

10 Steps to a Greener, Healthier Home

Why is it important to 'green' your home? What is healthier for you is good for the environment and may also save you money.

- ☐ The internal environment is 2 to 5 times as polluted as the external environment, according to the EPA.
- ☐ We spend about 90% of our time indoors.
- ☐ Environmental illnesses and allergy rates are on the rise and many are linked to the time we spend while indoors.

1. Replace your household cleaners:

Did you know?

- Over 90% of all reported poisonings in America occur at home, with the leading reported cause being household cleaners.
- Many chemicals in household cleaning products have been linked to long-term or delayed health effects; these include cancer, endocrine disruption, reproductive issues, asthma, organ damage and neurological problems.

Alternative:

- Buy natural alternatives. These can be found at natural food stores such as [MOMs](#) (in DC area), [Whole Foods](#), [Trader Joe's](#), and increasingly, at regular supermarkets.
- Make your own: see Annie Berthold-Bond's 'Better Basics for the Home' book for alternative recipes.



Tip: Household cleaners are not regulated, so check the ingredients carefully, even when the company claims that the product is made from 'natural' ingredients.

2. Minimize use of plastic bags:

Did you know?

- We throw away 100 billion polyurethane bags annually; that is equivalent to dumping nearly 12 million barrels of oil.
- Only 0.6% of plastic bags are recycled in the US; the rest persist for centuries in the landfills, our waterways, and our streets.

Alternative:

- Bring a reusable bag with you when shopping. Keep bags in multiple locations for easy access.
- If you only have one or two items, carry them out of the store instead of taking a plastic bag.
- Ask your favorite store to offer a discount on non-plastic bag use or charge for plastic bags.



Tip: If you do use plastic bags, make sure to recycle the clean ones at your local supermarket (ex: Harris Teeter and Whole Foods).

3. Buy organic and local food:

Did you know?

- It takes about a gallon of gas for 30 pounds of food to be shipped cross-country; the average supermarket food travels 2500 miles.
- Conventional growth methods include the administration of pesticides, antibiotics, and other chemicals, which are then ingested by the consumer, not to mention that conventional growth methods cause soil erosion and water pollution.

Alternative:

- Patronize your local farmer's market. To find a farmer's market near you, go to the [USDA AMS](#) site (www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm).
- Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and support a local farm while receiving fresh produce and vegetables.
- If the farmer's market is out of season or far away, buy organic - it is grown without pesticides and herbicides and has more nutritional value than conventional food.



Tip: For local sources of meat and dairy, see the [Eat Well Guide](#) (www.eatwellguide.org/). For general info on organic products, see [Organic Kitchen](#) (www.organickitchen.com/), and to learn where your food comes from, see Food Routes (www.foodroutes.org/).

4. Replace your light bulbs with CFLs or LEDs:

Did you know?

- Compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) use 50%- 80% less energy than incandescent bulbs and last up to ten times longer.
- Light emitting diodes (LEDs) do not contain mercury and have 60,000 hours of useful life.
- Replacing a single incandescent bulb with a CFL will keep a half ton of CO2 out of the atmosphere over the life of the bulb.

Alternative:

- Buy CFLs or LEDs when your incandescent bulbs die out.



Tip: There are CFLs or LEDs for different types of lights, including soft and bright lights as well as for dimmers, so read the label carefully to make sure you are buying one that is appropriate for your needs and your budget.

5. Cut down on junk mail:

Did you know?

- The average American household receives unsolicited junk mail equal to 1.5 trees every year—more than 100 million trees for all U.S. households combined; the production and disposal of direct mail consumes more energy than 3 million cars.
- Americans pay between \$320 and \$370 million annually to dispose of junk mail that doesn't get recycled.

Alternative:

- See instructions on how to stop junk mail on the FTC web site: www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/alerts/optoutairt.htm. You can also go to www.optoutprescreen.com to opt out of insurance and credit card offers.
- If you do not have time to research and would like a quick kit, go to www.stopjunk.com/ and order the kit (costs about \$10).



Tip: When you subscribe to a magazine, buy something from a catalog or online store, or donate money, be sure to tell the vendor to not rent or sell your name or address.

6. Turn off the lights and unplug electronics that are not in use:

Did you know?

- Up to 40% of all electricity used to power home electronics is consumed while the products are turned off.
- Standby power accounts for 10% of our electricity consumption. A laptop computer consumes 34.1 watts when turned on, and 16.5 watts on standby and your microwave oven consumes more electricity powering its digital clock than it does heating your food.

Alternative:

- Purchase power strips and plug your devices in. Turn the strips off when the devices are not in use.
- Invest in a SmartStrip for your computer and other office electronics and it can do the work for you (www.smarthomeusa.com/ShopByManufacturer/Bits-Ltd./Item/LCG5/).

7. Buy Energy Star appliances:

Did you know?

- The typical U.S. family spends more than \$1,600 a year on home utility bills.

Alternative:

- If you're considering buying a new appliance, choose one with low standby energy consumption (look for the Energy Star label or go to www.energystar.gov/). These use 2-10 times less electricity for the same functionality, and are better quality products for the most part.



Tip: If you are looking at a product and aren't sure if it is part of the Energy Star program, you can go to the web site and search by the type of product and model. Most large appliance sellers have Energy Star annual energy numbers listed on the appliance.

8. Walk and bike:

Did you know?

- Vehicle exhaust is the leading source of hazardous air pollution. Cycling and walking produce no pollution and improve health and fitness, as well as decrease stress levels.
- A commuting cyclist is also less exposed to air pollution than a commuting motorist.

Alternative:

- Buy a road or mountain bike or become part of a bike program (www.metrobike.net). Walk to places that are easily accessible.
- If you'd like to bike for fitness, join a biking club or take a look at the routes in your area at www.pedaling.com/.



Tip: The average person can walk about a quarter mile in five minutes. If you live within two or three miles of your work, give walking a try.

9. Get rid of pesticides:

Did you know?

- Up to 80% of contact with pesticides happens indoors. Several pesticides cause asthma and allergies; others are linked to lung disease, cause cancer or affect the nervous system.
- In one study, 90% of people tested had 5 to 16 pesticides in their bodies; most of the 6-11 year olds tested in one study had four times the amount deemed acceptable by the EPA (2005 CDC report).

Alternative:

- Buy pest control products without chemicals. For alternative methods, go to www.beyondpesticides.org.
- Keep pests out by installing or fixing door strips on outside doors, sealing baseboards with caulk, plugging holes with caulk or steel wool, caulk cracks around windows and doors.



Tip: Don't buy more pesticides than you will need. If you have leftover pesticides, dispose of them at your local hazardous waste disposal site (www.earth911.org). Never dispose of pesticides by pouring them down a drain of any kind or on the street.

10. Recycle and reuse:

Did you know?

- American consumers purchase over 500 million beverage bottles and cans, on average, every day. Only about one in three are recycled while two out of three beverage containers sold are sent to the landfill, incinerated or become litter.
- Plastics are derived from nonrenewable natural resources, mainly fossil fuels.

Alternative:

- Sell or donate your furniture, clothing and other unused items to a local charity. Use an exchange system, such as Freecycle (www.freecycle.org/).
- If you're not sure what to recycle, check out www.obviously.com/recycle/. If you'd like to find a recycling center or hazardous waste disposal site near you, go to www.earth911.org.
- Check out the Story of Stuff, a 20 minute video, on the web with a great resource list.



Tip: If you are recycling plastic or other containers, make sure that you rinse them out before putting them in the recycling bin.