



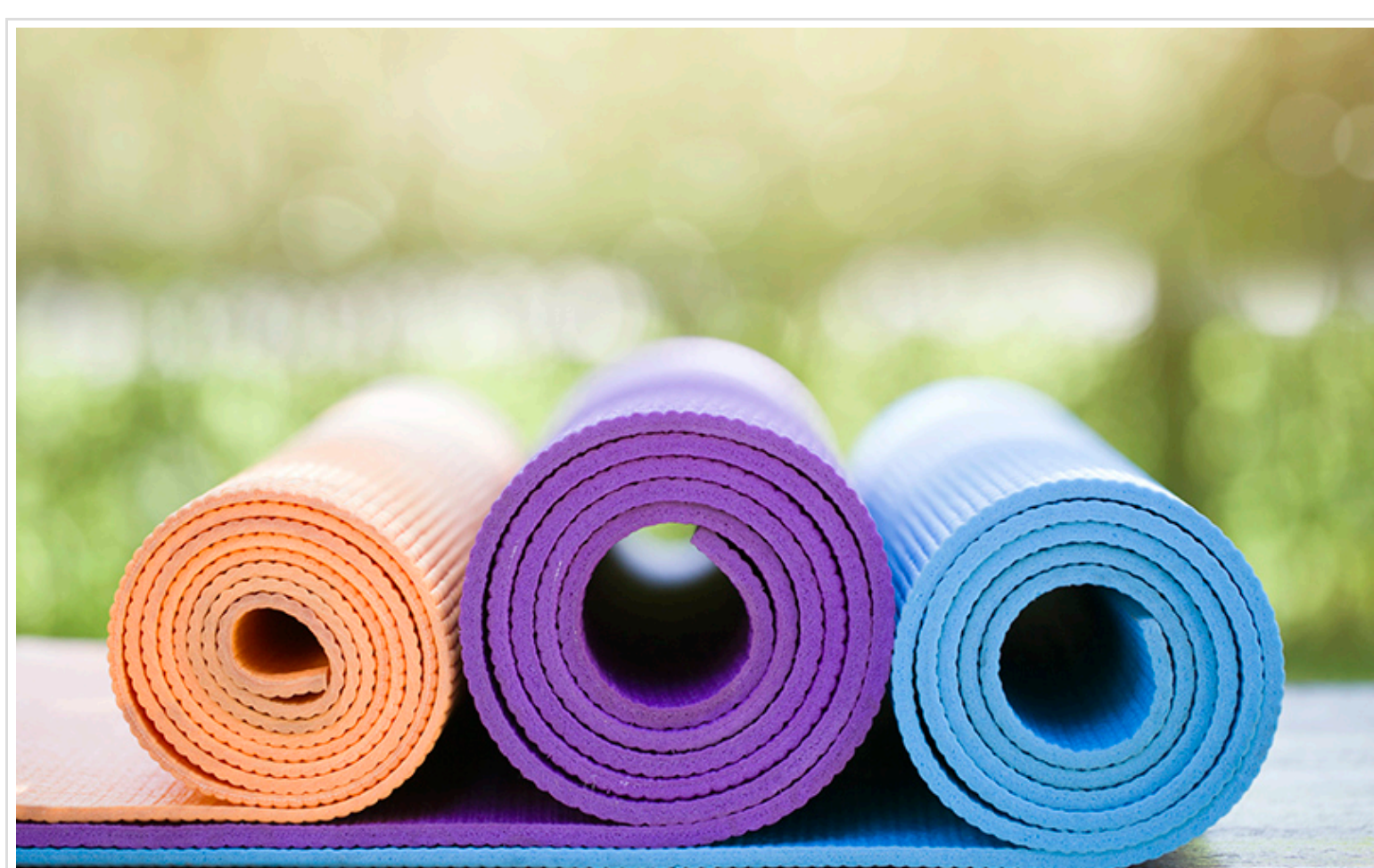
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How Yoga Mats Made from Algae Could Help Save the Planet

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by guest blogger Gillian Francella, multimedia journalist and newly converted vegan/vegetarian

It seems like a scenario that would play out on *Spongebob Squarepants*: Spongebob needs a pair of running shoes, so he goes to the store and grabs a new pair of algae kicks complete with green soles and the latest lightweight, no-tear technology.

But this seemingly silly situation is a very real way of the future for gym gear—from your sneakers to your yoga mat. And although the green soles are a joke (there is a [variety of colors](#) to chose from), algae may just be the planet-lifesaving material of the future. In fact, it's one of the simplest substitutes we could utilize to better sustain the environment.

Not only would using algae to make workout gear cut back on how much plastic we use and then need to recycle, but it would also consume a plant that's currently overpopulating bodies of water and damaging our planet's aquatic life.

"As global temperatures continue to rise, and as [the] human population expands, algae blooms are becoming more invasive," says Rob Falken, managing director of [BLOOM Foam](#), a new business that plans to transform algae into the flexible foam found in yoga mats, tennis shoes, luggage and even bath toys.

Algae are already being used as earth-friendly sources of dye for clothing, a climate-safe way to [power buildings](#), agents to suck up highway pollution, and [alternative food for farm animals](#). So what makes BLOOM (and its joint venture with Algix, an algae-biomass harvesting company) so unique?

Location, location, location.

BLOOM and Algix are harvesting algae found in wastewater, which will hugely help water authorities mitigate increasing algae blooms that harm fish and surrounding wildlife.

"BLOOM Foam literally turns a negative into a positive," says Falken. "The collection of the algae biomass remediates the water from which it is removed, aids in the well-being of aquatic life, and sequesters CO2 on a large scale..."

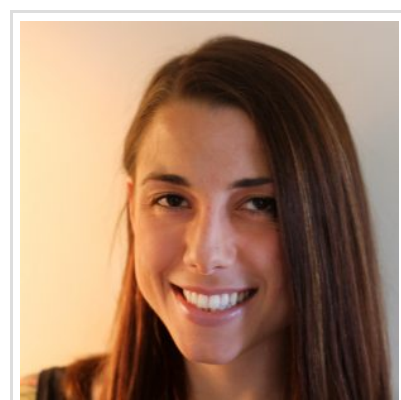
What's more, algae-based foam products have natural antimicrobial properties, which is great news for your sweaty-smelling gym shoes. Since algae is also naturally odor fighting, using it to make gym gear would significantly limit the use of nanosilver and similar antimicrobial products that have been linked to [health concerns](#) in people and animals alike.

It seems like a no-brainer that big companies would be on board for algae-based products, right? Well, not quite...

Producing biofuels and bioproducts from algae isn't a new concept. From 1978 to 1996 the Department of Energy's (DOE's) [Aquatic Species Program](#) led research to investigate the plant's potential to power the world compared to fossil fuels'. But after nearly 20 years of research, the DOE shut the program down, concluding that algae was too expensive to source in comparison to crude oil and plastic.

While research has been revived and more private programs and companies are sprouting up in support of using algae as a biofuel and plastic substitute, it's unclear whether algae-products will ever completely be able to overthrow oil or plastic.

Price tradeoffs might not add up now, but in another decade or so, will the mounting algae blooms in combination with plastic waste become more costly to resolve than if we invest in utilizing them now? Time will tell. Until then, keep your eyes peeled for BLOOM's pond scum-produced gear coming soon.



Gillian Francella is a writer, editor, and newly converted vegan/vegetarian living in Philadelphia. Through trial and error, she works through various cookbooks to discover delicious dishes that test the limits of her tiny kitchen. She strives to make cruelty-free foods and tweak classic recipes from her childhood to be healthy, vegan treats, all while ballin' out on a 20-something's budget. Chances are, if she can make it, so can you!

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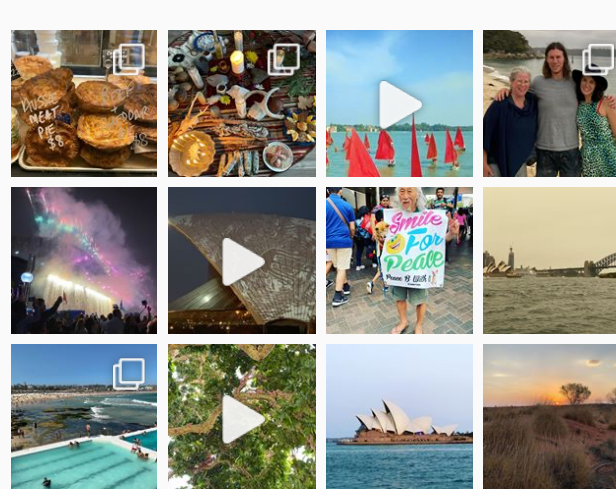


By day I'm chairman and CEO of one of the largest independent publishers left in America. By night I'm simply M.O.M. (which stands for Mean Old Mom). I'm a writer, cook, organic enthusiast, romance novel lover, and major music fan who does yoga.

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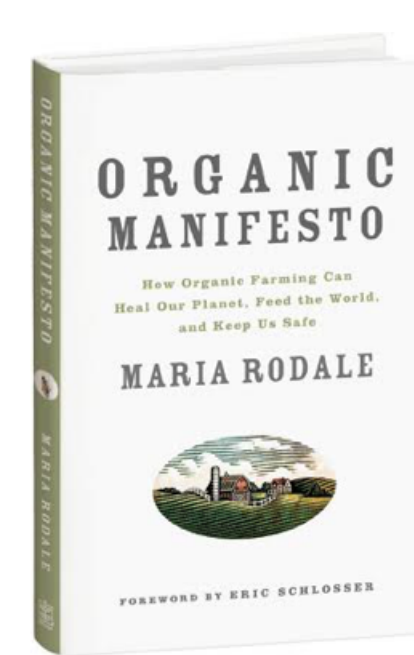
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