

Molly Hagan on Eco-Living: START SMALL AND STAY COMMITTED

by April Thompson

Born and raised in the Midwest, actress Molly Hagan moved west in the 1980s to pursue her dream of an acting career. Her childhood home was located alongside farmland that ended up being sold and quarried for limestone. “They kept buying more acreage and infringing on our life and landscape. It was hideous, and led me to want to conserve and protect the land and its beauty,” says Hagan.

Committed to realizing her professional goals, she’s also dedicated to living eco-consciously and furthering conservation causes. Hagan lives with her partner, archaeologist Richard Guttenberg, in an energy-efficient home below the San Gabriel mountains in Altadena, California.

During her 30-plus-year acting career, Hagan has appeared in more than 30 films, including the classics *Code of Silence*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Sully* and *Election*. Her many TV episode credits include *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*, *Columbo*, *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *The Golden Girls*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Bones*; she was a regular on the popular *Herman’s Head* and beloved *Unfabulous*.

With so many dimensions to sustainability, what issue most moves you to make green lifestyle choices?

My chief concern is overpopulation. The most conscious environmental decision I ever made was not to have children; my decision is in no way a judgment on those that do. But I believe the warming world is grossly overpopulated, causing resources to become precious, and we must make ever wiser choices.

What are some of the conservation steps you have taken in your home and garden?

When I had the means, I bought big-ticket items to conserve electricity, like a Sun Frost refrigerator. When money was tight, I focused more on little things, like energy-efficient light bulbs, composting and recycling.

When we bought our small home in sunny Southern California three years ago, we tore out the lawn and irrigation system and planted mostly native plants that require little to no watering. We have an organic vegetable garden, which we hand water using rainwater captured in rain barrels. We also capture our shower water and use it to water plants in summer and flush toilets in winter. Our house had no heating or cooling system, so we invested in ductless split-system heat pumps that cool and heat very efficiently.

We knew we needed to do more, so we met with a home energy consultant. We followed through with doable improvements like chimney balloons, painting our flat roof with a



reflective coating and weatherproofing windows and doors, while we saved toward doing more big things. Last year, we were able to take the plunge and installed recessed LED lighting, upgraded all our windows and doors and insulated our home’s ceilings and floors. We also repurposed material saved from my former yoga studio for the flooring.

The insulation has reduced our air conditioning use by 70 percent; despite living in the scorching San Gabriel Valley with little shade cover, we rarely have to turn it on. Our winter electricity bill is down 40 percent, so we’re already seeing a return on our investments, in addition to reducing our carbon footprint.

We know we can still do more. We dream of going solar and adding a water reuse system. Next, we want to get everyone involved in planting trees in our neighborhood.

Because living in a sprawling city or suburb can raise our everyday transportation footprint, how do you minimize your driving?

It’s tough to have a small transportation footprint in Los Angeles. I took the bus a couple of times when I moved here, but it was difficult to make time-sensitive shoots and auditions. Luckily, nearly everything I need is near our home, and I try not to travel far unless I’m auditioning.

I’ve always bought small cars to save gas. I bought the first electric hybrid made by Honda, their futuristic-looking Insight. My last three cars have been a hybrid Toyota Prius.

Do you try to use your public profile to advocate for change?

I’ve always focused on what I can do in my life to live simply and cleanly. The choices I’ve made come from my heart. I don’t carry statistics in my head, can’t quote experts and don’t consider myself an activist. I read up on eco-issues, get a visceral sense of what is right, and then try to lead by example. For example, after we tore out our water- and chemical-hungry lawn, our neighbors on both sides tore out theirs. It’s a simple, but powerful act.

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