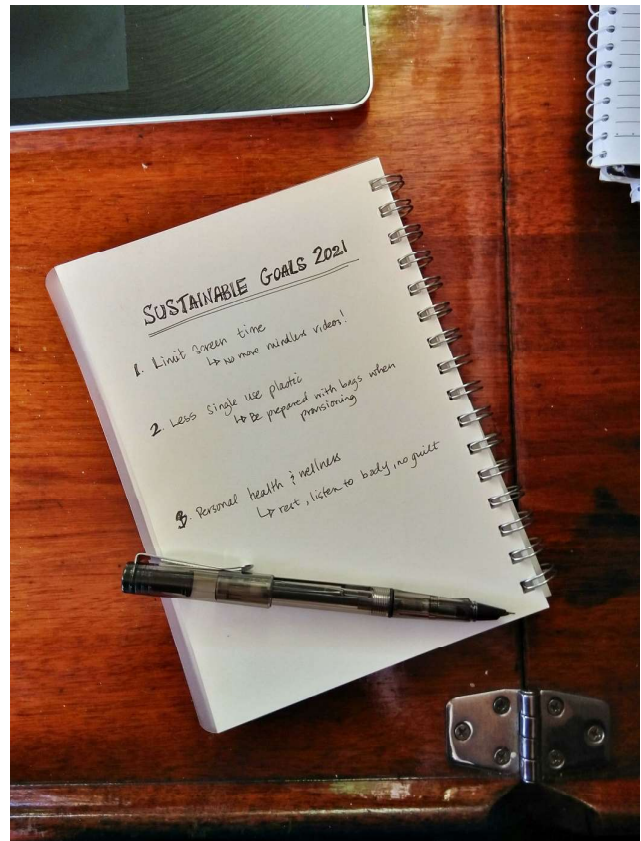
Better not Perfect: Being perfect at something is never a realistic expectation but striving to do better is always achievable. Whether you forget your reusable mug and decide to go for a takeout coffee anyway, or someone gives you a plastic knickknack made in China, setbacks will happen. The trick is not to dwell on things that are imperfect but to muster the courage to start again. Making a conscious effort to do better is the first step to doing your best. Like most things in life, building sustainable habits takes dedication and practice, so be patient with yourself.

So much of what has happened in 2020 has reinforced the basic principals that I try to live by. Small actions have far reaching affects and to reach a big goal everyone needs to do their part. These are important lessons to remember when things start to feel overwhelming.

I would love to hear what intentions you are setting this year and the actions you are taking to reach them.

You can find me on Instagram @sustainable.sailing where I post about things I am doing to meet my sustainability goals, including #FIXITFRIDAY, a movement to encourage people to take action once a week by trying to fix something rather than buy new.

You can also send me an email at sustainable.sailing41@gmail.com. This past year we've seen the impact working together can have, are you ready to help build a sustainable future for us all?



ABOVE: Reflecting on writing intentions for a more sustainable 2021.



Heather Francis is from Nova Scotia, Canada and has lived and worked on boats throughout the world. Since 2008 she has been living and sailing onboard *Kate*, a Newport 41 sloop, with her Aussie partner, Steve. She is a writer, photographer and cook who tries to live mindfully. Follow at www.yachtkate.com or [@sustainablesailing41](https://www.instagram.com/sustainablesailing41)