

Green living

As energy prices surge and evidence mounts that our abundant lifestyle harms the planet's health, the green living movement is gaining strength and it's reshaping the way we build, design and live. The old mantra of faster, better, cheaper is being replaced by recycle reuse and re-purpose.

Going green not only contributes to reducing pollution and global warming, but it makes economic sense, too, by saving you dollars and perhaps improving your health.

Though you can't single-handedly solve overwhelming challenges like the energy crisis, you *can* take incremental steps that aren't costly or difficult to improve your own environment and slash the natural resources you consume. And small changes by many people can have an enormous impact.

Inside your home

In your house, going green is not only about saving energy and dollars. Some strategies can positively affect your health too.

Clean green

Cleaning products are expensive and typically loaded with dangerous chemicals. A few eco-friendly homemade brews make inexpensive alternatives.

-Start with a couple gallons of vinegar and a box of baking soda. Vinegar is a natural disinfectant and baking soda is a gentle abrasive. Mixed together, the two are an effective drain cleaner.

-A spritz of vinegar and water leave stainless steel and windows gleaming.

-A quick Internet search with terms like eco-cleaning and green cleaning will yield thousands of recipes.

Dirty air

That freshly cleaned house aroma may be masking a foul mix of toxins, like dust mites, pollen, formaldehyde, pet dander and mold that you breathe in everyday. Learning about indoor air quality and taking steps to improve your household environment can positively affect your short-and long-term health.

-Keep an eye on the chemicals in all cleaning products, pesticides, paint, solvents, and so forth that you bring into your house.

-Opt for chemical free whenever possible.

-Choose products like low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints, adhesives and caulks for home improvement and repair projects.

-During renovations, be wary about all new products and materials. Carpets, upholstery and particle board and adhesives in cabinets can all off-gas formaldehyde and cause headaches and eye and nose irritation and other health concerns.

-Properly ventilate your home. Qualified air quality specialists can create proper ventilation, reduce moisture and deliver the correct amount of humidity. The California Environmental Protection Agency offers comprehensive information on indoor air quality at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/indoor.htm>.

Cheap lighting

Here's the bottom line on compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). The initial cost is higher than incandescent bulbs, but each CFL, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), keeps half a ton of carbon dioxide out of the air over its lifetime, they last ten times as long as incandescent bulbs and can cut your electricity bill by \$30 over its lifetime. Of course, turning off unnecessary lights saves the most money and energy.

Water conservation

That dripping faucet isn't only an annoyance. It's also a waste of water. Leaky faucets can waste water to the tune of 20 gallons each day. The same goes for a leaky toilet, which can drain away up to 200 gallons daily. Fix leaks and save water and money instantly.

- Shorten showers and turn off the water when soaping up are strategies to further reduce consumption.
- Bathe with a bucket and use the run-off to water outdoor plants.
- Save two gallons a minute by turning off water while brushing your teeth.
- Fill the bathtub only halfway and save 15 to 25 gallons of water per wash.
- Save 15 to 20 gallons of water per load by washing full loads of laundry.

Beyond the front door

Green living doesn't stop at your front door. There are outdoor strategies that can improve the environment, save energy and cut water consumption.

On-demand lighting

Though there are aesthetic advantages to leaving lights on all night, the approach is an energy hog.

- Put lights on timers so driveway, accent and seasonal lights shut off at a given time.
- Install CFL bulbs.
- Consider installing motion detectors that kick on lights when someone in a car or on foot approaches your driveway or entry.

Turf options

Manicured lawns guzzle resources, mainly water, unnecessarily. Moreover, that lush look frequently is a result of heavy chemicals that introduce unhealthy toxins into your environment and into water runoff.

- Learn about sustainable principles or consult a sustainable landscape architect to explore other options.
- Alternatives to turf include native, drought-tolerant plants that require less maintenance than exotics.
- Properly selected plants, trees and flowers can reduce disease and insect infestation
- Grow your own vegetables and herbs to slash food bills.

Rich soil

Use a composting bin to reduce your garbage output and transform organic waste into something that enriches your soil.

-Compost yard trimmings, food scraps, including everything from egg shells and potato peelings to tea bags and dryer lint.

Conserve water

The 20gallonchallenge.com offers an array of strategies to save water outside and inside. Some suggestions:

-Use rain barrels to capture rain water, and use the runoff to wash cars and decks and to irrigate the garden.

-Adjust sprinklers to avoid over spraying to save 15 to 25 gallons of water per day.

-Water before 6 a.m. and after 8 p.m. It reduces evaporation and interference from wind to the tune of 20 to 25 gallons per day.

-Replace a portion of the lawn with native plants to save 33 to 60 gallons per day per 1,000 square feet, depending on the climate.

-Use a broom, rather than hosing down a driveway to save between 8 and 18 gallons per minute.

Clean the decks

Arsenic was widely used to preserve pressure-treated wood found in things like decks, picnic tables, fences and playground equipment. If you have such wood in your yard, test the product for arsenic and take steps to replace it or make it safer. For information on what to do, see http://healthybuilding.net/arsenic/what_to_do.html

Daily Habits

Incremental changes can have an enormous impact on cutting waste and on saving you money. Some of the strategies are so simple -- shutting off lights, for example -- and implementing them is really just a matter of dispensing with old habits and developing new ones.

Bulk buys

Look at everything you bring into your life and examine, for instance, the packaging and usefulness of each item and ways you can reduce waste. After all, better than recycling is not producing waste at all. Some examples include:

-Rather than buying dried fruit and snacks in individual serving packs, can you buy in bulk and split up the food into your own recyclable containers? The same goes for dry cereal and oatmeal and juice. The strategy saves you money and reduces the waste.

-Use rechargeable batteries instead of buying bulk packages of disposables.

-BYOC. Bring your own cup, rather than accepting a disposable cup every day at your favorite java spot.

-Use washable plates and utensils at picnics.

-Replace paper towels with washable towels and rags.

Based on your use patterns, you can easily calculate how much money you'll save by buying in bulk rather than paying for the cost of individually packaged goods.

Drive defensively

Maybe it's impossible to abandon your car entirely, but can you reduce your car trips by walking, cycling or carpooling?

-Consider streamlining your driving. For instance, do all your car-based errands in one trip rather than in five separate trips. The benefit to you is less fuel consumption that translates into more dollars you can invest or spend elsewhere.

-Eliminate the car and its expenses by joining a car-share service like ZipCar (www.zipcar.com) so you only drive when you absolutely have to.

-Adapt your schedule to carpool or take public transportation just once per week.

Phantom electricity

Look around the house and count the number of items quietly sucking power.

-Clocks on the microwave, TV, stove, coffee pot, and so forth are huge offenders.

-Computers, DVD players and chargers for things like electric toothbrushes and portable gadgets all can be put on power strip and turned off when not in use.

BYOB

That is, bring your own bag. San Francisco has already banned the practice of handing out plastic bags for supermarket purchases, and more communities are likely to follow its lead. Swap out paper for sturdy canvas totes and you can save a few trees. Also, some stores reward you for BYOB-ing by giving you a credit of \$.03 or \$.05 for each one you bring.

Mailbox purge

Mailboxes serve as major polluters, delivering a steady stream of paper trash.

-Register with services that eliminate unwanted catalogs, junk mail and credit card offers and save some trees. Some options include, <http://www.catalogchoice.org/>, https://www.directmail.com/directory/mail_preference/?ref=G and <https://www.optoutprescreen.com/?rf=t>.

Eat locally

Committed locovores often try to eat food grown within 100 miles of where they live. Among the aims is to support local farmers, reduce the energy required for long-haul shipping (imagine how much fuel it takes to ship kiwis to the United States, for example) and eat the freshest produce. For additional benefits, see <http://100milediet.org/why-eat-local>. That 100-mile approach may seem extreme, but you can reduce the carbon required to get food to your table by:

-Buying produce at the farmers markets and stick to foods that are in season.

-Avoiding produce that arrives by airplane. NRDC offers a list of commonly air-freighted foods and their country of origin. Examples include asparagus from Peru, bell peppers from the Netherlands and nectarines and cherries from Chile.

-Locating nearby farmers markets and shopping there. Find farms by typing in your zip code at <http://www.localharvest.org/>.

Walkability

When relocating, check out how walkable your new neighborhood is. Get insight from www.walkscore.com , a site that ranks more than 2,000 cities by how easy it is to get around without a car.

Green gifting

Rather than giving stuff for holidays and special events, consider giving experiences. Tickets to a concert, membership to a local garden or museum or a subscription to a CSA (community supported agriculture), brings recipients enjoyment without the need to store, care for and dispose of another object. Find farms that offer subscriptions for produce delivery at www.localharvest.org/csa/ or www.wilson.edu/csasearch/search.asp.

Longer term strategies

When you're shopping for a new home or upgrading an existing property, think long-term. Tap renewable power (for green utility programs, see (<http://apps3.eere.energy.gov/greenpower/markets/pricing.shtml?page=1>), upgrade appliances to Energy Star® models, investigate solar panels, geothermal heat pumps, tankless water heaters; opt for green furnishings; and familiarize yourself with LEED standards greener homes.

Broaden Your Knowledge

C.A.R. Business Products available at store.car.org.

Sustainable Housing and Building Green: What Agents Should Know
Distressed Properties ReadyPak® for WINForms® Users

C.A.R.'s Electronic Publications available at <http://clarusresource.com/datamine.html>
including:

The Invaluable Investor
2008 Survey of California Home Buyers
2007-2008 Survey of Top Producers
County Economic Profiles

Other resources:

-*Gorgeously Green: 8 Simple Steps to an Earth-Friendly Life* by Sophie Uliano

-*Greenopia: The Urban Dweller's Guide to Green Living Los Angeles*

-Green Living Ideas -- <http://greenlivingideas.com/indoor-air-quality/freshen-up-your-indoor-air.html>

-Green Renovation Checklist--

http://www.greenhomeguide.org/guide_for_green_renovation/green_renovation_checklist.html

-Healthy Building Network-- <http://healthybuilding.net/about/index.html>

-U.S. Green Building Council-- <http://www.greenhomeguide.org/>