

My camera was out of battery and I couldn't charge it today (I have a flip-phone in case you're wondering and I use an actual DSLR for my pics), so I'll instead be describing the place and what I saw in rich detail.

First, on my walk I saw the campus staff, bustling around like bees themselves. Clad in blue tops and dirt-stained pants, the groundskeepers stood out from the rest of the staff. In the hands of some, a trowel and a bucket brimming with little plants that society has considered "detrimental" to our neatly groomed gardens. A few others had large bottles strapped to their back and wands in hand, spraying the garden beds and grass as if they were trying to replace the morning dew.

By weeding out small plants and spraying pesticides on our soil, we harm our long-term ability to grow in the dirt around us and we incentivize the very weeds and invasive species to become stronger. This can give rise to monosystems, or ecosystems with only one plant. The simplest solution? Stop planting gardens that require pesticides and weeding. Plant native gardens. They look good year-round and they require little or no maintenance.

Second, my walk brought me past the trash bins near the cafeteria. The students inside were seated comfortably, eating their lunch with friends. But just outside were the trash cans bursting at the seams with discarded candy, ice cream, chips, and other convenience items quickly forgotten in the class-to-class whirlwind. As I approached the trashcan, a young squirrel and several bees scattered, taking with them food never meant to be eaten by animals, never designed for ingestion in the first place.

Despite the waste being in the trash can, that doesn't prevent insects and pollinators from eating the sickly-sweet sugars of our discarded candy. The squirrel had its paws on some chips, and I can only hope that it was just young and lazy, not out of options for food. College campuses often lack natural flowers for pollinators and nut and seed sources for small mammals. As a result, it's very common to see squirrels digging in the trash. The best solutions here is for colleges to preserve the natural habitat as much as they can. Community colleges like mine are most commonly grass and pavement and adding in nut-producing trees and pollinator friendly plants helps a lot.

Finally, on my walk, I saw our parking lot and transit center. Dozens of monochrome vehicles were lined up, idling idly. A large red truck stood out, tailpipe coughing up smoke like melted licorice. Our transit center was full of candy-colored busses, all sleeping under the midday sun. Then, they each let out a growl as their operator woke them up and they grumbled as they were loaded up, before all of them hummed away.

In America, we sit in our cars and idle without a second thought. Some people even tune their engines to release extra pollutants because it "looks cool". Even riding public transit can produce a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> because of the amount of idling our busses do. My transit system has only 3 fully electric busses, but the rest are hybrid or full diesel that release carbon and other toxic emissions. These effects harm our health by having large, concentrated spots of pollutants at park and rides. The best thing we can do as consumers is to begin purchasing fuel efficient or electric cars, and to stop idling them. We can also help our transit network by asking them to implement more fully electric busses.



**Sienna Lippert** is with Kyleah McKnight and 5 others.



Just now ·

What would it take for you to reduce your impact on our atmosphere and our animals? Well, next time you're looking to buy a car, opt electric. If you can't do that, take public transit to work and research your public transit's progress toward electric vehicles on your way. These two small steps can improve your lung health and release fewer toxins into our local ecosystems. Do you want to give it a shot?

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