

Go "Green" to Save Green

A lot of attention has and is currently being given to green building and living, though the concept is not new. In fact, green building roots can be traced in part to builders of solar homes during the 1970's and 1980's. Green building and living concepts are designed to focus the way we design homes and buildings and the way we live so that we minimize the impact we have on local, regional and global ecosystems. Green building and living concepts challenge us to choose practices that help us to do such things as: reduce our reliance on automobiles, conserve energy and water, build in an environmentally responsible manner with low environmental-impact materials, and practice environmentalism through things such as recycling and reducing waste materials.

Why Think Green?

Thinking about and incorporating green concepts into your home has many advantages. When we take steps to make our home greener, we reduce energy and water usage, and the costs associated with them, and we create a comfortable living environment and a healthy indoor environment. One of the best ways to begin to incorporate green concepts into your home is by performing a home energy audit to see where you can make the biggest impact. Home energy audits show homeowners, on average, how to reduce their



Steps to make our home greener create a comfortable living environment.

utility costs by 30%. Utility companies can assist in performing energy audits, or there are many home energy audits you can perform on your own. Home energy audits can inform you of things such as: the efficiency of your heating and cooling system, duct leaks and sources of air infiltration, the location of any water leaks, levels of insulation, holes and cracks, and the maintenance of appliances.



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Take Green Steps

Once you have performed your home energy audit, you can begin to take steps to reduce your energy costs and be green. One thing to remember when making changes is to look at total costs associated with them. Often times, we look at the upfront costs but forget to take into account the operational costs. In other words, we look at what it costs us to purchase something, but we don't think about how much it will cost us to use it. Going green often involves making purchases that may cost a little more upfront. But when we consider that we pay less in operational costs, we can see the whole picture and the savings we get in return.

Energy Users

There are many energy users in your home. The biggest user of energy in a Florida home is the air conditioning system. In Central Florida, 29% of an average homes energy usage goes towards cooling. Taking steps to reduce usage in this area can lead to significant dollar savings. Easy tips to reduce your cooling load include keeping the temperature set between 78 and 80 degrees, installing a programmable thermostat, changing the filters monthly, and having the system serviced once a year.

The second biggest user of energy in a Florida home is the hot water heater. The average Florida family uses 24,000

gallons of hot water per year. Steps to reduce usage in this area, including keeping the thermostat set at 120 degrees and maintaining the tank, can help to save both water usage and money. If your hot water heater is older, consider replacing it with an alternative heating method, such as a tankless water heater, or try solar heating.

The third largest user of energy in a Florida home is the refrigerator. Older model refrigerators are generally only marginally efficient, and if you have a refrigerator in the garage, it is working overtime to cool in a hot and humid environment. To keep your refrigerator working efficiently, perform regular maintenance, such as vacuuming the coils underneath or behind the refrigerator, limit the amount of time the door is opened, and keep as full as possible. If you are considering replacing your refrigerator, pay attention to the Energy Guide label, and



Bottom freezer refrigerator models offer the greatest efficiency.

consider purchasing an Energy Star® model. When choosing a style, consider that top model freezers are more efficient than side-by-side models, and bottom freezer models are more efficient than both.

Finally, lighting accounts for 11% of the energy usage in a typical Florida home. This is one area where savings are easy. Replace your standard incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs. CFL bulbs use one-fourth of the energy of an incandescent bulb and can last up to 10 times longer. Other ways to save with lights include: turning lights off when you are not in a room, keeping bulbs clean, using task lighting, and using motion sensors in bathrooms, hallways, garages, and outdoors.