

Green at Home

Green your home for 2010

January 4, 2010

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SPECIAL TO YOURHOME.CA

Taken from

<http://www.yourhome.ca/homes/green/article/741548--green-your-home-for-2010>

At the start of each new year I want a clean start, similar to a spring clean. I yearn for order, structure, organization and cleanliness. I tackle closets, kitchen cupboards and shelves, getting rid of things we don't need or use and starting fresh. This year instead of cleaning house, I will be 'greening' my house.

Here are some tips to help you make your home greener in 2010:

Get an energy audit: I'm certain you have heard this before, but I can't stress enough how a proper audit will point out energy loss flaws. There are main culprits to look for, and the audit will emphasize the most effective way to reduce your energy consumption. You might be surprised at how much attention is paid to garages, laundry rooms, basements and other invisible areas.

Lighting: Start replacing all of your incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). You might balk at the initial cost, but they're more energy efficient and you'll need to replace them less frequently than traditional incandescents.

Off is the new on: Plug all your small appliances and electronic gear into power strips, and turn them off when you leave the house each day. The constant flashing on your alarm clock can remind you of the energy you are saving.

Season to season: Dress your bed like you would dress yourself. Your bed should have spring, summer, fall and winter outfits. Expand your comfort boundaries a notch or two by adjusting the thermostat a few degrees, and self insulate and ventilate as needed. Use a ceiling fan with multiple speeds to help moderate air movements, plus it makes calming, sleep inducing sounds.

Eliminate partial loads: This means in the washer, the dishwasher, and the freezer. You can dramatically reduce your energy and water consumption by changing your laundry practices and dishwashing duties.

Water conservation: About 65 per cent of household water use occurs in the bathroom, so it's a great place to start making changes. A dripping tap wastes five gallons of water a day, and fixing a leak can save up to \$50 a year.

Paint: Every house needs painting at some point, so what better time to use a green product? Many people redecorate every couple of years, which is fine if they use a non-toxic, low-VOC paint. VOC stands for volatile organic compounds, which are toxic gases that can diminish air quality and cause respiratory problems and allergic

reactions. Many paint companies are now on board with green paints, and offer a large choice of colours and finishes.

Get rid of toxic shower curtains: Plastic curtains are made of flexible PVC (polyvinyl chloride) which studies say can emit toxic compounds. Many retailers including Ikea and Bed Bath & Beyond now offer plastic shower curtains and liners made with EVA (ethylene vinyl acetate) or PEVA (polyethylene vinyl acetate). These plastics don't contain chlorine, which is the basis of many of the health concerns related to PVC.

If your bathroom is big enough, consider an open shower design or using a glass door or partition. It's a more durable, and therefore a greener alternative to plastic shower curtains, and at the end of its life, the glass can be recycled easily.

Pre-cycle: For the waste conscious, precycling is the next best thing. It's about learning how to limit and reuse household waste. Reduce what goes into your recycling box and prevent potential waste from entering your home, which eases pressure on landfill sites.

Live small: Size matters when it comes to home efficiency. If you are building new, or renovating, go small. If you aren't doing either, then just live small. Or move!

Melody Wren is a perennial writer, and in an effort to avoid being an environmental nuisance, she is recycling, reusing, repurposing, rediscovering, reupholstering and researching ways to live a greener life in a greener home. Visit her website at www.melodywren.com