

Tips to make your home eco-friendly

It isn't easy being an eco-warrior, but there are some simple ways to help save the planet. After all, it's our only home. Conserving resources such as electricity and water, and implementing...

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[Tashneem Chaudhury](#)
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Even if green isn't your favourite colour, it's definitely the one that needs to come to mind when you survey your home these days. Conserving resources such as electricity and water, and implementing the reuse, reduce and recycle mantra in your home and surroundings will not only mark you out as an eco-aware citizen, but also save much-needed cash in these days of rising prices. It isn't always easy to be an eco-warrior, of course, but there are some not so difficult ways of doing your bit to save the planet. After all, it's your only home.

Within the home

It's very easy to immediately implement eco-friendly measures in your home. "Being conscious of water and energy use is the first step," says Roshni Udyavar Yehuda, head, Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture, Mumbai.

Water:

Always repair leaking taps and switch to aerosol spray faucets or just add an attachment to existing taps. This will increase pressure while reducing water flow. Use low-flow showerheads and switch to a dual flush system for your WC or install a waterless urinal. However, see that your commodes are compatible.

Ventilation: Try and create natural ventilation in your home wherever it's possible. Natural cross ventilation allows for cooling and also prevents the build-up of toxic chemicals or carbon monoxide. In addition, allow sunlight to flood into the house to prevent the formation of moulds and mites which may live in carpets, sofa covers and curtains, making you and your family vulnerable to upper respiratory diseases.

Appliances: Use energy-efficient devices and equipment like flat screen monitors, BEE-labelled



or eco-star products. When going to bed, switch off and unplug all connected devices such as TVs, DVD players, phone chargers, etc., as they consume energy even when not in use. Almost half a home's energy consumption is due to heating and cooling. Use energy saving models of air-conditioners for summer and oil radiators to keep warm in winter. Shade your east and west windows with curtains or blinds to help keep your home cool in warm weather. The less the difference between indoor and outdoor temperature, the lower the energy consumption. Delay heat-generating activities such as the use of a dishwasher, washing machine or dryer until evening.

Common areas

To take the eco-friendly concept further, get your building or housing society to implement conservation measures. Roshni Udyavar Yehuda explains, "Harvest and use rainwater wherever possible. This will reduce the load on civic infrastructure. Install a solar hot water system and use an electric geyser only as a backup. If a housing society installs this it will lead to tremendous savings in electric consumption. The payback comes in a maximum of two years."

Lighting: For common areas like staircases, lobbies, etc., install LED lights which are controlled by infrared or motion detection sensors. Or use Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs), which use 66 per cent less energy than a standard incandescent bulb and last up to 10 times longer. Replacing a 100-watt incandescent bulb with a 32-watt CFL saves cost and energy. Also, don't forget to go solar. Solar lights, solar water heaters, solar chargers, etc., are all energy saving products.

Waste: Encourage your building or office to recycle all waste. Try to segregate organic and inorganic waste; recycle organic waste through composting within your compound and send the recyclable items to your local recycling vendor.

Revise and update

Being eco-friendly does not always mean making do with old things till they rust away or break down, or denying yourself new gadgets. Sometimes, new things can help you save energy. Says Rama Ranjit Mehra, functional medicine practitioner and chairperson, Svaasa Group & Ranjit's Svaasa, Heritage Boutique Spa Haveli, Amritsar, which is renowned for its green practices, "If your home appliances are over 10 years old, replace them with new energy-efficient models, especially refrigerators and air-conditioners, as they are the highest energy-consuming appliances. Old vehicles should be traded in for energy-efficient engines that consume less fuel and give greater mileage."

Re-use, reduce, recycle

Save water: Says Yehuda, “A little common sense can go a long way in water conservation.” Do the things you’re told to do but never do, such as turning the tap off when brushing or shaving, using a bathtub sparingly and opting for a bucket bath over a shower wherever possible. The toilet is the biggest culprit where wastage of water is concerned. Install a low-flow toilet and one with a smaller water toilet tank. That will save gallons of water. If you have an old model, see if you can adjust the float valve to admit less water into the toilet tank.

Also, clean your car with a wet sponge rather than a hose. “Switch your dishwasher and washing machine to quick wash mode to not only save electricity but also water. Do not use either without a full load. If you have help to do these chores, teach them to soak clothes in a bucket with detergent and then rinse them and follow the same principle when it comes to dishes in a kitchen sink,” advises Mehra.

Ban plastic: Keep a jute or cloth bag handy so that when you go shopping you don’t have to use plastic bags. Buy unbleached paper – many paper products, including some made from recycled fibres, are bleached with chlorine. The bleaching process can create harmful byproducts, including dioxins, which accumulate in our air, water and soil over time.

Use safe cleaners: Some household cleaners are potentially toxic, so don’t buy them. Instead use simple ingredients such as plain soap, water, baking soda (sodium bicarbonate), vinegar, washing soda (sodium carbonate), lemon juice and borax to make home cleaning items for floors, bathrooms, etc.

Gardens: Compost is always better than synthetic fertilisers. Compost provides a full complement of soil organisms and the balance of nutrients needed to maintain the soil’s well being without the requirement of harmful chemicals. And healthy soil minimises weeds and produces healthy plants. Also, plant native and perennial plants as they are sturdy and since they have adapted to the local environment, they require less attention and use less water.

Toxic chemicals escape gardens and concentrate in our environment. So try a variety of organic and physical pest control methods, such as using diatomaceous earth to kill insects, pouring boiling water on weeds, sprinkling red pepper powder to save leaves from being eaten and growing garlic around fruit trees to repel borers. “Try and use products that are based on human energy, such as old-fashioned push lawnmowers. This

is the best way to be green,” explains Mehra. “You can also find torches and other small gadgets that can be wound to recharge themselves.”

Construction cost

There are more measures you can take to keep your home and office green, starting at the construction level. According to Dr Prem C Jain, chairman, Indian Green Building Council and founder, Spectral Services Consultants, which has pioneered the idea of green buildings in India, “Green concepts for the home can address national issues like handling of consumer waste, water efficiency, energy efficiency, conserving natural resources and reduction in fossil fuel use. These concepts enhance occupant health, happiness and well being through design interventions, without imposing a financial burden on the occupant.”

These concepts involve the use of reflective material finishes on exposed roof surfaces / terrace gardens, roof and wall insulation, use of low VOC paints, primers and adhesives and reusing building components and furniture.

Go green @ work

Try to read and file documents electronically rather than print paper copies.

Take notes and make lists on your computer rather than on paper.

Save reminders for appointments and occasions on your computer calendar.

Disperse information within the office through emails or posts on notice boards.

For office-going folks, carpooling is a good way to decrease your carbon footprint.

Otherwise, switch to hybrid or battery-charged cars or public transport.

Once you get to work, take the stairs rather than the elevator.