



Get on the "Green" Bandwagon

A contractor's definition of going green is simply the use of materials, products, design considerations and construction methods that result in the production of a healthier, lower maintenance and more energy-efficient home.

So what can we do as homeowners? It depends on how green you want to be and what you can afford. Baby boomers grew up wanting to save the planet. The time is now! It's our opportunity to help.

I recommend starting over and tearing down your house – what else did you expect a contractor to say? It's obviously not cost effective to do it all at once so I recommend taking baby steps unless you're ready for a complete home improvement.

From recycling bins built into your base cabinets (for cans, plastic, glass and paper) to bamboo cabinets and flooring, there are an abundance of environmentally friendly options available to consumers interested in improving their kitchen.

Lighting is a great place to start. Change out lamps as they burn out with fluorescents, which last longer and save energy. But you can't beat natural light - try a solar tube or skylight. We have a total of nine of them on our home. You can't see more than two on any one side. We also installed solar tubes in the showers and ran a 4" dryer duct vent from the solar tube to an outside vent to let fresh air in and keep the shower dry.

There are lots of little things you can do to make an older home perform better than its original design including solar heating for water, energy-efficient appliances, and heating and air conditioning systems that don't leak air into your attic. Use low-V.O.C. paints, charcoal filters on water systems, new windows and doors, ceiling fans in rooms with vaulted ceilings to push warm air down in the winter and skylights that open to let hot air out in the summer.

We shouldn't make this more complicated than it really is. Energy-efficient design and energy-efficient construction are the biggest part. I recommend having a punch list of items that interest you to go over with your architect, designer or interior decorator. And if you just bought your house, don't get into a big hurry to start building. Pay attention to the sun, wind and rain for all seasons before starting to design.

There are a few things you can do while remodeling to save energy and avoid waste, which in turn reduces the amount of material going into the landfills. Use the dirt out of the footing for your rear yard or in the slab which will raise your projects up a few inches. Some city inspectors will even let you reuse insulation and lumber.

Don't throw anything away. For example, put a fluorescent pink "FREE" sign on an old door, window or refrigerator and it will



Solar heating can help make an older home perform better than its original design.

be gone the same day. You can bury concrete as long as it is compacted properly - just make sure the inspectors are okay with it. If we all can do a little, we can make a difference.

During outside landscaping, choosing an environmentally friendly landscape architect will help. There's a lot of waste from over watering. Turn your automatic sprinklers off in the winter and water by hand. Also, you can divert rainwater off roofs from downspouts to 55-gallon drums and use that water for your inside plants and garden. Plants grow better and vegetables taste better without the harsh chemical chlorine.

My favorite green thing is having a garden; it's really simple and it's something I can enjoy with my kids. I usually prep the soil myself and they come along and we plant seeds together. It is so easy and so rewarding to see a sunflower sprout and then grow seven or eight feet tall. Corn, carrots, and tomatoes are very simple. This year we grew four types of peppers and made lots of hot salsa.

Have fun "going green!" **HB**

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