

20 things you can do.



Do the right thing!

Many of us want to do what's best for the environment, but often don't know where to start. Most people are surprised to find that small changes can have big results. The following are 20 tips to help lower the environmental impact of your home and your daily life.

See the light

Compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) are a good alternative for saving energy. Although CFLs cost three to five times more than conventional light bulbs, they last several years longer and use one-quarter of the electricity. These energy-saving light bulbs can be found virtually everywhere light bulbs are sold.

Go underground

Geothermal systems function by pumping steam or water, which is about 55 degrees Fahrenheit, from beneath the ground and transferring it to cool buildings in the summer and heat them in the winter. Reducing electrical usage with geothermal energy helps to conserve nonrenewable fossil fuels and reduces emissions that harm the atmosphere. Each of the homes in Hope Crossing is equipped with ClimateMaster geothermal systems.

Put your mouse to work

Banking and paying bills online not only saves trees, but it also helps reduce fuel consumption by the trucks and planes used to transport paper checks. Recent reports say that if every U.S. citizen viewed and paid bills online for one year, solid waste would be cut by 1.6 billion tons and greenhouse gas emissions would be cut by 2.1 million tons.

Take a breath of fresh air

Opening windows on a nice day instead of running the air conditioner can save energy and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Setting the thermostat a couple of degrees higher in the summer and lower in the winter, as well as weather stripping or caulking all doors and windows, can also help conserve energy.

Use water wisely

Minor changes can save both money and water. Running dishwashers and washing machines only when they are full, installing low-flow showerheads and shutting the water off while brushing your teeth are simple ways people can reduce water usage. Repairing leaky faucets and taking showers rather than baths can make a big difference in the long run.

Read the fine print

Energy Star, a rating system by the Environmental Protection Agency, can help consumers find energy-efficient options for everything from ovens to hotels. Although Energy Star appliances are more expensive, they cost less to power. Consumers using these appliances can reduce their utility bills by as much as 30 percent. Homes in Hope Crossing are equipped with energy-efficient windows which, together with other energy-related improvements, bring the homes to an Energy Star rating.

Pass on the plastic

More than 500 billion plastic bags are distributed each year, and fewer than three percent of those bags are recycled. The rest can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade in landfills that emit harmful greenhouse gases. To reduce plastic bag pollution, shoppers can use cloth bags or bags made out of biodegradable plant-based materials.

Hit the fruit stand

Buying fruit, vegetables and meat produced closer to home can reduce the number of "petroleum miles" trucks must travel to bring food to your table. To find farmers markets and food co-ops nearby, search www.localharvest.org. This website also identifies restaurants that specialize in regional and seasonal ingredients.

Power down

Screen savers are not energy savers. Taking a few minutes to turn off electrical devices won't just help you save the planet, but it can also help you save a few bucks off your electric bill each month. The U.S. Department of Energy found that 75 percent of all electricity consumed in the home is standby power used to keep electronics running when they are not being used. Turning off a computer after use can reduce up to 83 percent of the machine's carbon dioxide emissions and save about \$70 a year. Additionally, be sure to unplug chargers for cell phones and other rechargeable devices when not in use.

Lights out

Walking the halls to make sure computers, monitors, desk lights, printers and fax machines are turned off daily may not be a glamorous job, but it can make a difference. Turning things off after hours can reduce electricity use, extend equipment life and lower maintenance costs.

Get your system a check up

A tune-up can improve the efficiency of your heating and cooling systems. Clean or replace furnace, air conditioner and heat pump filters. If new systems are needed, consider the benefits of appliances with high Energy Star ratings.

The heat is on

Water heating can account for 14 to 25 percent of the energy consumed in your home. To increase water heater efficiency, drain a quart of water from your water tank every three months. This removes sediment that hinders heat transfer. Also, turning down the thermostat on your water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit can save energy and still provide comfortable hot water.

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Rake it in

Although improvements have made leaf blowers more efficient, they still burn up to one pint of gas and oil every hour they're used. Raking the leaves may be more time consuming, but with more than 30 million acres of lawns in the United States, it is the environmentally-friendly option that will save fuel.

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Tree-cycle

Americans recycled 42 million tons of paper last year, which is only 50 percent of what they used. Buying recycled paper can save the 900 million trees cut down to make paper every year. Each ton of recycled paper purchased saves 4,000 kilowatts per hour of energy, 7,000 gallons of water and 17 trees. This brochure was printed on 100 percent recycled paper.

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Pack light

Styrofoam peanuts and plastic CD cases cost energy to make and deliver. This is something to consider when moving or shipping gifts during the holidays. Many companies are doing their part to aid the environment. Hewlett-Packard is switching to lighter packaging for its printer cartridges to reduce carbon emissions, and Wal-Mart plans to reduce carbon emissions by cutting packaging by five percent starting in 2008.

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Under pressure

Even if you can't spend money on a hybrid vehicle, there are still many ways to reduce your car's carbon dioxide emissions by improving its gas mileage. Properly inflated tires, an engine tune-up and a new air filter can improve gas mileage by three to 10 percent, putting 200 fewer pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year.

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Think Johnny Appleseed

The simple act of planting a tree helps the environment in so many ways. Planting a tree is an act of putting down roots and contributing to the future. While one tree can absorb up to a ton of carbon dioxide in its lifetime, trees also filter pollution from the air, help recycle water, prevent soil loss, create shade and – best of all – make great jungle gyms.

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Repeat offender

Each American creates about a ton of garbage each year and about 90 percent of it is reusable, recyclable or compostable. Rather than buying single use, throw-away products like razors, plastic utensils, paper plates, washable drinking glasses, and batteries, look for products that can be used repetitively. Instead of paper towels, make reusable rags out of old t-shirts and fabrics. Look for ways to reuse containers. Large plastic tubs make great storage containers for toys or crafting supplies

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Garbage to gardens

America spends more than \$5 billion a year on fossil fuel-delivered fertilizers that leak chemicals into the ground and accelerate the release of greenhouse gas. Compost is one of nature's best mulches and can be used instead of commercial fertilizers. Best of all, compost is cheap. Made up of grass clippings, kitchen refuse, wood ashes, spoiled hay, pine needles and manure, you can make it without spending a cent. Using compost improves soil structure, texture and aeration, and increases the soil's water-holding capacity – great for Oklahoma's hot summers. For compost information, visit <http://www.compostguide.com>.

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Grow green kids

Educating children about their impact on the environment will help them understand why these small changes in your daily life can have big results. Including them in the process of recycling and making them part of your "green" efforts will encourage environmental awareness for years to come. Eco-friendly activities can be as simple as growing a garden or getting crafty with recycled materials such as cereal and tissue boxes.

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Helpful sites:

<http://www.lowimpactliving.com/?gclid=CP2HjKHO3owCFQcKlGody2gl0Q>

<http://www.specialtyliving.com/home/eco-friendly-buyers-guide>

<http://www.ecolivingcenter.com/>

