

It is Easy to Be Green

5 low-cost things you can do to go Greener at home

When that certain lovable Muppet Kermit the Frog sang “It isn’t Easy Being Green” so long ago, chances are pretty good that he wasn’t referring to how easy it is to help the environment.

Helping the world go greener can begin with you. Anything from purchasing the right appliances to changing out a light bulb can make a huge difference to both the world around you and even your pocketbook in the long run.

1) Reaching for the “stars”

What is already in place in your home that could be a drain on energy? Is it that old refrigerator in the garage? Did you know that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that one older appliance (such as your trusty old fridge) can cost you as much as \$150 more per year than an energy-efficient model ?

Here’s a sobering thought — if just 10 homeowners replaced their older appliances with EnergyStar®-qualified ones, it would be equivalent to planting 1.7 million new acres of trees. Plan a budget to slowly replace all your “energy hog” appliances with new energy saving models and you’ll thank yourself later on.

2. How hot is hot and how cold is cold?

Turning down the thermostat in cold weather and inching it up during the warm months can save as much as 3-5 percent for each degree adjustment. In fact, as much as 60 percent of your energy bill may be heating and cooling related. Programmable thermostats can make the most prudent adjustments automatically during any 24-hour period but are grossly underused, according to Ron McClure, of the Pleasant Hill, Calif.-based California Home Energy & Comfort Solutions, a company that sends inspectors to perform energy “audits” for homeowners or buyers.

“About six out of ten households already have programmable thermostats but don’t use the automatic (programmable) function on them,” says McClure, “The first thing they do on a cold morning is head to the thermostat to warm up the place and

by the time they are comfortable they head out the door without another thought..” he relates. Even if you remember to shut your heat off before you leave the house, however, McClure goes on to say that it costs more to reheat your home than to maintain the temperature with a properly programmed thermostat.

Other low-cost energy saving tasks to look into:

- Get some new clothes for your hot water heater by placing an insulating jacket around it (usually costs under \$20) and outfit your pipes for even less.
- HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) changes can contribute even more – something as simple as cleaning your furnace’s air filter monthly during heavy usage times can make a big difference.
- Shade your east and west facing windows to prevent the most brutal heat intrusion during summer months. And if your house doesn’t already possess dual-pane energy-efficient windows, why not start replacing those windows slowly, but start with those that receive the most intense sun exposure first?
- Saving heat generating activities such as dishwashers and cooking until the evening hours can help you ease up on cooling costs as well as your local energy grid.
- Using ceiling fans to move air on low speeds (even if TV reality remodeling shows think they’re not fashionable) can permit you to push the thermostat in either direction, providing more circulation of either cool or warm air.

3. Water, water everywhere but not a drop to waste

You may love the forceful flow of water at your faucets, toilets and showerheads, but did you know that installing aerators on them could cut your annual water consumption by more than half?

And then there is the commode... Toilets installed 15 years ago use more than twice the amount of water than the newer low-flow models. Even if you have older toilets, however, you can adjust your float valves to permit a lower water flow into the tank.

4. Going into the light

Replacing your incandescent light bulbs with the EnergyStar®-rated compact fluorescent variety all over the house can save you \$100 per year, according to the

Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH), a voluntary partnership between leaders of the homebuilding, product manufacturing, insurance, and financial industries. They calculate that if every family in the U.S. did this, greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by one trillion pounds.

True — buying new bulbs does take an initial investment, but even a recent ad by Starbucks in The New York Times that said if every person who received the newspaper switched one light bulb to a compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulb, it would be the equivalent of taking 89,000 cars off the road.

5. Filling in the gaps

Have you bothered to look around your attic space to see if all areas contain insulation? According to PATH, even a small area with limited or no insulation — or even insulation that has been damaged or compressed — can significantly decrease overall effectiveness. The U.S. Department of Energy says that adding insulation to the attic is relatively easy and very cost effective. To find out if you have enough attic insulation, measure the thickness of the insulation. If it is less than R-22 (7 inches of fiber glass or rock wool or 6 inches of cellulose), you could probably benefit by adding more. Most U.S. homes should have between R-22 and R-49 insulation in the attic.

By Dena Kouremetis
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