

Free Local Guide!



healthy
living
IN BERKS



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Get outside for a nature walk.

Buy local fruits and veggies.

Get your well water tested.



A Project of the
STATE OF THE **ENVIRONMENT** in Berks Program

Eat Local

Top reasons to buy food locally

- **Locally grown food tastes better.** Food grown in your own community is usually picked within the past day or two. It's crisp, sweet, and loaded with flavor.
- **Local produce is better for you.** Fresh produce loses nutrients quickly. Locally grown food, purchased soon after harvest, retains its nutrients.
- **Local food supports local farm families.** With fewer than 1 million Americans now listing farming as their primary occupation, farmers are a vanishing breed. Local farmers who sell direct to consumers cut out the middle man and get full retail price for their crops.
- **Local food builds a stronger community.** When you buy direct from the farmer, you are re-establishing a time-honored connection between the eater and the grower.
- **Local food preserves open space.** As the value of direct-marketed fruits and vegetables increases, selling farmland for development becomes less likely. The rural landscape will survive only as long as farms are financially viable.
- **Local food supports a clean environment.** A well-managed family farm is a place where the resources of fertile soil and clean water are valued. Good stewards of the land follow management plans and grow cover crops to prevent erosion and replace nutrients used by their crops. Cover crops also capture carbon emissions and help combat global warming.

- **Buying local food is about the future.**

By supporting local farmers today, you can help ensure that there will be farms in Berks County tomorrow, so that future generations will have access to nourishing, flavorful, and abundant food.

Top Foods You Should Buy Organic

When you go to the grocery store, there are many foods that you can buy organic. According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), consumers can reduce their pesticide exposure by 80% if they avoid the most contaminated fruits and vegetables and eat only the cleanest. The list below are the fruits and veggies that use the most pesticides (the Dirty Dozen), so choose organic if possible.

Here's the Dirty Dozen:

Peaches	Apples
Sweet Bell Peppers	Celery
Nectarines	Strawberries
Cherries	Kale
Leafy Greens	Grapes
Carrots	Pears



Did You Know?

According to several studies, American food travels an average of 1,500 to 2,500 miles from farm to table. By buying fresh local foods, less fuel is burned to get a meal to you.

Local Farmers Markets

Below are just a few of the markets in Berks County. Please call or visit their website before visiting for days and hours of operation.

Fairgrounds Farmers Market

N. 5th St. & Bellevue Ave.
Reading, PA 19605
610-929-3429

Leesport Farmers Market

312 Gernant's Church Rd
Leesport, PA 19533
610-926-1307
www.leesportmarket.com

Penn Street Market

800 block of Penn Street
Reading PA 19601
610-898-5482
www.pennstreetmarket.org

Shillington Farmers Market

10 South Summit Ave
Shillington, PA 19607
610-777-7675
www.shillingtonfarmersmarket.com

West Reading Farmers Market

500 block of Penn Avenue
West Reading, PA 19611
www.westreadingmainstreet.org

Farmers' Market of Wyomissing

845 Woodland Road
Wyomissing, PA. 19610
610-374-1916
www.farmersmarketofwyomissing.com

Bountiful Berks

Look for the Bountiful Berks sticker on foods at Redner's Warehouse Markets and Shurfine Markets. This means that the food was grown or processed in Berks County. Other grocery stores also have programs that promote locally grown food. This could include local fruits and vegetables, milk and poultry to products that are unique to Berks County such as pretzels!



Berks County Farm



The Air We Breathe

Outdoor Air

Why is air quality important? Local air quality affects how you live and breathe. Like the weather, it can change from day to day or even hour to hour. A key measurement for air quality is Air Quality Index, or AQI. It tells you how clean or polluted your outdoor air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you.

COLOR	AQI	LEVELS OF HEALTH CONCERN
Green	0-50	GOOD - Satisfactory air quality. Air pollution poses little to no health risk.
Yellow	51-100	MODERATE - Acceptable air quality. Very small number of people are at health risk and they should limit long outdoor exertion.
Orange	101-150	UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS- Sensitive groups are prone to air quality effects on their health and should limit outdoor activities.
Red	151-200	UNHEALTHY FOR GENERAL PUBLIC- Health effects felt by majority and sensitive groups may experience serious effects. Limit outdoor activities.
Purple	201-300	VERY UNHEALTHY - Everyone may experience serious health effects and should limit outdoor activities. HEALTH ALERT PUT IN PLACE!
Maroon	301+	HAZARDOUS - Everyone's health is seriously affected and should avoid all outdoor activity. EMERGENCY CONDITIONS PUT IN PLACE.

When there is a bad air day...

You may think, "How can I make a difference?" Collectively, if all of Berks County would think about their actions, there would be a greater impact on the quality of air in Berks County.

- **Conserve Electricity** and set your air conditioner at a higher temperature.
- **Use a cleaner commute.** Share a ride or use public transportation. Combine errands and reduce trips. Limit engine idling, and refuel vehicles after dusk or early morning.
- **Use household, workshop, and garden chemicals** in ways that keep evaporation to a minimum, or try to delay using them when poor air quality is forecast. Reduce grass mowing since it pollutes more than a car.
- **Reduce small engine use.** Mow your grass less often, try an electric mower or push mower, or reduce total lawn area by installing native plants, rain gardens, or vegetable gardens.
- **Reconsider the campfire.** Wood smoke contains toxins and harmful microscopic particles.

On the web

View the current forecast of air quality in your area at www.AirNow.gov.

Sign up for email notifications when the air quality is at the UNHEALTHY status at www.enviroflash.info/signup.cfm.



Did You Know?

The average indoor radon levels of Berks County is 11.8 pCi/L, compared to the 1.3 pCi/L average nationally. At 4 pCi/L or above, the EPA recommends you take measures to reduce your exposure to radon. 55% of the test results in Berks are at or above this level!

Great Resource!

For more information about indoor air quality, visit:

Radon

www.epa.gov/radon

Lead

www.epa.gov/lead

Carbon Monoxide

www.epa.gov/iaq/co.html

Indoor Air

Radon. A big part of "living green" is breathing clean, healthy indoor air. One of the best ways to protect the health of your family is to get radon gas out of our homes. It's the environmentally responsible choice that can help reduce lung cancer. Since radon enters homes from under the ground, living healthy and green starts from the ground up. By removing radon out of homes every family can have safer, healthier air to breathe. For more information, visit www.lunginfo.org and search for "Radon".

Lead. If your home was built before 1978, you should test your home for lead. Lead can be inhaled in particles from deteriorating paint, or ingested as paint chips (mainly a problem with children). You should test painted surfaces in older buildings for lead content, and make sure all painted surfaces are in good condition. For test kits, visit your local home improvement store.

Carbon Monoxide. Carbon Monoxide can be found in unvented kerosene and gas space heaters; leaking chimneys and furnaces; back-drafting from furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces; gas stoves; generators and other gasoline powered equipment; automobile exhaust from attached garages; and tobacco smoke. Get a carbon monoxide monitor to regulate the gas in your home.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). Common sources of indoor VOC exposure include building materials, paints, lacquers, household cleaning products, air fresheners, disinfectants, personal cosmetics, pesticides, dry-cleaned clothing, and hobby and craft materials. Be aware of your purchases and read the instructions carefully.



42.6% of Berks County has tree cover.

Benefits of Trees

How do trees affect your health?

The public health benefits of trees are direct and indirect. Direct benefits include:

- **Clean air and water.** Trees improve air quality by absorbing hundreds of pounds of air pollutants that affect our health. Trees improve water quality and reduce community flooding by absorbing and intercepting rainfall in their canopies, thus reducing storm water that often carries pollutants to waterways.
- **Reduce exposure to harmful UV rays** that are causing increases in skin cancer and cataracts.
- **Positive psychological effects** associated with the proximity of natural environments such as reducing stress, fatigue, and aggression in humans.

Indirect benefits include a more active lifestyle linked to increased outdoor activity. Growing research suggests that a lack of near proximity to nature may be associated with numerous health conditions such as asthma, childhood obesity, and childhood diabetes.



Planting trees along the Tulpehocken Creek

Plant more trees

If your property includes forested areas, try to keep some or all of those areas intact; if your property lacks trees, consider planting trees where they are compatible with property use. Select trees appropriate for the regional climate, and local soil and moisture regimes. Blocks of trees provide habitat for more woodland species than rows of trees; consider this if you are clearing trees from your property. Berks Conservancy staff or native plant nurseries can advise you on selecting attractive, appropriate tree species for planting. There is also more information about the common trees of PA at www.dcnr.state.pa.us and search "Common Trees". Another resource for planting trees in your community is TreeVitalize. Learn more at www.treevitalize.net.

Did You Know?

An acre of trees absorbs enough carbon dioxide over one year to equal the amount produced by driving a car 26,000 miles.

Protect forested land

Landowners (whether you own 20 acres or 400 acres) should learn about the options available to help conserve and protect their land. There are a variety of programs available in our community. The Berks Conservancy can advise you on options for your land and provide you with the information and facts you need to make this important decision for you and your family. If you don't own land, you can help make things better by sharing this information with friends, neighbors, or relatives that may be interested in protecting land for future generations.

Great Resource!

Questions about forests or land protection in Berks? The Berks Conservancy can help you and your family. Visit www.berks-conservancy.org.



Get Moving Outside

To Your Health

Walking, biking and other outside activities are good forms of exercise that offers numerous health benefits such as reducing heart disease, increasing lung capacity, losing weight and maintaining good mental health. Always consult a qualified medical professional before beginning any nutritional program or exercise program.



How Many Calories You Burn

Your weight and the distance you walk determine the energy calories burned while walking. Walking speed matters less than distance and weight. A rule of thumb is 100 calories per mile for a 180-pound person and 65 calories per mile for a 120-pound person.

Fun Ways to Get Outside

- **Go for a morning or evening walk every day.**
- **Try gardening.** From planting a vegetable and fruit garden to planting a few flowers, both activities get you outside regularly and communing with nature.
- **Have a staycation.** Visit French Creek State Park and Nolde Forest State Park and explore the trails and activities that are available. It saves you fuel and invests in local resources.
- **Find a trail.** Whether hiking or biking is your speed, there are trails around the county for you to explore. Find one near you at www.greaterreadingtrails.com.
- **Slow down and connect with nature.** Sit outside quietly and just appreciate the natural beauty around you! Notice the scents, sights and sounds as you sit quietly and focus on the moment. Try sketching a leaf or flower. Visit www.berks-conservancy.org to download a free how-to-guide on "Drawing Naturally."
- **Go to your neighborhood park or playground.** The next time the weather is good, trade your usual gym workout for an outdoor one!
- **Commit to the outdoors, rain or shine.** When you're layered properly, you can enjoy the outdoors in any season, cold, wet or hot.
- **Fish your local streams and lakes.**

Do you know what Letterboxing is?

LETTERBOXING is the new low-tech geocaching. It combines navigational skills and rubber stamp artistry in a charming "treasure hunt" style outdoor quest. Visit www.letterboxing.org to learn more. There are nearly 90 sites in Berks County alone!



Local Recreation Resources

Angelica Creek Park & Trail
www.greaterreadingtrails.com

Appalachian Trail
www.appalachiantrail.org

Berks County Parks
www.co.berks.pa.us/parks

Blue Marsh Lake
<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/>

Earl Poole Sanctuary
www.greaterreadingtrails.com

Gravity Trail
www.greaterreadingtrails.com

French Creek State Park
www.dcnr.state.pa.us

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary
www.hawkmountain.org

Historic Sites
Daniel Boone Homestead
www.danielboonehomestead.org
Conrad Weiser Homestead
www.conradweiserhomestead.org

Horseshoe Trail
www.hstrail.org

Monocacy Hill
www.monocacyhill.org

Neversink Mountain
www.greaterreadingtrails.com

Nolde Forest
www.dcnr.state.pa.us

PA Game Commission
www.pgc.state.pa.us

Schuylkill River Trail
www.schuylkillrivertrail.com

Outdoor Groups

There are many walking, hiking and biking groups in Berks County that meet weekly or even more often. Below are just a few. Visit www.greaterreadingtrails.com/groups for listings and websites. Also check the Reading Eagle weekend section under List of Things to Do for Berks County activities!

Berks Area Mountain Biking Association
Berks Community Hiking Club
Berks County Bicycle Club
Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club
Delaware Valley Orienteering Organization
Keystone Canoe Club
Pagoda Pacers



Quality of Water

Local Drinking Water Information

Each year, public water suppliers send out a short report (consumer confidence report or drinking water quality report) that provides information about where your water comes from and what's in it. Take some time to read it and call your provider if you have any questions.

Is your public water supply protected?

The drinking water we receive from our local drinking water utilities comes from ground water, streams, rivers, or lakes in a watershed. Protecting this source water is an important part of providing safe drinking water to the public. Check to see if your water provider has a source water protection plan in case of an emergency. If not, encourage them to do so.

What if you have well water?

If your drinking water comes from a private well, you are responsible for your water's safety. EPA rules do not apply to private wells (although some state rules do), but EPA recommends that well owners have their water tested annually. Private wells should be checked every year for mechanical problems, cleanliness, and the presence of pollutants. Some of the pollutants commonly found in wells around Berks County are coliform, E. coli, nitrates, volatile organic compounds, arsenic, lead and pesticides.

Pick up a test kit at the Berks County Cooperative Extension.
Call 610-378-1327 or visit www.aasl.psu.edu/water_drinking_main.html.



Help protect our water source

- **Never dump anything** into storm drain inlets. Everything that enters the storm drain inlets ends up in the water. Don't dump oil, trash, leaves, pet waste or any other material into or near the inlets. Dispose of any waste product properly. Visit the Berks County Solid Waste Authority's website for information on where to dispose of hazardous materials, tires, electronics and more - www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/SWA.
- **Pick up pet waste.** Stormwater will carry pet waste left on the ground into the storm drains, contributing to harmful bacteria, parasites and viruses in our water.
- **Practice environmentally friendly lawn and garden care.** Use only organic fertilizers and use them sparingly. Avoid pesticides. These chemicals will be swept into local waterways by stormwater runoff and harm aquatic life.
- **To reduce runoff, direct downspouts to porous, not paved, surfaces.** Or use a rain barrel to collect rainwater for later use on your lawn or garden.
- **Practice environmentally friendly automotive care.** Check your vehicles for leaks and fix immediately.
- **Don't dump anything into streams.** Even garden debris like leaves, branches and grass clippings are hazardous to our waterways because excess amounts hurt aquatic life.
- **Don't mow to the edge of streambanks.** Allow native vegetation to grow freely in at least a 15-foot strip along the bank to reduce erosion and to help filter out pollutants. This is called a riparian buffer - protect it!
- **Conserve water. Use it wisely!**



Lake Ontelaunee

What do you do with your unused pharmaceuticals?

Take your unused pharmaceuticals to a collection program. Don't flush them down the toilet or pour them down the drain. They will enter the water supply. See local collection times at www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/SWA. Over 2,300 pounds of medication was collected in Berks County in just one year!



Connect with Nature

To Your Health

What many people have known for a while — that experiencing nature and the outdoors benefits our mental and physical health — is increasingly verified by research, according to research conducted for the U.S. Congress and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Research findings include:

- Access to nature and green environments yields better cognitive functioning, more self-discipline and impulse control, and greater mental health overall.
- Less access to nature is linked to exacerbated attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, higher rates of anxiety disorders, and higher rates of clinical depression.

For the Children in Your Life...

The Berks Conservancy works to ensure that the natural wonders in Berks County are preserved so that our children can appreciate and enjoy the outdoors when they get older.

It's easy to introduce children to the natural world. Take them outside to a local park or your own backyard and introduce them to the wonders of the "unplugged" world. Bestselling author Richard Louv offers a field guide full of tips for getting kids outside in his book, "Last Child in the Woods." Next are some of the easiest ways to get outside RIGHT NOW, with your family.

Eco-Adventure Days!

The Berks Conservancy hosts events year-round that provide opportunities for you to connect with nature. Keep up to date with outdoor events in our community. Sign up for Conservancy's e-news and check out the website at www.berks-conservancy.org for event listings!

During the summer, have your children try Eco-Adventure Camp, South Mountain YMCA, or the many other quality outdoor programs in your community.

Right at Home!

Top Ways to Get Outside

- **Revive old traditions.** Collect lightning bugs, leaves and stones and explore your own backyard. While you are out there, take your camera and photograph nature!
- **Engage grandparents.** Who has better memories of playing outside?
- **Adopt the "sunny day rule."** When the sun's out, unplug. (Works for rainy days, too.)
- **Be a cloudspotter.** Go "clouding" – no equipment required.
- **Go birding.** Urban or suburban, rural or wilderness. Who are your feathered neighbors?
- **Got dirt?** Let little kids dig with plastic shovels and pails.
- **Adopt a tree.** Take pictures of your favorite tree in different seasons and around different family events. How does it change?
- **Go harvesting.** Take kids to pick apples, blueberries or corn.
- **Camp in the backyard.**
- **Keep a "wonder bowl."** Kids fill their pockets with acorns, rocks and leaves. Empty those pockets into a bowl, so kids can linger over their treasures.
- **Create a nature club** in your community and tell the Berks Conservancy about it! Email the Berks Conservancy at info@berks-conservancy.org.
- **Try Geocaching!** Berks County is home to over 10,000 sites, and this inexpensive hobby is easy to try with your smartphone. Learn more at geocaching.com
- **Go for a nature walk or take a hike!**
- **Plant a tree!**



Things To Do!!

Take more pictures.

Whether you use your smartphone or a polaroid camera, get outside and take some photos! You can even show them off in local photo contests like the Reading Fair in the summer.

Keep a Journal, sketch outside, or do something to remember how much fun you're having.

Be the first person at the farmers market to score the best fruits and veggies!

Move the dinner table outside.

If you don't have an outside patio, pack up dinner and go to Gring's Mill or your neighborhood park. Don't feel like cooking, visit one of the many restaurants in Berks that have outside dining.

Breathe.

When you've got time - at your desk, driving the car, cooking food - do some deep breathing. Inhale and count up to 5 seconds, hold it for a few seconds, and release slowly. Breathing is one of the best things we can do for our blood and cells.

GO CAMPING!

Even if it's outside in your own backyard. Camping is a great way to connect with nature and there are many places to camp in **BERKS COUNTY** such as French Creek State Park!

Plant a garden. Download a Green Your Space guide at berks-conservancy.org.

UNPLUG! Turn OFF your TV and your computer and your cell phone....

Take a Road Trip in Berks County.

Be a tourist in your own town! There are plenty of places to visit in Berks County - for great ideas, visit www.readingberkspa.com and click on Getaways...Staycations.

Stargaze.

For public viewings, visit www.berksastronomy.org.

Paper or Plastic? **NEITHER!** Make sure you use a canvas tote bag when shopping. You would accumulate about 1,000 fewer bags if you simply used a reusable bag when grocery shopping! Make sure you wash them regularly and use plastic for your meat products to prevent illness.

Start a nature collection.

Explore nature with your kids by creating a collection of items found in the woods such as leaves, rocks, pine cones, acorns, etc. Put the nature collections into shoe boxes (which you can call a "Nature Treasure Box"), or glass jars. Your kids can start their own "natural history" museum, which they can present to other classmates, friends and family members.

Squeaky clean...

Try one new eco-friendly cleaning product out each month. You would be surprised how great they work without all of the chemicals. You can find them at most Berks grocery stores.

REDUCE. REUSE. RECYCLE. Enough said.

Clear the Air

A big part of "living green" is breathing clean, healthy indoor air. Test your home for radon, lead and carbon monoxide.

GROW SOMETHING GREEN!

GET CAUGHT IN THE RAIN AND LIKE IT, MAYBE EVEN DANCE IN IT.

Let the fresh air inside!

Open the windows in your home when the weather is nice. When it's hot, try running the ceiling fan.

Start a compost pile.

Not only do you reduce your amount of trash, but you also can create a great mulch if you garden!

Learn something new!

Take a class in something that involves the outdoors such as fly fishing, photography, or gardening. The Berks Conservancy offers Eco-Adventure Days during the year for those that want to learn something and be outdoors at the same time. Visit berks-conservancy.org.

WATCH A SUNRISE AND A SUNSET.

Great location for either could be the Pagoda in Reading, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, or even your own backyard.

Got a well?

Get it tested.

You can pick up a test kit at the Berks County Cooperative Extension. Call 610-378-1327 or visit www.aasl.psu.edu/water_drinking_main.html. If you don't have a well, learn where your water comes from and help keep it clean.

Walk. Run. Bike. Get on the Trail.

Learn more about great trails and opportunities in Berks, visit www.greaterreadingtrails.com! Get involved and run a 5K. There is one almost every weekend in Berks County!

Explore. Enjoy. Right at Home.



with the Berks Conservancy.



FREE Calendar of Events

Visit www.berks-conservancy.org and sign up for our enews or join us on Facebook.

The Berks Conservancy is a non-profit, charitable organization whose mission is to be the leading agent for the conservation of the environment in Berks County. The Berks Conservancy connects people to nature through trail creation, water & land protection, community gardens, municipal relationships, and educational activities such as nature walks and summer camp.

Healthy Living in Berks - State of the Environment

The State of the Environment Program is an ongoing project of the Berks Conservancy intended to raise awareness and appreciation of our exceptional natural resources in Berks, and to stimulate action and discussion to protect these resources. We invite you to learn something new, consider changing some of your behaviors as a result, and become engaged in our conservation work – the health of our community depends on it.

Endorsed by:



Rx

Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.

Have a Staycation in Berks.

Plant a native tree.



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