

TOP TIPS

Don't leave Appliances on Standby

A million tonnes of greenhouse gases are pumped into the atmosphere every year by appliances left on standby in the UK according to the latest government figures, so it's obvious to see where energy savings can be made. Switching off appliances at the mains and not on standby would save enough energy to power 2.7 million homes for a year.

Make it a habit at the end of the day to check that you've taken the plugs out on big appliances like washing machines and dishwashers, right down to mobile phone and MP3 player chargers. It all makes a difference, but 71% of us admit to forgetting to switch off.

Use Appliances more Economically

We spend around £2 billion a year on electricity to run household appliances, but using your items more efficiently would help to cut this annual bill and save energy. Better technology makes it easier to get more out of appliances than ever before. Using lower settings is more efficient and often just as effective. You'll get the same results using newer washing machines at lower temperatures – but 40°C wash uses a third less energy than a 60°C cycle.

Buy Energy Efficient Products

When replacing an electrical item in your home, look out for products carrying the Energy Saving Recommended logo. This indicates that the item is energy efficient and will cost less to run by saving energy, without necessarily being more expensive to purchase. Appliances including fridges, freezers, washing machines, tumble dryers and boilers will have the logo if they meet the requirements.

According to the Energy Saving Trust, an energy saving dishwasher costs just 9p a cycle to run, compared to 16p on an inefficient appliance – that's around £20 a year saved on your electricity bill.

And why not think ahead to the digital switchover when you buy your next television? Everyone needs to upgrade to digital TVs between 2008 and 2012, and an energy saving Integrated Digital TV means you don't need an extra set-top box plugged in.

Think Before you Use Energy

Next time you go to boil the kettle or load the washing, think before you switch on: do you really need to fill it right up; is that a full load you're washing? Putting a bit more thought into everyday and often unconscious actions will make a surprising difference to how much energy you use. Taking a smarter approach to using electrical items couldn't be simpler, but the Energy Saving Trust's recent survey uncovered that laziness was the chief reason for our poor energy efficiency record. A few tips to help make you think:

- Try a half-load or economy programme on the washing machine
- Wait until the dishwasher is full before using it
- Only fill up the kettle with as much water as you need

Reuse and Recycle Old Appliances

If possible, reuse or recycle your goods rather than throwing them away, even if they're damaged or broken. Check if your local area has recycling facilities for electrical items. If it's still in working order, then your appliance could find a good home with someone else. Donate them to your local charity shop or try free cycling – you could even swap it for something else you want. You don't need to be an eco warrior to take a greener approach to your everyday life - even making small gestures in your home by saving energy through your appliances will collectively make a big difference overall.

LOOKING AT YOUR KITCHEN'S ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

Kitchen appliances all use varying levels of energy, is key when tackling energy efficiency in your kitchen. This includes the everyday items such as oven, fridge and freezer, which most of us rely on to cook and store food safely and effectively. It also means the more specialist electrical items – dishwashers, blenders and electrical whisks – that help us get jobs in the kitchen done quickly and painlessly.

Everyday Essential Items

Oven

Opening your oven door to check if your food is ready actually reduces its temperature by 25 degrees, making it take more time and energy to cook your food thoroughly than is necessary. You should try and cook the items

you need for a meal simultaneously in order to reduce the time you need your oven on for. Finally – if you have an electrical oven, turn it off ten minutes before your meal is due to finish cooking. If you don't open the door, the oven will carry on cooking at the same temperature.

Fridge and Freezers

Together, fridges and freezers are the two biggest energy consumers, so you need to ensure that you make the most of both appliances to maximise their performance. Check that doors are tightly shut; otherwise both need to work much harder to maintain their temperature. When it comes round to replacing your appliances, choose an Energy Saving Recommended model –these fridges and fridge freezers use over 60% less energy than a typical old one, according to the Energy Saving Trust. This will give you savings of up to £45 and 180 kilograms of CO₂ a year for a fridge freezer and £20 and 80 kilograms for a fridge.

Washing Machine

When it comes to washing clothes, your washing machine will work just as well at a lower temperature as it would at a higher one. Because washing powders and liquids are technologically more advanced these days, they will clean just as well at 30 degrees as they will at 40 degrees – which will use much less energy every time you run a cycle. Always ensure you're washing at full load, otherwise adjust your cycle to a half load setting so it doesn't use as much energy or water. An Energy Saving Recommended model uses a third less electricity to operate than an older model, so bear this in mind when shopping for a new one.

Non Essentials

The other items you use in your kitchen – dishwashers, blenders and tumble dryers – are all extra appliances rather than essentials, however much we might be attached to the time saving benefits they offer. Where possible, try and minimise your use of these items in favour for a more energy efficient mode. Instead of using the dishwasher every night, why not wash up by hand every other day? Ditch the tumble dryer when the weather allows you to dry your items outside, and use a fork or manual item to whisk and stir items instead of zapping them in a machine – you'll feel much more satisfied at the end of the recipe!

Finally, try a few of these quick tips to make your kitchen more energy efficient:

Only boil as much water as you need in a kettle

Wash fruit and vegetables in a bowl rather than under the tap

Choose a refrigerator with freezer on top – placing them side-by-side is less energy efficient

Choose energy efficient light fittings.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT APPLIANCE

When trying to use less energy in the home it's important to choose energy saving products to support your efforts. If your boilers on the blink, washing machine's is broken, or you're just considering investing in more energy efficient products, help is at hand to find the best appliances for the environment.

The Energy Saving Trust together with industry professionals and the government, has devised a system of grading household items and brands according to their energy efficiency and impact on the environment. Those that make the grade are awarded Energy Saving Recommended status. Look out for the blue Energy Saving logo on products and select these items instead of less energy efficient models.

There are more energy efficient models for different appliances that you might be aware. Here's a run through of the main products you can pick up if you're shopping for new household items.

Washing Machine

An energy saving washing machine uses, on average, a third of the energy used as that of a regular model. So a more efficient model is great way of saving money, particularly when you consider that on average households wash 274 cycles a year.

Also try to use your washing machine at a lower temperature. Washing clothes at 40 degrees rather than 60 uses a third less energy and will wash your clothes just as well.

Boiler

We rarely think of our boilers - until they fail. Boilers usually break down in winter so it's essential you make sure yours is up to scratch over the summer. If your boiler is over 15 years old, it's probably time you gave it the elbow and replaced it with a nice new energy efficient one. Condensing boilers are the most energy efficient and could save you around a third on your heating bills straight away, and even more if you upgrade to modern controls.

Additionally, you can save 10% on your energy bills simply by turning the thermostat down a degree. And if you're not planning to replace your boiler, installing an inexpensive boiler jacket helps keep it well insulated and stops it from losing heat.

Dishwasher

Dishwashers are a luxury that more and more of us now use— around one in four households. You should only switch on and use if you have a full load to save energy and water. Your dishwasher may also have an economy programme, which doesn't use as much water or electricity, so try to select this rather than a longer and more energy intensive one.

An energy saving dishwasher will also help your environmental efforts, working in the same way as a regular model but using 40% of the energy. This will also save you around £20 a year on your energy bills.

Fridge and Freezer

Fridges and freezers are essential appliances to keep our food fresh, but you can also help reduce your carbon emissions by investing in an energy saving recommended model. These use two thirds less energy. Again, you'll also benefit by saving nearly £50 a year on your electricity bills.

An awful lot of energy is needed to keep both fridges and freezers cold enough to store your food 24 hours a day. Try and keep them cool at all times to minimise extra energy being used- shut doors properly and quickly after use.

Insulation and Double Glazing

While not, strictly speaking, appliances, adding cavity wall or loft insulation as well as double glazing not only makes your home more energy efficient and better for the environment, but will also add value to your property.

Half of your home's heat loss is through the roof and walls, so insulating your property is a big energy and money saver. Cavity wall insulation pays for itself after five years and will give you average savings of £130-160 a year on energy bills. Loft insulation will also help reduce CO2 emissions by saving energy.

Double-glazing works in the same way, keeping the heat to make your home warm where it should be- inside your home. It's also an excellent extra security measure.

KEEPING YOUR HOUSE COMFORTABLE AND COSY

Particularly during the winter months is one of the biggest preoccupations in any household. As such, energy bills are one of the biggest expenses, even after recent announcements that many of the energy companies would be lowering their costs for customers.

This is why insulation is a vital investment for any household that's looking to curb its heating costs. Not only does it make heating your home more energy efficient and therefore use less energy to keep it adequately warm, it's also a much greener way of using energy.

Insulating your walls and your loft will reap the biggest energy saving benefits overall, as this is where around half of your heat is lost. There are also some simple money savers you should get started with. Whether you choose to adopt all or even one of them, you should certainly consider them for your property's wish list.

Quick Ways of Insulating Your Home

Before you start considering the bigger insulation jobs in your house, it's worthwhile to look at the smaller tasks you can complete inexpensively in order to start making savings to your energy consumption and bills immediately. Here are a few ideas:

Place foil along the back of a radiator –This reflects the heat away from the wall and instead back into the room rather than out of the house, so the heat stays where you want it to.

Draft excluders –You can purchase these inexpensively from a DIY shop or make your own using leftover carpet or material. Place them under doors and drafty areas to stop heat escaping.

Fit an insulating jacket on your boiler –This helps to prevent heat escaping at the source of its generation, and instead reach the rest of your house as it should do.

Now you know the basics, it's time to understand the two main types of insulation you could save money and energy by adopting loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.

Loft Insulation

The roof loses a third of the heat you use to keep your home warm, so insulating your loft has great energy and money saving benefits. It works by simply laying a sheet of insulating material over the floor of the loft, though you should leave it to a professional tradesman to carry out the practical work.

With this sort of insulation you can expect to pay in the region of £250 to install it, but the payback you'll get through the savings you should make on your energy bills should cover this cost within a year.

According to the Energy Saving Trust, if you currently have no loft insulation and you install the recommended 270mm depth you could save between £180 - £220 a year on your heating bills and nearly 1.5 tonnes of CO2 every year.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Cavity wall insulation works by inserting an insulating foam-like material between the two walls of your house. This helps to retain heat in your home more efficiently and prevent condensation. It's a fairly simple process that takes two to three hours for a professional to complete.

This type of insulation costs around £260 to install according to the Energy saving Trust. However, in the long term, you can expect to knock up to £160 off your bills each year. There are also government grants available for a certain number of households each month.

Cavity wall insulation is becoming more and more popular as people see the long-term benefits associated with insulation. Between 2002 and 2005, 800,000 households installed cavity wall insulation, saving around nearly 400,000 tonnes of CO2.

IN THE SUMMER

When the long sunny summer months arrive, it's time to get out of the house into the garden and the outdoors. It's not the traditional time for thinking about saving energy and reducing your home's bills. However, there are still things that can be done to keep your energy usage to sensible levels.

The hot weather can make even the most active of us a little lethargic, so take some quick and easy steps that won't interrupt your summer relaxation too much.

Keep Your Home Cool

Surprisingly, lots of people forget to turn off the heating in the summer, so when the warmer weather arrives, make sure you adjust your thermostat and boiler settings. In order to keep your home cool, open windows and back doors to allow cooler breezes to circulate around the house. Home insulation, which is usually associated with keeping your home warm in the winter, actually works by regulating the temperature throughout your home so it can keep it cool too.

Air conditioning units and fans can help to keep a room cool, but running them uses up a great deal of energy. If you're unable to open a window or find another way to keep cool naturally, keep the use of these high energy products to a minimum. This will also help to keep your electricity bills down.

In the Garden

It's great to get outdoors and enjoy the garden, but fight the temptation to use the hosepipe or sprinkler. It's still possible to keep the lawn pristine without using high quantities of water by investing in a water butt and watering can instead. A water butt collects and stores rainwater throughout the year, which you can then use free of charge to water your lawn and plants. You should also bear in mind the water restrictions operate in some parts of the UK and you'll be breaking the law if you used hosepipes or sprinklers anyway.

Summer Barbeques

The holiday season wouldn't be the same without a good barbeque to end a hot, sunny day. Keep yours green by purchasing locally produced meat, and using fresh and local vegetables. Buying local reduces the food miles each product travels in order to reach your plate. You should also support your local economy by getting your charcoal from near where you live.

Discover Local Beauty Spots

It's the perfect time of year to get out and about in your local community. Next time you decide to go on a trip, leave the car at home and cycle or walk instead. That way you'll be minimising carbon emissions and won't miss any hidden beauties. Taking a holiday in the UK rather than further afield is also a greener way to take a break, plus you'll be surprised what you'll discover on your doorstep.

AT HOME

Household chores are a daily – or at least weekly - task for most of us from vacuuming rooms and cleaning the bathroom or kitchen to doing the laundry. Getting the housework done is something probably nearly all of us do reluctantly, but, like many other things in the household, you can add a green twist to at least make the work more ethically friendly!

Take a look at our tips to washing and cleaning your home to leave it clean and green. It's easier than you think to keep your home and your habits spick and span. Plus, you might even manage to save yourself money on your energy bills and washing and cleaning products.

Doing the Laundry

There are lots of ways that you can make washing day more environmentally friendly. Washing machines and tumble dryers are both particularly high on energy consumption – so the less you can use them, the better. As soon as the weather allows it, dry your clothes outside on a washing line. The wind is free to use, will dry your clothes quickly and will save you on tumble dryer and radiator costs.

The type of cycle you use will also have an affect on the amount of energy you use. Washing clothes at 30 degrees will save up to 40% on your washing energy costs. The major washing powder and liquid brands, such as Ariel – who work with the Energy Saving Trust to promote their 'Turn to 30' campaign – all agree that the technological advances in their products mean it will work just as well at a lower temperature.

Air Freshening

You should check how you're freshening your home by ensuring the air fresheners you use are environmentally friendly and do not contain polluting materials, or potentially toxic substances that aren't good for you to be inhaling regularly. Again, use the outdoors, once weather allows, freshening your home. Open windows and let in the outdoor air to keep your home smelling fresh and feeling ventilated. You should also minimise the use of energy-guzzling air-conditioning systems.

Check those Chemicals

You should always read the ingredients of all the cleaning products you're using in the house. Bleach is powerful, corrosive and toxic, and other abrasive products will irritate your skin and eyes if you make contact.

As much as possible, only use the minimum amount of whatever you need to clean the kitchen surfaces, bath, shower and toilets. Also look for phosphate-free products that do not upset the balance the natural systems in rivers and lakes. Look for biodegradable products not based on petrochemicals.

Refill and Recycle

Always choose items that come with a refill option. This minimises the need to use more packaging than you need to, as you instead re-use the original product bottle that you buy. The great thing about refillable items is that they tend to be cheaper than the non-refillables.

Also, try and choose items that are available in recyclable containers.

Green Cleaning Tips

There are also plenty of inexpensive but natural, eco-friendly approaches to cleaning. Firstly, there are a number of 'green' cleaning brands, such as Ecover. This company offers items that use natural ingredients and won't harm your local environment.

Additionally, you could use your own everyday items as cleaning products. The following will clean your house just as effectively as bought chemical-based products, and offer a sweet-smelling, natural and eco-friendly element to your housework:

Soda crystals - Great at unblocking sinks

White vinegar -A natural disinfectant, stain remover and reduces mineral and lime deposits

Bicarbonate of soda (baking soda) - Mix with water to cut through grease and dirt on almost any surface, or use alone for tougher stains

Lemon - A natural bleaching and disinfecting agent which also smells great

Olive Oil - Use as a furniture polish to nourish wood.

Supermarkets have never been known as the most environmentally friendly of businesses. In fact they've been criticised for their overly packaged goods, building stores on green field land. Their 24-hour convenience-shopping ethos can also put a real strain on small, locally run stores.

However, with lower prices, long opening hours and a variety of goods under one roof, realistically, most of us will shop at a supermarket. By putting a bit more thought into our shopping trips to the supermarket, it is possible to go in with green intentions, come out with green products and minimise our effect on the environment.

Shop for Locally Produced Items

Supermarkets have gained the reputation of trampling on local business and agriculture by importing many goods from around the globe, which is also bad for the environment because of the carbon emissions created from the so-called 'food miles' used to transfer them.

However due to a revived interest in locally produced goods and pressure from consumers, many supermarkets offer a range of local products. You should check the packaging on an item, which will usually tell you where it originates. Always go for the locally grown goods to support small businesses and agriculture in your area.

Shop Organic and Fair Trade Products

The organic food market is a massive one – and growing year on year. Organic goods are naturally produced and grown with a minimal impact on the environment. No pesticides or chemicals are used, which is good news for rivers and local ecosystems. And the more popular it's becoming, the cheaper organic is becoming too.

Fair Trade is also growing in popularity. For items that are imported from overseas – for example coffee or bananas – always go for the fair trade option. This ensures that the farmer or producer of the item, particularly in developing countries, gets a fair price for their goods and are not being exploited.

CHANGING YOUR SHOPPING HABITS TO BECOME LOCALLY FRIENDLY

Firstly, it's about making the choice between purchasing an item made locally versus purchasing one that has had to be transported thousands of miles for a place on shop shelves. Secondly, it's about changing where we shop and how we go about our weekly or daily shopping, supporting small local businesses and food producers as well as making more ethical decisions about food from supermarkets.

Shopping local has many advantages, both for your convenience and the environment...

Good Food on Your Doorstep

A great thing about shopping local is the fact that you don't need to travel far to do it; that's the essence of supporting your local food producers. This means you don't necessarily need to use a car or public transport to do your shopping and can combine exercise – walking or cycling – with getting your shopping done.

Less Food Miles

Food in the UK travels 65% further than it did two decades ago, which means a product's so-called 'food miles' are on the increase. But you'll be surprised how many fruit, vegetables or other food products you can get from a local supplier. Buying locally eliminates the costs and environmental impact of transport, processing, packaging and advertising. Always take a look at the place of origin on a food product's packaging and try and select the one with the least food miles. If more people buy local, it will put pressure on suppliers to put more emphasis on the environmental impact of the products they sell.

Knowing Where Your Food's From

Consumers are more concerned than ever about where food comes from and the conditions it has been produced in – what with food scares and outbreaks hitting the headlines. With locally produced food, particularly when purchased from the place of origin, you know where your food has come from and can ask with confidence in what sort of conditions it has been grown or reared.

Supporting Your Local Economy

Another advantage is that shopping local has a direct positive impact on the local economy. Currently over 15% of people buy food locally and this number continues to rise as more opportunities are made available for people to support the local economy, including farmers' markets and local fruit and vegetable box schemes. Supporting local enterprise also creates a sense of community and allows you to purchase direct from the local producer rather than through a middleman.

Fresher, Tastier

Finally, the proof is in the pudding. As it's been produced locally, you can buy and eat your food almost immediately after production. This makes it fresh, tasty and of a higher quality. It also eradicates the need for chemical treatments that are often used on food to keep it fresh while it's transported and extend its shelf life.

The benefit of locally grown fresh food is that it can be consumed almost immediately after production leading to an increase in food quality and taste as it may be sold fresher and usually riper. Also, the need for chemical preservatives to artificially extend the shelf life can be reduced or eliminated.

DRIVE A LOW CARBON CAR

It's important to recognise that using cleaner forms of transport than the car is not always possible in day to day life. Making a car journey, particularly in rural areas or places not well served by public transport, can sometimes be the only realistic way of getting from A to B. Low carbon vehicles aren't as harmful than standard cars, so if you're going to drive a car, it ought to be a low carbon one.

Car manufacturers are increasingly aware that greener models of car are becoming more popular with people who are keen to minimise the impact they have on the environment when they need to drive. All new car models are now awarded an emissions rating, which will be able to tell you how green the car is.

Types of Low Carbon Vehicles

There are a number of options to consider when looking for a low carbon vehicle. Here's a selection of ideas:

Electric

Because electric cars do not use petrol, they do not emit CO₂ or toxics into the atmosphere when driving. There are no fuel costs involved, apart from the electricity needed to recharge them. Recharging needs to take place frequently, meaning that long journeys in an electric car aren't feasible. However they are particularly good for city driving. They are a popular car choice in Los Angeles, for example.

Hybrid

Hybrid cars work on the basis of using a mixture of both fuel technologies - electric and petrol power - to run. Because they depend on both forms of fuel they benefit by being able to complete much longer journeys, still producing lower CO₂ emissions than a regular petrol car. The Toyota Prius is probably the most well known example of a hybrid vehicle.

LPG and Other Gas Fuels

You can also buy vehicles that run on gas rather than petrol. Although still emitting CO₂ and carbon monoxide into the atmosphere, they do so to a much lower extent. One example is an LPG (liquid petroleum gas) fuelled vehicle, which produces around 10-15% less CO₂, 75% less carbon monoxide and 85% less hydrocarbons than a regular petrol burning car. The other good thing about gas vehicles is that gas is 50% cheaper than unleaded petrol.

Benefits of Low Carbon Vehicles

Driving a low carbon vehicle helps in the continuing fight against climate change. As you'll be emitting less CO₂ into the atmosphere, you'll be reducing the overall levels of CO₂ that are being pumped into the atmosphere creating the climate change problems we're seeing already in the world.

There are also a number of financial benefits to owning a low carbon vehicle. Firstly, your running and fuel costs should be lower than if you were in a standard car model – and will be lower still if you only drive your car when it's absolutely necessary. You may also be eligible for reductions in your car tax and congestion charges, such as the scheme in London.

So you've cut your energy consumption at home started recycling and cut down how much you use your car - what next to tackle in the pursuit of going green? Next on your list should be where you take your shopping list. Shopping local and investing in locally produced foods is another way to do your bit for the environment.

IN THE GARDEN AND WHEN MAKING HOME IMPROVEMENTS.

Select Natural Materials

If you use natural materials when doing home improvements you can lower your impact on the environment and at the same time, minimise your family's exposure to hazardous or toxic substances.

Where possible, try to avoid solvent-based finishes, paints, adhesives, carpeting, particleboard, MDF and many other building products that release toxins into the air. Breathing in these chemicals can be potentially dangerous to humans and isn't good for the atmosphere either. Plus, there's nearly always a greener, more natural alternative.

Use Recycled Products

Not only are recycled products good for the environment, they can also make highly original additions to your home. Instead of buying wood from a DIY store, try to see if you can find salvaged or reclaimed timber – it's cheaper and will have an original and natural finish. For other items, head down to your local salvage yard, where you can pick up goods for a low price or free of charge.

DIY the Green Way

If you're looking to enhance your property, or add value to it, there are many environmental ways in which to do this and lots of green benefits.

Firstly, installing cavity wall or roof insulation is a great way of cutting your energy bills by stopping heat from escaping your home. Insulating your walls will cost around £260 for an average sized home, but with an annual energy bill reduction of £130-160, the investment will pay for itself after two years.

Another DIY job with a green alternative is when installing windows. If you are getting new windows, opt for the much healthier wood frames rather than PVC ones. These are high in toxins and difficult to dispose of. You should also use low-emissive glass which helps to reflect heat into your room, stopping it from escaping.

Alternatively, if you're really handy, look into installing a wind turbine or solar panel to start harnessing your own natural and renewable energy.

Recycle Leftovers

Once you've finished making over your home, don't simply throw leftover materials away. Why not see if the neighbours might like any of your materials for some home improvements of their own?

Contact your local council to see if they have recycling facilities available in your local area to recycle your extra wood, paint or wallpaper. You should always be careful when disposing of materials that contain toxic or hazardous substances to minimise their impact on the environment.

In the Garden

There are plenty of ways to enjoy a healthy and flourishing garden without wasting precious water supplies and running up big water bills. You should harness natural rainwater as well as reusing water from the home on your grass, flowers and plants. Invest in a water butt. This collects and stores rainwater and allows you to tap into a free and natural supply when rainy weather is scarce. Even better, it's free of charge!

You can also use grey water – water that's already been used – to water plants as well. Instead of pouring dishwater down the sink after you've finished washing up, use it in the garden instead. Just make sure it doesn't contain damaging chemicals and is allowed to cool first.

Get Composting

A third of the rubbish you throw in the bin can actually be composted, and it's very simple to start your own composting bin off. You can compost your garden waste, vegetable and fruit peelings, ripped up cardboard and newspapers, and even old teabags. After a few months, your garden will benefit from nutrient soil.

The kitchen is the centre of most households – where meals are prepared eaten and enjoyed, and where much of the housework takes place. Of course this high level of activity tends to mean that a high quantity of energy is used up in order to make things run smoothly in the kitchen. However like with anything else in the home, you can make your kitchen more energy efficient by becoming more aware of the way you're using energy and taking steps to reduce your levels of energy consumption.