

## 10 Ways To Live Simply In 2015

by Duane Elgin

Although simplicity has a long history, we are now entering radically changing times—ecological, social, economic, and psycho-spiritual—and we should expect the worldly expressions of simplicity to evolve and grow in response. For more than thirty years I've explored the "simple life" and I've found that simplicity is not simple. I've encountered such a diversity of expressions of the simple life that I find the most accurate way of describing this approach to living is with the metaphor of a garden.

### A Garden of Simplicity

To portray the richness of simplicity, here are ten different flowerings of expression that I see growing in the "garden of simplicity." Although there is overlap among them, each expression of simplicity seems sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate category. So there would be no favoritism in listing, they are placed in alphabetical order based on the brief name I associated with each.

1. **Choiceful Simplicity:** Simplicity means choosing our unique path through life consciously, deliberately, and of our own accord. It means to live whole—to not live divided against ourselves. This path emphasizes the challenges of freedom over the comfort of consumerism. A choiceful simplicity means staying focused, diving deep, and not being distracted by consumer culture. It means consciously organizing our lives so that we give our "true gifts" to the world—which is to give the essence of ourselves. As Emerson said, "The only true gift is a portion of yourself."

2. **Compassionate Simplicity:** Simplicity means to feel such a strong sense of kinship with others that, as Gandhi said, we "choose to live simply so that others may simply live." A compassionate simplicity means feeling a bond with the community of life and being drawn toward a path of reconciliation—with other species and future generations as well as, for example, between those with great differences of wealth and opportunity. A compassionate simplicity is a path of cooperation and fairness that seeks a future of mutually assured development for all.

3. **Ecological Simplicity:** Simplicity means to choose ways of living that touch the Earth more lightly and that reduce our ecological impact. This life-path remembers our deep roots in the natural world. It encourages us to connect with nature, the seasons, and the cosmos. A natural simplicity feels a deep reverence for the community of life on Earth and accepts that the non-human realms of plants and animals have their dignity and rights as well the human.

4. **Economic Simplicity:** Simplicity means there are many forms of "right livelihood" in the rapidly growing market for healthy and sustainable products and services of all kinds—from home-building materials and energy systems to foods and transportation.

When the need for a sustainable infrastructure in developing nations is combined with the need to retrofit and redesign the homes, cities, workplaces, and transportation systems of “developed” nations, then it is clear that an enormous wave of highly purposeful economic activity can unfold.

5. **Elegant Simplicity:** Simplicity means that the way we live our lives represents a work of unfolding artistry. As Gandhi said, “My life is my message.” In this spirit, an elegant simplicity is an understated, organic aesthetic that contrasts with the excess of consumerist lifestyles. Drawing from influences ranging from Zen to the Quakers, simplicity is a path of beauty that celebrates natural materials and clean, functional expressions.

6. **Family Simplicity:** Simplicity means that the balanced lives of children and families are of highest priority and that it is important not to get sidetracked by our consumer society. In turn, a growing number of parents are opting out of consumerist lifestyles and seeking to bring enhancing values and experiences into the lives of their children and family.

7. **Frugal Simplicity:** Simplicity means that, by cutting back on spending that is not truly serving our lives, and by practicing skillful management of our personal finances, we can achieve greater financial independence. Frugality and careful financial management bring increased financial freedom and the opportunity to more consciously choose our path through life. Living with less also decreases the impact of our consumption upon the Earth and frees resources for others.

8. **Political Simplicity:** Simplicity means organizing our collective lives in ways that enable us to live more lightly and sustainably on the Earth which, in turn, involves changes in nearly every area of public life—from transportation and education to the design of our homes, cities, and workplaces. The politics of simplicity is also a media politics as the mass media are the primary vehicle for reinforcing—or transforming—the mass consciousness of consumerism. Political simplicity is a politics of conversation and community that builds from local, face-to-face connections to networks of relationships emerging around the world through the enabling power of television and the Internet.

9. **Soulful Simplicity:** Simplicity means to approach life as a meditation and to cultivate our experience of intimate connection with all that exists. A spiritual presence infuses the world and, by living simply, we can more directly awaken to the living universe that surrounds and sustains us, moment by moment. Soulful simplicity is more concerned with consciously tasting life in its unadorned richness than with a particular standard or manner of material living. In cultivating a soulful connection with life, we tend to look beyond surface appearances and bring our interior aliveness into relationships of all kinds.

10. **Uncluttered Simplicity:** Simplicity means taking charge of lives that are too busy, too stressed, and too fragmented. An uncluttered simplicity means cutting back on trivial distractions, both material and non-material, and focusing on the essentials—whatever those may be for each of our unique lives. As Thoreau said, “Our life is frittered away by detail. . . Simplify, simplify.” Or, as Plato wrote, “In order to seek one’s own direction, one must simplify the mechanics of ordinary, everyday life.”

As these ten approaches illustrate, the growing culture of simplicity contains a flourishing garden of expressions whose great diversity—and intertwined unity—are creating a resilient and hardy ecology of learning about how to live more sustainable and meaningful lives. As with other ecosystems, it is the diversity of expressions that fosters flexibility, adaptability, and resilience. Because there are so many pathways of great relevance into

the garden of simplicity, this cultural movement appears to have enormous potential to grow—particularly if it is nurtured and cultivated in the mass media as a legitimate, creative, and promising life-path for the future. As the culture of simplicity develops, it will draw people toward it by demonstrating a more meaningful and fulfilling way of life beyond modern materialism. In turn, a vital foundation for nurturing the garden of simplicity will be the flowering of new forms of human-scale community.

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Join people from all over the world in a 21-Day Simple Living Challenge that starts January 9th! You'll receive an idea for a unique expression of simplicity every day for three weeks, and will have the opportunity to read and share stories with a like-minded community.