



April 2004 \* Issue # 4

# Natural Living Journal

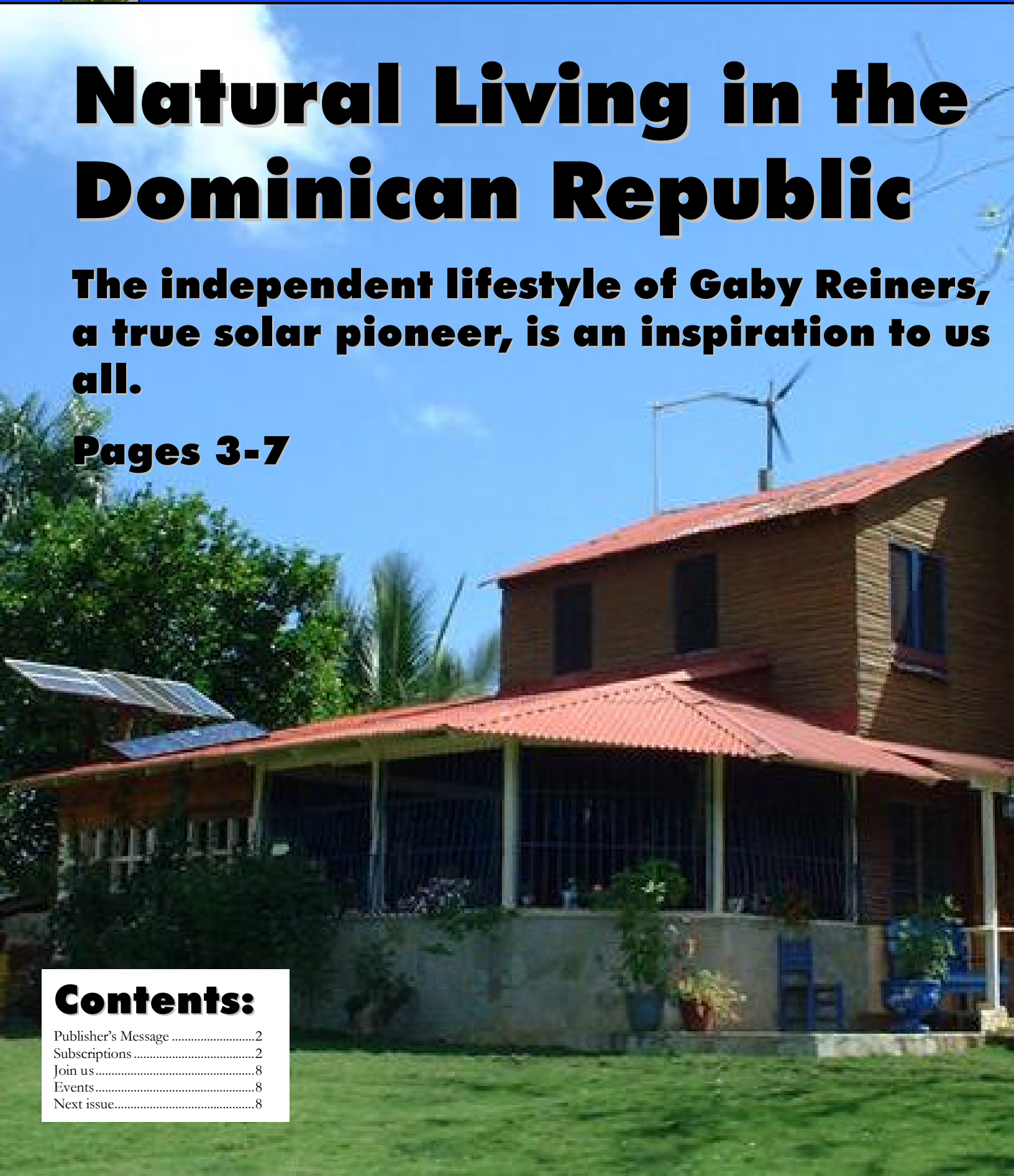
## Natural Living in the Dominican Republic

**The independent lifestyle of Gaby Reiners, a true solar pioneer, is an inspiration to us all.**

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# Publisher's Message

## Going South

This is where it all began. More than twelve years ago my parents bought their life long dream house on the beach in Cabarete, Dominican Republic, wind surfing and kite boarding capital of the world. Each year for that past twelve my family has enjoyed the beautiful accommodations of Wilsons Beach House, run by my parents Ian and Lynn Wilson.



The house has come a long way from the ramshackle, dark little house that my parents discovered rounding the corner of what is now the first and second point where all the kite boarders line the beach. Back then the house was breeze blocked across the entire front, had a small kitchen, and a few little dark rooms upstairs. Through the first few years my parents transformed the beach house into one of the most beautiful and favorite places for windsurfers and tourists to stay in Cabarete. If you are in the area, drop by and say hi. I am sure they would be glad to give you a tour.

About ten years ago, as we sat on the new front porch that provides a view of the entire Cabarete beach, including the often hundreds of windsurfers flying across the bay, we were chatting about my interest in solar panels and how, given the frequent blackouts in the country, and the current need for a noisy diesel generator, wouldn't it be a good idea to use solar panels. Sure enough, Dad, seized the moment when a long time Cabarete resident originally from Ottawa, put up his used solar panel system for sale. Dad bought it and installed the system. It has provided what has turned out to be one of the great features of Wilsons Beach House, a house that always has power for lights and fans, despite the frequent blackouts, keeping guests and proprietors happy.

The photo voltaic solar panel system has been expanded several times over the years. Several years ago we filled up some large bags with some panels, protected them with my underpants, and brought them down as an upgrade to the system. The battery system has also been expanded.

About four years ago Dad had the brilliant idea of improving the hot water situation with a solar hot water heater. That system, purchased in Santo Domingo, where Chris Columbus and sons lived after they discovered the new world, has been installed and working well providing wonderful hot showers after a day of wind surfing or sun bathing.

The house provides a reasonable sustainable income for my parents while doing the right thing for guests and the environment. We are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to share in this little paradise for two weeks each year. Sports are even of the sustainable variety, it occurred to me the other day, in that wind surfing and kite boarding are totally wind powered. There is nothing like the thrill of flying across the water on a piece of fiberglass with a sail or water skiing underneath a large kite. There really is an answer to sustainability in every aspect of life.

See our next issue to get the full scoop. For more information about Wilsons Beach House check out their web site at [www.wilsonsbeachhouse.com](http://www.wilsonsbeachhouse.com).

**John Wilson**, Founder of the **Natural Life Network**

## Natural Living Journal

John D. Wilson – Editor

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We are always looking for new, interesting and inspiring stories, pictures, and poetry, about people who are achieving a natural lifestyle. If you would like to contribute an article or story then please send us a note with your idea. Contact John Wilson by email at [john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com](mailto:john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com)

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# Natural Living in the Dominican Republic

**The dream of an organic farm, in the breezy hills of Dominican Republic, independent from the electricity grid, is the result of a creative, strong, independent visionary. This is the life Gaby Reiner has created and she loves it!**

Gaby bought the finca, which is Spanish for farm in 1995. At the time one of the ideas she had was to cultivate Neem trees. These tree, from India originally, have many valuable byproducts including an organic insecticide. As it turned out these trees did not do as well as had been hoped. Fortunately everything else that Gaby grows and looks after on the farm does very well as we shall see.

Gaby originally came here on vacation more than fourteen years ago. She fell in love with the wonderful tropical weather, friendly people, great food, fantastic beaches, and a more natural lifestyle. For the past ten years now Gaby has established herself as the agent for many of the better rooms and homes to stay in in

Cabarete. Cabarete is a wind surfers' and kite boarders' paradise. Cabarete offers the worlds best conditions including an off shore wind that doesn't start until after noon so you can party all night, sleep until noon and not miss the great boarding action.

Gaby has a house in Procab, a development off the beach strip in Cabarete, that she rents to tourists and residents. She also looks after many other beautiful homes and rooms including those at world famous Wilsons Beach House

[www.wilsonsbeachhouse.com](http://www.wilsonsbeachhouse.com).

The finca where Gaby lives and farms is about ten to twenty minutes out of town, or about forty minutes from Puerto Plata international airport. The finca house is completely off-the-grid as are a number of other solar power systems used for lighting and small pumps throughout the farm. Given the chance, when she bought the property, Gaby declined to invest in the new hydro electricity connections that her neighbors did. Instead, she favored the independence of a completely self-sustained, off-the-grid, setup. She has no regrets given the frequent power outages on the grid in Dominican Republic and problems with people connecting illegally to the hydro wires.

The two primary energy generation systems for the home she has expanded extensively, include a Whisper 1440 wind turbine and a mixture a several brands of photo voltaic solar panels that you can see on the roof. The house systems are all connected to a simple controller that lets her know how much power she has generated on a digital readout in the media room. A set of eight batteries store the energy generated during the day. A small PortaWatt 1750 inverter converts the DC current generated by the photo voltaic solar panels and wind turbine into AC so that her lights, appliances, television, stereo and computer have power whenever she needs it. This system also provides power for about

twenty lights all of which are fitted with compact florescent light bulbs that consume dramatically less energy and last ten times longer than conventional light bulbs. Each light has a beautiful local fixture that gives the home a wonderful touch of character.

During the winter, when it rains the systems generate less power even in this part of the world. Given this circumstance Gaby connects an extra set of eight batteries so that she is able to store more electricity during this time. In the summer she only needs eight. By changing the systems number of batteries she is able to extend their life span by better optimizing the level of charge and discharge. She has found that having good, properly gauged cables and clean connections makes a big difference in their ability to store electrical energy efficiently especially in this humid climate.

The finca has several other renewable energy systems. For the driveway lights a single small panel near the entrance gate (you can see it on the right post in the picture on the previous page) provides enough power for about four lights along her driveway at night. In order to do some small scale pumping and provide lighting in one of the farm's work sheds, another panel is used along with several batteries. Gaby says that she prefers a more distributed system since there is then less chance of all systems failing at once. This is a good analogy for the large scale centralized systems prevalent in North America. Witness the devastating

Blackout we had in 2003, throughout eastern North America that cost the economies of Canada and the US millions, if not billions of dollars. By getting more distributed we can avoid such major disruptions.

The system is also able to supply power for the occasional use of a blender which Gaby really hates to use. She is an amazing cook. However, she does not have any iron or toaster since these are such big energy hogs. She is also very careful about not leaving lights on at any time unless necessary.





## SOLAR HOT WATER SHOWER

- **Solar Hot Water Panel** – The glass paneled box above and behind Leigh in the shower is the solar water heater panel. Water arrives by gravity from the cistern which is located on a hill above the house to the black storage tank.
- **Black Water Storage** – The storage tank is a black metal one that also increases the temperature of the water during the day by absorbing sunlight. Black absorbs heat as compared to white that reflects heat. Both colors provide important opportunities for heating and cooling naturally.
- **Water from River** – The water for the entire farm comes from a natural stream that flows through the center of the property. Water is pumped up to a cistern that existed when the property was purchased.
- **Cistern** – The concrete cistern can store about 2500 liters of water. This water is piped down to the house and shower for domestic usage. Other pipes are laid so that the animals and gardens can be watered. Her dream is to have one water pump powered by independent photo voltaic solar power panels connected to an electric pump.
- **Natural Feeling** – That natural feeling is enhanced by surrounding the shower with native plants and trees.



This can become a problem when she has guests who are not used to this level of strict energy conservation. It is a great learning lesson for those of us so unaware of all the energy we waste.

Gaby has had to learn how to setup and maintain the all of the energy systems over the past several years. She says that for her it is a wonderful rewarding challenge and can be really fun. She especially likes that feeling when she gets something working...wow, look at those lights go on/off automatically at night. She has become so aware of the difference positioning the solar panels makes in energy production that she would like to get an automatic tracking system that would keep the solar photovoltaic panels facing the sun at the optimal angles throughout the day.

The wind turbine system, after several years of flawless operation seized up on Gaby. She had a local electrician come up to take a look. The unit was brought down from its forty foot pole. The electrician found that many of the screws had corroded. The entire unit was taken apart, parts that had corroded were replaced, and everything greased up again. After this maintenance that took a few days, the system was back up and operational again. This

particular unit was very quite despite the heavy winds...testament to the name Wharrisper.

On the finca Gaby grows many wonderful fruits and vegetables. The partial list she could come up with during morning visit included:

- Grapefruit
- Lime
- Avacado
- Tamarind
- Rose Apple
- Coconuts
- Mangoes
- Papaya
- Cherries
- Bananas
- Plaintain
- Bamboo



## Energy Management

- **System Monitor (Center and Top Left)** – The control systems are placed in the living area so that Gaby can monitor the state of the battery charge provided by the wind turbine and solar panels. The monitor registered 13.3 kilowatts stored. The system can store up to about 25 kw/h.
- **Inverter (Right)** – The inverter is housed outside of the house near the parking shed. Eight batteries are connected to store electrical energy.
- **Batteries (Right)** – The eight batteries are used so that they are optimally charged and discharged according to the usage patterns that Gaby has established. More batteries would reduce this effect. Gaby does have an additional set of eight batteries in the summer.
- **Kitchen/Living (Top)** – The house that Gaby has expanded and fixed now includes a gas fridge and stove. The living area shows the television, video and stereo systems powered using conventional AC supplied by the inverter.



- Neem trees
- Cherry tomatoes

With rapid growth of trees near her first vegetable garden Gaby is now moving it to a location that gets more sunlight. An important additive to the garden is compost that she collects from Wilsons Beach House and her own food waste.

Compost here consists of:

- Chicken manure
- Cow manure
- Cut weeds
- Vegetable waste

These supplements are very important as the soil is quite thin and rocky just beneath the surface. In some places the land is so harsh only undesirable weeds grow. Gaby is trying to figure out a way to improve the soil and get grass for the cows growing. Currently the only way she knows of is to use a poison weed killer and then manually plant grass. She hates the thought of having to do this.

Since the finca uses a large amount of water the 2500 cubic litre cistern is very important for both domestic and farm usage. The property has a stream that runs through the middle of it. Gaby fills her cistern with a portable pump.

Being an organic farmer is not always easy. Recently Gaby invested in some bees. As with any new venture this involves learning many new things. First of all, the bees had to be picked up

in the dead of night while the hive was asleep, for obvious safety reasons. With a friend Gaby arrived to pick up the hive from a local keeper who was keeping them in an old palm tree log. The stock was placed gingerly in the back of her jeep for fear of waking the hive that was producing a slight buzz. This ominous buzz got louder as the trip progressed along the bumpy roads. Fortunately the transit was accomplished without incident.

Recently the bees decided they wanted a new home. So, left the hive and took up residence in a nearby tree. The local experts said that all Gaby had to do was make loud noises all day and night until the bees returned to their home. This was tried for some time without effect. For whatever reasons the bees decided that the wind turbine was the next logical place for their home. Unfortunately this was a mortal mistake. The little bees bodies were found strewn all around the turbine pole as the winds picked up and the determined bees made every attempt to stick with their new home.

The finca is expanding. On the day we arrived a new born calf roamed the pasture. Gaby has planted bamboo trees. Sheep are kept as pets. The chickens and geese are producing lots of eggs. Our kids were fortunate enough to get a ride on two of the seven friendly horses that Gaby keeps for riding and as friends. Gaby loves animals and quite clearly they love her. The five dogs she currently has are her constant companions. ✨



**Wind Turbine (Left)** – The Whisper wind turbine, mounted on a hydro pole extended with an old windsurfing mast provides about half the power Gaby needs for the house. The beautiful bougainvillea grows all around the house creating wonderful shaded pathways. The brilliant red, orange and pink flowers create a cool paradise all around the home.

**Composting (Top Middle)** – The composting pile is critical to enriching the thin soil. Gaby is liberal with the variety of organic matter she adds to the pile. The thin soil makes this compost critical to the productivity of the finca.

**Cows (Bottom Middle)** – Gaby loves her cows. The day before we arrived this new calf was born. With the several cows that Gaby has she is able to make some money supplying a local dairy with about four bottles of milk in addition to meeting her own needs. Gaby loves the wonderful peaceful nature of the cows and is looking at getting more.

**Bamboo (Right)** – The bamboo that Gaby planted several years ago has grown rapidly. This tropical relative to grass can be cut back, the bamboo wood used for building things, and it will grow back again. This plants' natural hardness properties are still not matched by any modern manufactured materials for some purposes.

## Events

### Canadian Geographic Kids – Wilson Natural Home featured

*Some time between February and March 2004 the series will feature an episode on the Wilson Natural Home. Hear what the Wilson kids have to say about living solar.*

### April 3, 2004 Halton EcoFest

*Drop by our booth to catch up with us on the latest publications, books and videos. John Wilson will present Natural Living: The Wilson Natural Home, a 25 minute documentary, at 12:30.*

For more information:

Web Site: [www.haltonecofest.ca](http://www.haltonecofest.ca)

### April 17, 2004: Natural Home Tour and Seminar

*Held on location at the Wilson Natural Home, you get a full tour of this amazing, inspiring home, that incorporates straw bale natural insulation, passive solar design, solar & wind power, natural construction materials, no fossil fuel based furnace, and a green roof.*

For more information on attending:

Web Site: [www.NaturalLifeNetwork.com/learning/](http://www.NaturalLifeNetwork.com/learning/)

Phone: 519-942-3266

E-Mail: [john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com](mailto:john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com)

### April 22, 2004 Earth Day

*Look for local festivals and activities in your area. Renew your commitment to the earth.*

For more information:

Web Site: [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net)

### August 28, 2004: SunFest 2004

*Tour a working solar/wind powered home. See the awarding winning Wilson Natural Home. John Wilson will be giving tours. Learn about the amazing green roof, straw bale walls, and passive solar design features. Talk to the experts to find out how you too could be running your meter backwards.*

For more information on attending or exhibiting:

Web Site: [www.NaturalLifeNetwork.com/sunfest2004/](http://www.NaturalLifeNetwork.com/sunfest2004/)

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## Join Us

Become a part of a community of people around the world dedicated to living in harmony with nature. We've created this network so that we can all share our ideas, experiences and knowledge. The changes we envision are revolutionary; however our goals are to make them the norm. The organization is about the practical, inspiring and real application of living gently on the earth so that our children may enjoy a clean, healthy and productive environment.

The simple point is that we all can "do" much more – and that means all of us or it won't work. For example:

- Choose or create a home/community that is powered by the sun;
- Grow and eat organic food;
- If you must travel select the most efficient means, walk, bicycle, tele-commute, travel by train, bus, ultra-efficient car, or fly;
- If and when possible, work in nature – grow your own organic food, restore nature around you, put your investments to work for natural living.

What will amaze you that everything we need to live this way exists. The cost over the longer term is less. The results are a happier more healthy self and family. Start learning how today.

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- Monthly **Natural Living Journal** full electronic edition.
- E-Mail **Question & Answer** (3 per year, no more than 1 per month.)
- **Directory listing (optional) and Natural Directory.**
- Discounts on some products and services offered by **Natural Life Network.**

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Have a question? Ask us and we'll try and include a response in our next issue of the *Natural Living Journal*. Have an interesting story to tell that relates to natural living?

Contact us any time with your questions, concerns or ideas at:

[john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com](mailto:john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com)

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