

Rachel Carson Center

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We Never Lock Our Doors

Ecovillage resident and author Diana Leafe Christian on life in an ecovillage

I live in a tiny house in a small community in the southern Appalachian Mountains of the United States. Here we have no televisions; no SUVs (and no garages); no air conditioners, toaster ovens, electric hair dryers, or furnaces; and no electricity from a local power company, piped-in city water, or connection to a municipal sewer system.



Source:
John McBride

What we do have are well-insulated houses with passive solar heating and woodstoves as back-up—so we're warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Our houses are built with various natural building materials: clay, straw, adobe bricks, and earthen plaster. Our electricity comes from solar panels, our water from springs, wells, and rainwater catchment tanks. We use homemade composting toilets and graywater recycling systems. Three small, onsite organic farms sell us and our neighbors biodynamic vegetables, garlic, eggs, milk, butter, and lamb. An orchard and a trout pond also provide us with food.

Together we are creating a village of wonderful neighbors, who help each other all the time. We have our own self-governance system and conduct mediations, with friends as mediators, when there are conflicts. We have an active social life, with work parties, potluck dinners, game nights, movie nights, dances, and study groups on nonviolent communication. We even employ ourselves and our neighbors through onsite cottage industries, such as a fruit and berry nursery, two herbal businesses, two construction companies, a woodworking and excavation shop, a bookseller, a solar design/installation business, and onsite lodging for visitors. We hold intellectual examinations of leftist politics, the Occupy Movement, alien technologies, Spiral Dynamics, and Integral Theory. Conversations about insulation and thermal mass, biofuel and biochar, the best designs for a compost toilet, and whether someone can borrow your wheelbarrow, your power



Source:
Lucas Foglia

tools, or your truck can be heard at any given time. We recycle everything. We never lock our doors. We live extremely simple lives. And, in terms of quality of life, we believe we're rich.

Our community, Earthaven, is an ecovillage.

An ecovillage combines ecological and, sometimes, spiritual values and practices. It promotes sharing land resources and other assets, as well as cooperative self-governance. Ecovillagers believe that if they can inspire and encourage enough people to also adopt this way of life, it can lead to a more ecological future for everyone.

I believe ecovillages are important because they offer another way to understand what we must do to transform our world into a saner, healthier, more humane and more livable place for humans and all the world's creatures. Traditionally, environmental activists have campaigned for legislative and lifestyle changes and protested against harmful laws and practices. Ecovillagers make the same point from another angle. They're essentially saying, "How we are living in our ecovillage is what the sustainable future on our planet could look like." They practice Buckminster Fuller's advice: "To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

Yet ecovillages are not, and certainly don't claim to be, exemplary models of what they're attempting to learn and teach. They are essentially "works in progress," learning as they go, making mistakes, and correcting course accordingly. Ecovillagers are undertaking a profound quest: to show us what it might be like to leap from the dominant paradigm of materialism and environmental callousness to that imagined future paradigm in which people live simple, satisfying, cooperative lives in balance with the natural world, harming nothing and no one. It may seem naïve, even arrogant, and perhaps impossible. But it is what we ecovillagers hope to accomplish.