

Go Green at Home, Save Money



Health and Wellness

These days, many homeowners are interested in going “green.” But can you protect and preserve the environment and save money too? Although many eco-friendly improvements (like buying new energy efficient appliances) can be expensive, there are many ways to “green” your lifestyle that can actually save you money. While some may involve a small investment upfront, they’ll pay off quickly. Here are some ideas on how to get started.

Get a Home Energy Audit

What better place to start your new green living than at home? After all, it’s probably where you and your family spend most of your time. And a quick walk through the place may clue you in to a few simple changes you can make that will save you cash.

To maximize your savings, you could hire an energy auditor, a professional who comes to your home and evaluates its energy efficiency. The auditor will help you locate weak weatherstripping, ineffective insulation and more. While energy audits usually cost \$300 – 400, they can pay for themselves over time as your energy costs decrease.

Even without a professional, you should be able to do an audit yourself. Here are a few things to check:

- **Weatherstripping.** Repair weak and damaged weatherstripping and caulk around windows, doors, and other entry points. To be effective, weatherstripping should provide resistance when you open and close the door. This will keep warm air from escaping in the winter and cool air from escaping in the summer.
- **Light bulbs.** Much is made of the difference between traditional and compact fluorescent (CFL) light bulbs. CFL light bulbs cost slightly more than regular bulbs, but they use about 75 percent less energy and can last up to ten times longer.
- **Electrical outlets.** Anything plugged in to an electrical outlet sucks energy even when not in use—unless you plug everything into power strips that you turn off when you’re not using them. You’ll make up the cost of the strips with your reduced energy bills.
- **Thermostat.** Lower your central air temperature two degrees in the winter and let it go up by two degrees in the summer and you could save up to 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, all while lowering your energy bills.

- **Furnace and air conditioning filters.** Keeping your furnace and air conditioning filters clean will help them function efficiently. An electrostatic filter will cost more up front than a paper or fiberglass one, but can be cleaned and reused.
- **Water heater.** To spend less money heating water, turn your water heater to 120 degrees. Wrap an insulating water heater blanket around your unit to help reduce heat loss by 25 – 40 percent. If you have an electric water heater, install a timer that will shut it off when the water heater isn’t being used.

Green Cleaning

We spend a great deal of the energy in our homes just trying to keep the place — and ourselves — clean. There are ways to do this while helping the environment and saving money. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Hang laundry.** Skip the dryer and buy a clothesline. Use it particularly during warm summer months.

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- **Wash your clothes in cold water.** About 90 percent of the energy used for washing clothes is used to heat the water. Modern detergents don't need hot water to work, and stains that won't come out in cold water probably aren't going to come out in hot water either. In fact, the hot water may set them.
 - **Use the dishwasher.** Modern dishwashers tend to be more efficient than handwashing, since they use less than ten gallons of water per load. And they're effective enough that you can feel justified in not pre-rinsing your dishes, which wastes water. Wait to run the dishwasher until it is completely full, and let dishes air dry if you can.
 - **Get a low-flow showerhead.** It will still have good water pressure, but will release a lot less water. While you're at it, shorten your showers and avoid water-hogging baths altogether.
 - **Mulch.** Trap moisture in the soil by covering it with a layer of organic material, such as bark. Mulch will prevent weeds from sprouting and keep the ground cool in hot summer months.
 - **Compost.** Instead of throwing organic materials in the trash, make a natural soil amendment by composting. You'll reduce waste and enrich and improve soil for little or no cost. Find out more at the Environmental Protection Agency's website at www.epa.gov/compost.
 - **Grow your own fruits, herbs and vegetables.** Get the absolute freshest produce available at low cost. And if you convert lawn to garden space, you'll help reduce water waste, too. If you don't have space, check the neighborhood for a community garden.
- If you implement these few strategies, you'll be doing the planet — and your pocketbook — a big favor.

Outdoor Green

Believe it or not, not everything outdoors is green. Here are some easy and inexpensive changes to your outdoor space that are environmentally friendly.

- **Go native.** When planting new flowers, bushes or trees, choose native varieties to limit water consumption.
- **Water grass carefully.** Watering lawns and gardens accounts for 50 – 70 percent of home water use. You can easily reduce your consumption by watering early in the morning and keeping grass three to four inches long. This prevents evaporation.

