

ORGANIC LIVING

By

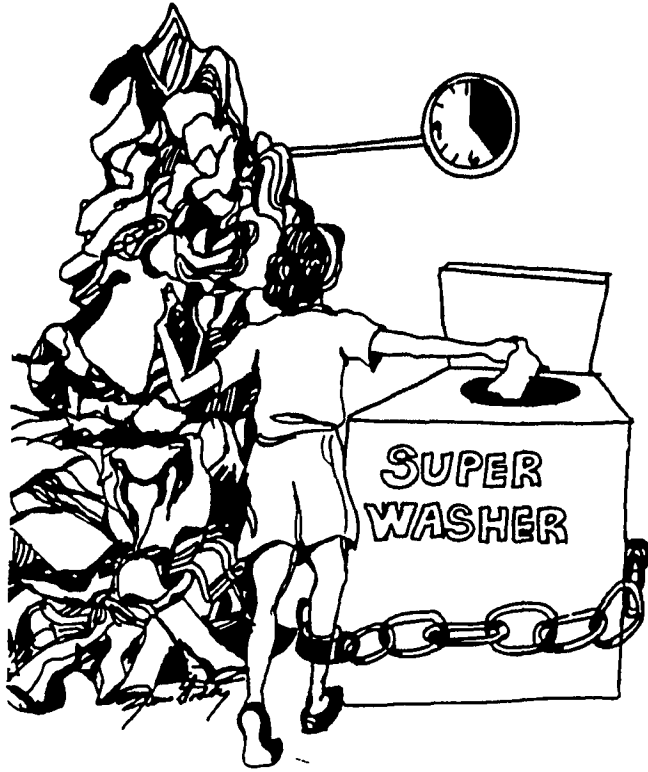
Robert Rodale

HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY WASTES MORE TIME (AND MONEY) THAN IT SAVES

Americans love technology, especially in their homes. They buy electric can openers to save muscle power, electric stoves with two or even three ovens, electric knives with enough power to carve up a side of beef, and a whole cross section of implements invented by latter-day Leonardos whose ultimate goal is to separate you from your hard-earned money.

Why bother with those things? Probably the most common reply is that the convenience of those labor-saving devices allows the homemaker more leisure time by freeing him or her from the drudgery associated with housework.

Unfortunately, we've all been sold a bill of goods. A recent study completed by a sociologist Joann Vanek of New York's Queens College shows that, despite the wide range of modern conveniences, modern women spend



more time doing housework than their mothers and grandmothers did.

The survey, which included an analysis of 20 studies done over the past 50 years, pointed out two household tasks in particular that take significantly longer to complete today than they did in the "good old days."

One is laundry. Perhaps you have childhood memories of Saturday mornings in your home. Your mother worked long and hard — for about four hours — over tubs of hot, soapy water while doing the family's laundry.

But surprisingly enough, it now takes about six hours a week to do the family's wash. Perhaps, as Prof. Vanek said, "people have more clothes now than they did in the past and they wash them more."

Another job that now takes longer to do is shopping. Back in the 1930s, shopping for the family took about two hours a week. Today, Prof. Vanek estimates, the typical housewife spends approximately one full day every week simply travelling to and from stores.

Prof. Vanek's study is important for two reasons. One, it debunks the myth of the labor-saving device. Secondly, the study indicates directions we should take to adjust our lifestyles and to win back some of our freedom from machines.

I'm sure that if you planned your shopping trips more carefully, you could eliminate more than half of them. Make a list, buy what you need and avoid return trips. Car pools are still good ideas, even if many don't want to participate in them. The time you save can be put to fruitful use in a garden or at a money-making hobby.

Examine your laundry habits. Sort the clothes into separate hamper as they become soiled, not on wash day.

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Wash with full loads whenever possible. These steps will significantly reduce the amount of time you spend at this necessary, but boring job.

Generally, there are some jobs that you might be doing now that you could eliminate completely. Perhaps it hadn't occurred to you that you don't have to iron socks, towels or sheets. It's a waste of effort and time.

Think about every job before you start it. How much space do you need? Where should materials be placed? What's the bare minimum of work needed to finish? In what order should steps be taken?

Get everything together you need for the job before you begin. There's nothing more discouraging than having a pair of wet hands while wallpapering, only to discover that you didn't bring along a towel.

In most cases, you'll find that by thinking before you act, you'll save time. You might even save money. By eliminating part of your ironing, for example, your electricity bill will be that much lower. By not washing clothes so often, you'll be doing the same thing.

Fortunately, you can't eliminate all your work. Dr. Lenore R. Zohman, a New York heart specialist, said recently that people should program their housework to get valuable exercise at the same time. Scrubbing floors on hands and knees (rather than standing and using a mop) provides good exercise.

Dr. Zohman said it's possible to program housework so one can have a "very clean house, a very nice figure and a very strong heart."

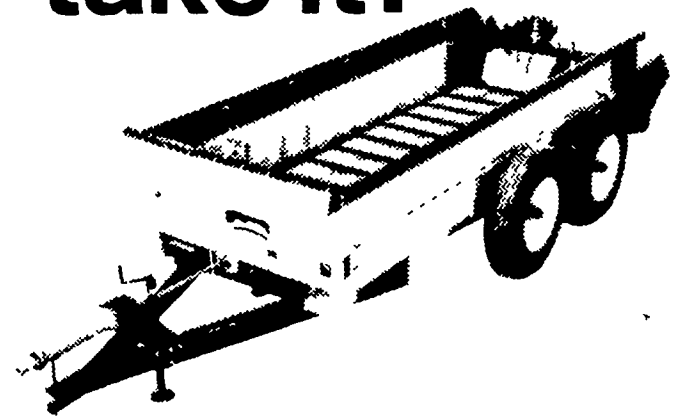
It's time to reassess your household schedule. Eliminate the frills. Stick to the basics. Work with what you have, and try to consume less. Use your head instead of your wallet. You may be surprised to find you gain more free time.

xxx

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)

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