

GoingGreen

Whether building, moving or renovating, homeowners consider the planet

Regardless of your beliefs about global warming and climate change, making your new home eco-friendly makes sense financially — and it may be easier than you think. Whether your motivation is to save money or save the planet, homeowners today have many options for "going green."

Build it green

One way to build an Earth-friendly home starts with the construction process itself.

Advanced framing techniques, for example, take less time to construct, increase energy efficiency and reduce your lumber costs by up to 30 percent.

Other green solutions include wool insulation, which regulates home temperature better than other insulation types and is more fire resistant. Energy efficient appliances cost less to operate, offsetting their higher up-front costs, and locating the water heater near the highest point of use will reduce pipeline energy loss.

Utilizing alternative materials such as plastic lumber and engineered wood is a great way to conserve natural resources. Look for a builder who can use reclaimed or excess materials from other jobs and who will also post a jobsite recycling plan to reduce wasted materials.

Green energy systems

Upfront costs of solar and wind power features may seem formidable, but renewable energy systems provide long-term savings while conserving finite natural resources.

Solar irradiation levels vary across the U.S., but homeowners everywhere can supplement a significant portion of their electrical needs by utilizing solar panels on their home's roof space. The cost of solar panels, per watt, has continued to decrease in recent years, as well as installation costs. Furthermore, the energy produced by these panels can offset their initial production costs in as little as one to four years.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory claims that land-based wind farms alone could potentially supply America's energy needs 10 times over. Unfortunately, residential applications aren't as reliable yet.

Many factors determine how much energy a residential turbine can produce. Experts advise homeowners to research a specific site's potential for producing significant wind energy. If you live in an area with consistent wind patterns, the rewards of installing a wind turbine could far outweigh the initial investment.

The great outdoors

When considering ways to make your home eco-friendly, don't forget to look outdoors. Solar ovens harness the sun's energy to cook outside, while solar lighting features keep driveways and sidewalks lit at night.

Families can have fun working together to grow their own produce and herbs in organic gardens. Learn to feed your garden year-round with kitchen compost.

In addition, rainwater collection systems capture and store water, which can be used to keep lawns and gardens beautiful, without adding to the utility bill.

STANDARDIZED ENERGY SCORES

Every new car comes with a window sticker that clearly explains what kind of gas mileage you can expect to get.

What if your new home came with that same kind of sticker?

That's the concept behind home energy ratings. The Department of Energy is promoting a standard home energy score that home buyers can use to compare different properties they're thinking about purchasing.

It's a great way to shop among similar homes to see which ones are really the most efficient, because builders' claims about home efficiency are not always transparent or easy to understand.

