

Health

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Tips on creating a green home and conserving energy and money

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When it comes to the environment, being a good global citizen starts at your doorstep. From recycling to using alternative cleaning materials, minor changes at home can add up to real benefits for the planet, as well as for your own health and happiness.

The best way to be Earth-friendly is to cut down on what you consume and recycle whenever you can. Every little bit helps; recycling just one glass bottle saves enough electricity to light a 100-watt bulb for four hours.

What can you do to "live green" and help save our planet? Lots of things - some are easy, and some will take a change in how we think and live. It's up to you to decide the level of commitment that you and your family are willing, and want, to make.

House temperature: Almost half a home's energy consumption is due to heating and cooling. Turn down the thermostat in cold weather and keep it higher in warm weather. Each degree you turn down the heat saves 3 percent of heating costs, while each degree you raise the temperature of your air conditioner saves 3-4 percent of cooling costs. By changing the temperature just two degrees all year you can save about 2,000 pounds of CO₂ a year.

A programmable thermostat will make these temperature changes for you automatically.

Furnace: Make sure that you clean your furnace's air filter monthly during heavy use. Shade your east and west windows and delay heat-generating activities such as dishwashing until evening. Use ceiling fans instead of air conditioners. Moving air feels cooler, so a slow-moving fan can easily extend the comfort range to 82 degrees Fahrenheit.

Lights: Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL bulbs) use 66 percent less energy than a standard incandescent bulb and last up to 10 times longer. Replace your 100-watt incandescent bulbs with a 32-watt CFL bulb and save \$30 in energy costs over the life of the bulb. Turn off the lights when you aren't using them and reduce your direct lighting energy use by 45 percent. Stop using heat-producing halogen lamps, which also can be fire hazards.

Water pipes: Make sure your hot-water pipes are insulated.

Washing clothes: Switch to cold-water washing and save 80 percent on energy used for laundry - a savings of an estimated \$60 a year. If you must use hot water for a wash, use cold water for the rinse cycle. Use your washer's high-speed spin cycle to take out as much moisture as possible from your clothing to reduce drying time.

Driving: Keep your tires inflated to improve gas mileage by 3 percent.

Cooking: Cook with a slow cooker or toaster oven when possible. For a meal that requires an hour in an electric oven, you use 2.7 pounds of CO₂; a slow cooker uses 0.9 pounds of CO₂ for seven hours; a toaster oven takes 1.3 pounds of CO₂ for 50 minutes; and a microwave uses 0.5 pounds of CO₂ for 15 minutes of cooking.

Refrigerator and freezer: Keep your refrigerator away from heat sources such as dishwashers, ovens, heating vents, and direct sunlight, all of which can cause it to work harder to keep contents cold. Leave a few inches of space behind the refrigerator to ensure proper air circulation around the condenser coils and vacuum the coils at least once a year. Open the refrigerator and freezer doors as little as possible to minimize the amount of cold air that escapes. Keep the refrigerator and freezer full to better retain the cold. If your refrigerator is nearly empty, store water-filled containers inside.

Dishwasher: Run the dishwasher only when it is full. Choose the air-dry option instead of heat-dry or simply open the door when the final cycle is complete.

Clothes dryer: Dry heavier and lighter items separately to reduce overall drying time. Dry multiple loads of laundry in a row to make use of the residual heat left over from the previous load. Make sure that your lint trap is cleaned out after each use.

Cut water waste: Check for and fix leaks and install faucet aerators on all faucets to cut your annual water consumption by 50 percent. Install low-flow toilets or, if you can't replace your toilets, put a filled water bottle, brick or other heavy object into the tank to take up space and use less water for filling. Landscape for maximum water efficiency by using mulch to keep moisture in the ground, use plants that require low moisture ("native plants"), and don't water during the day when the moisture only evaporates. Turn the water off when you shave or brush your teeth until you need it again.

Instead of being overwhelmed with how you can possibly make all the changes listed, try picking just one thing you can do to save energy each week. Try it out, let it become habit and then try one more thing. Remember, every little change will help. Get your children and friends involved. Share ideas. But start today.