

# Eco-Friendly Kids' Shoes & Seafood

From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine

**Dear EarthTalk: I've found environmentally friendly shoes for myself but have had trouble finding similar shoes for my kids. Are they out there?**

– Dawn Masterson, Augusta, GA

Kids' shoes are a quickly expanding market, and companies with a green perspective are now jumping into the race with mini versions of everything from flip-flops to slippers to heeled dress shoes. While green kids' shoes from makers like Simple, which offers organic cotton EcoSneaks with car tire soles, might seem expensive at \$40 or more, they are durable enough to get passed around from sibling to sibling. "It is an investment if you're going to do quality," says Craig Throne, general manager of footwear at Patagonia.

Patagonia has been making climbing gear and outdoors wear for over 30 years and is committed to using sustainable materials, including recycled polyester and only organic cotton in their clothes. Using hemp and recycled rubber content, the company has created kids' shoes that are rugged and sturdy enough for hiking or climbing, or for simply running around in the back yard.

Of course, packaging plays a big role and in Patagonia's case—that means 100 percent recycled content boxes with soy-based inks and fun graphics that encourage kids to reuse the boxes. "We're getting kids to participate and be more aware of the outdoor world," says Throne.

Timberland has launched its own line of sustainable kids' shoes, too. "Kids today are learning about the environment at a younger and younger age; in many cases, they're even teaching their par-

ents," says Lisa DeMark of Timberland's kids' collection. "It's important to show kids that even small choices can have a positive impact."

The company strives to use the most environmentally friendly materials when possible—like recycled soda bottles (PET) in linings or meshes, recycled laces, and organic cotton canvas—while always making sure that the shoes meet performance goals: "At the end of the day, the shoe has to stand up to kids and their daily adventures," DeMarkis says. Curious customers can read the "nutritional labels," which include the amount of renewable energy used in production, right on Timberland's 100 percent post consumer recycled shoeboxes.

Parents looking to avoid leather in their kids' shoes, whether for ethical or environmental reasons, have to do a bit of hunting online. While many vegetarian and non-leather clothing sites have yet to add kids' shoes, KidBean.com has, including the popular baby shoes called Isabooties, which are made with soft, synthetic Ultra-suede.

For parents of budding dancers, a vegan alternative ballet slipper can be had from the Cynthia King Dance Studio in Brooklyn, New York. The dance instructor and studio owner approached a local shoemaker when she couldn't find an affordable outlet for vegan slippers, and she now provides them

to the world at large.

For more information, visit the Cynthia King Dance Studio at [www.cynthiakingdance.com](http://www.cynthiakingdance.com); Isabooties at [www.isabooties.com](http://www.isabooties.com); KidBean at [www.kidbean.com](http://www.kidbean.com); Patagonia at [www.patagonia.com](http://www.patagonia.com); Simple at [www.simpleshoes.com](http://www.simpleshoes.com); and Timberland at [www.timberland.com](http://www.timberland.com).



**Dear EarthTalk: How can I find out which seafood to avoid if I am concerned about lessening my impact on the environment and avoiding consuming unhealthy pollutants?**

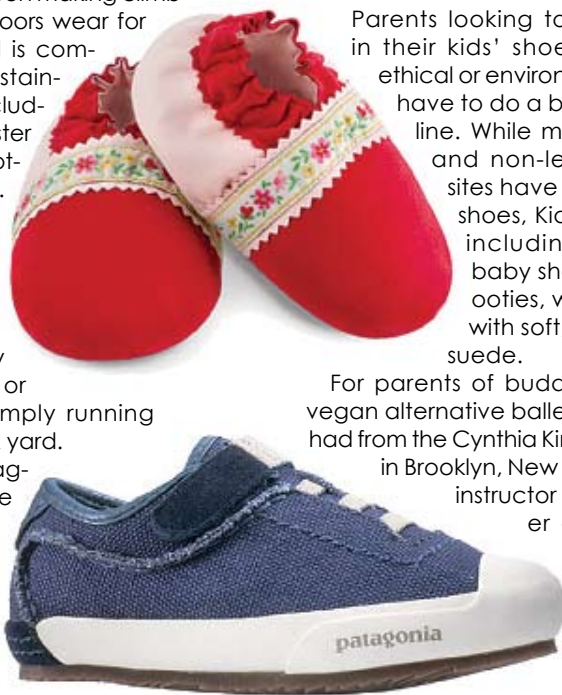
– Pat Kelly, Seattle, WA

Several decades ago, a fish-centric diet was considered to be not only healthy but also environmentally friendly. But today those of us who eat a lot of fish may not be doing ourselves or the environment any favor. The two major concerns are overfishing and pollution.

Demand for low-calorie, protein-rich fish has grown tremendously alongside increases in world population. At the same time, the technologies employed for catching seafood have improved to the point that the commercial fishing industry has essentially stripped the ocean of its once-teeming fish populations. One recent analysis concluded that only 10 percent of the large predatory fish that once roamed the world's oceans are left, due to overzealous sport and commercial fishing. Another study concluded that three-quarters of the world's fisheries are either fully fished or overfished.

Pollution from industrial, agricultural, and other everyday activities like electricity generation and automobile driving has also taken a serious toll on the health of the remaining fish species. Scientists routinely find unsafe levels of mercury, PCBs, dioxins, pesticides, and other harsh toxins in the fat, internal organs, and even muscle tissue of many different kinds of fish. These contaminants are then passed on up the food chain to our dinner plates.

According to Seafood Watch, a project of the Monterey Bay Aquarium that works to educate the public about the seafood



crisis, consumers can make a difference by getting educated so as to make smart choices about what seafood to avoid. Consumers can download and print out free Seafood Watch pocket guides to the "best choices" across six different regions of the U.S.; after all, what's abundant and sustainably harvested in your area may not be the same for someone across the country.

Another convenient way to get the low-down on the fish you may be contemplating buying at the grocer or a restaurant is to text "30644" with the message "FISH," followed by the name of the specific fish in question. In a few seconds, an automated response will come back from the non-profit Blue Ocean Network's FishPhone service with information on the status of the fish in question – and alternatives, should Blue Ocean consider the fish an undesirable choice.

The basic skinny on fish consumption is that if you like it, you should eat it, but responsibly; that means in moderation and armed with the proper knowledge of which types of fish to buy and which to avoid.

For those looking to cut down on or eliminate seafood from their diets but still gain the health benefits of eating fish, plenty of alternatives exist. As most vegetarians know, beans, tofu, and many nuts can be significant alternative sources of protein. And walnuts, flaxseed, and hemp oil/seeds are all rich in the omega-3 fatty acids common in many fish and thought to help ward off heart disease, cancer, macular degeneration (age-related blindness), arthritis, and inflammatory disorders.

For more information, visit Seafood Watch at [www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp](http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp) or FishPhone at [www.fishphone.org](http://www.fishphone.org).

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