

25 Ways to GO GREEN

EXPERTS SHARE TIPS FOR ENERGY SAVINGS, WATER CONSERVATION,
INDOOR AIR QUALITY, LAWN CARE AND WASTE REDUCTION



LEFT:
After a thunderstorm, outdoor air quality is at its best, so open doors and windows to bring fresh air inside.
© Sandra Henderson

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

By R. Bruce W. Anderson, PhD

TIP 1. BRING IN FRESH AIR

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the quality of air in homes and offices is worse than outdoors. Bring in fresh air when the outdoor air quality is at its best. After a thunderstorm, a lot of things that you don't want to breathe have been washed from the outdoor air. In addition, lightning causes "fall out" of other air pollutants. Open doors and windows, and perhaps use fans to bring fresh air in to replace stale air.

TIP 2. OUTDOOR AREA

Provide an outdoor area, protected from the elements, perhaps a covered porch or a gazebo, for the convenience of resident or visiting smokers, and insist that the indoors remain smoke free.

TIP 3. NIX SCENTED AIR FRESHENERS

Do not use scented air fresheners or other scented products that merely mask household odors while actually contributing to the chemical pollutants in the air. Use unscented candles and oil lamps sparingly. These forms of illumination add charm at dinnertime, but they also emit smoke and soot particles that are not good to breathe.

TIP 4. REPLACE CLEANERS

Replace household cleaners containing chlorine or ammonia with cleaners that do not contain these or other harmful ingredients. There are many good products on the market today, such as the Get Clean products from the Shaklee Corporation, as seen on Oprah. Shaklee biodegradable cleaning products are effective and economical and don't contribute to water pollution as the rinse water goes down the drain.

TIP 5. GET AN AIR CLEANING DEVICE

Invest in an air cleaning device that is appropriate for your needs and air quality goals. There are many such devices on the market, such as the Air Source from Shaklee, which removes particulates out of the air, removes

odors and kills airborne bacteria, molds and viruses. It's also economical to operate at only 20 watts.

Dr. R. Bruce W. Anderson taught Research Methodology, Statistics, Sociology of Language, Sociology of Intercultural Communication and Sociology of Medicine for 30 years before retiring to pursue other interests. At present he works part time as a Wellness Educator, and full time as Winemaker at Sunset Winery in Burleson, Texas. For information about Shaklee products go to www.Shaklee.com/live-well.

ENERGY SAVINGS

By Joe Willix

TIP 1. TURN IT OFF

Somewhere along the line, we decided it would be a great if appliances or devices would be on at all times ready for us to use at our every whim. That uses a lot of electricity. Save a little money each month by turning off computers, cell phone chargers, TVs and battery chargers.

TIP 2. INVEST IN A KILL A WATT

Save hundreds by investing a few bucks in a Kill A Watt. Plug anything into the Kill A Watt and it will measure how much electrical energy anything in your house is using. It's a great way to find out if your old refrigerator needs to be replaced.

TIP 3. DO NOTHING

"The Do Nothing Strategy" calculates how much homeowners will spend on electricity and gas if they keep doing the same thing for the next 25 years. Remember the number \$160,804.92. That is how much you will spend if your home uses an average of \$200 per month on electricity including the average 7 percent annual electric rate increases over the next 25 years. From January through May 2008 TXU's rates went up 17 percent, so it's time to think about generating your own electricity with solar or wind power.

TIP 4. PRODUCE YOUR OWN ELECTRICITY AT HOME

Invest in your own solar energy or wind energy system. A 2 kilowatt solar energy system or a 2 kilowatt wind turbine will produce about 3,200 kilowatt-hours a year. You can install either of these systems for less than \$20,000, and they will produce energy for the next 25 to 40 years. Start small: You can easily expand the solar energy or wind energy system size later. Both solar and wind energy are clean energies with zero emissions.

TIP 5. NEVER REPLACE YOUR AIR CONDITIONER

When your air conditioner dies, don't replace it. Invest in a geothermal cooling and heating system, which will reduce your electric usage and your cooling/heating electric bill by more than 50 percent. Air conditioning and heating typically represent 60 percent of your total monthly electric bill. Geothermal uses the moderate temperature of the earth, which is 55 degrees to 72 degrees six feet below the surface, to cool and heat your



ABOVE: Avoid high energy prices and invest in a solar energy or wind energy system for your home. © magann

home. These machines are up to four times more efficient than an air conditioner. They also are so quiet that they are installed indoors away from the heat and cold. A geothermal cooling system will pay for itself in a few years.

Joe Willix is President of Dallas-based SWG Energy, a renewable energy company that specializes in the design and installation of solar energy, wind energy and geothermal cooling systems. 214.870.4332, www.swgenergy.com

GREEN GARDENING

By Collin County Master Gardeners

TIP 1. RECYCLE YARD WASTES

An obvious benefit derived from recycling yard wastes is the reduction of bulk that makes it into the landfill. An often overlooked advantage is the benefit to the garden. In a forest, leaves and branches fall to the ground and are left there undisturbed where they eventually decompose. This process returns nutrients to the earth. The natural recycling process keeps the plants healthy and vibrant. Likewise, leave grass clippings on the lawn so they can return nutrients to the soil. They provide a light layer of mulch, which helps moderate the soil's temperature and moisture. Shred autumn leaves and chip fallen branches to use as mulch for the wintering of plants or put them in a compost pile.

TIP 2. COMPOST

The leaves and branches that have been shredded and chipped make a terrific start to an outdoor compost bin. Add to this base most kitchen wastes, and a nutrient-rich organic fertilizer is created. Composting can be as simple as throwing the waste material on a pile in the back yard or in a bin made of chicken wire. Most of the manufacture brands will keep rodents at bay and reduce odors. Worm composting is a great activity that will get children interested in the process and creates a powerful macro- and micro-nutrient organic material that does miracles in the garden.

TIP 3. CAPTURE AND USE RAINWATER

The earth has a finite amount of water, and as our population grows, it is necessary to examine how this precious resource is utilized. It is not uncommon for people to use up to 50 percent of city water on landscape irrigation. This is wasteful and not a good use of water that has been filtered and processed for human consumption. Rainwater collection is a simple process and the rewards are numerous. Plants perform much better when managed with rainwater. Unlike city-processed water, rainwater is chemical free, naturally soft and does not have the salts and other minerals commonly found in treated water. Using treated water causes salts and minerals to build up in the soil and it has a negative impact on plants. Capture rainwater in barrels from guttering downspouts or direct rainfall directly into a garden. ▶

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25 green tips



For a beautiful, drought-tolerant landscape, use native plants and those that have adapted to the local weather conditions.

WATER CONSERVATION

By Denise Hickey, North Texas Municipal Water District

TIP 1. LEARN TO READ YOUR WATER METER

Left in disrepair, water leaks waste a tremendous amount of water and can develop into more serious problems. Your water meter keeps track of how much water your household uses. The water meter is usually located along the sidewalk or in the front yard of your home. You can check for leaks on individually metered residences using your meter. While no water is being used inside or outside, check the meter to see if the dials are progressing, indicating water is being metered. If the lower indicator (triangle or star) is turning, there is a leak. Or note the location of the pointer and the last two numbers on the far right window. Do not run water for 30 minutes. If the pointer has moved or the numbers have progressed, there is a leak. It pays to repair leaks promptly.

TIP 2. MAINTAIN YOUR LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Nationally, landscape irrigation consumes more than half of all water supplied to homes and much of it is wasted. Check your system frequently for broken or misdirected spray that can cause overspray onto pavement. Adjust, clean or replace malfunctioning spray heads. Have an irrigation audit performed annually to ensure your system is leak free. Operate your system manually. This prevents the system from operating during or after a rain event. Set your system controller to apply the correct amount of water for your landscaping needs. Run your system for two or three short cycles instead of one long cycle to ensure that the water soaks into the ground rather than running off your yard. If you do not have an automatic irrigation system, use sprinklers that disperse large drops of water close to the ground.

TIP 3. LEAKS WASTE WATER AND COST MONEY

Check your toilets for leaks. A leak in the toilet can waste 20 gallons of water per day. To determine if your toilet has a leak, put a few drops of food coloring or a leak detection tablet in the toilet tank. After 15 minutes, check the bowl to see if there is dye color in the water. If there is, or you see water flowing into your bowl, it's time to replace the flapper. The flapper is the rubber flush valve that controls the volume of water passing from the tank to the bowl during the flush cycle. After installing a new flapper, run the dye test again to ensure that the leak is repaired. If the leak persists, contact a plumbing professional for repair. To reduce your indoor water use by as much as 20 percent, install low-flow toilets.

TIP 4. SAVE WATER WHILE DOING THE LAUNDRY

Clothes washers are one of the highest water users in the home. Installation of a high-efficiency clothes washer can save thousands of gallons of water per year and provide energy savings. Be sure to run only full loads of clothing, matching the water level with the load size. Set the wash and rinse cycle temperatures to cold water to save on energy costs. Some cities offer rebates for water- and energy-saving washers. Check with your salesperson or city staff to see if a rebate is available. Check your water supply hose frequently for leaks or cracks. Replace the supply hose periodically to prevent leakage and potentially costly water damage to your home. Consult your clothes washer owner's manual on other areas to check for potential leaks.

TIP 5. POOL OR SPA LEAKS

Swimming pool or spa leaks can cause substantial damage and result in huge water bills. Some warning signs of pool or spa leaks are: a loss of

TIP 4. USE WATER WISELY IN THE GARDEN

One way to reduce dependence on water in the garden is to choose plants that are satisfied with the local rainfall. Look for native plants and those that have adapted to the local weather conditions. A terrific source for these plants is the Texas SmartScape Web site (www.txsmartscape.com). Mulch plants well to decrease the effects of evaporation. If an irrigation system is necessary, consider using drip irrigation, which delivers water precisely to the roots of plants with little to no waste. Replace water-guzzling grass in the landscape with a hardscape or a plant bed.

TIP 5. REDUCE THE USE OF CHEMICALS

If some of the above suggestions are put into practice, a reduction in the need for chemicals will naturally occur. Add to that an increase in the use of organics, and it might be surprising how little chemicals are needed at all. The use of compost and the recycling of leaf and grass clippings give the plants the exact nutrients required, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. If fertilizers are deemed necessary, opt for the organic slow release type. Use Texas natives in the garden and there will be little need for chemical pest and disease management materials. Texas natives have natural resources to fight pests and diseases. A wonderful resource for plants that require little to no chemical intervention is the Texas Superstar Plants Web site (www.gotexan.org).

The Master Gardener Program is a volunteer organization and is part of The Texas AgriLife Extension Service. With education as the primary focus, Collin County Master Gardeners conduct horticulture-oriented programs and projects throughout the county. Contact the horticulture Help-Line at 972.548.4232 or go to www.ccmgatx.org.

25 green tips



ABOVE: Create less waste by using a canvas shopping bag, such as this one by EcoBags (www.ecobags.com).

BELOW: Install a high-efficiency clothes washer to save thousands of gallons of water per year and provide energy savings.



one-quarter inch or more of water in a two-day period, loose or falling tiles, algae formation after chemical treatment and cracks or gaps in the decking or pool shell. To determine if water loss is caused by evaporation or a leak, place a bucket on the top step of the pool and fill it with water even with the water level in the pool. After a day, if the water level in the pool is lower than that of the bucket, a leak might exist. A pool professional can locate and repair the leak. To minimize evaporation, use pool covers and reduce the use of fountains and waterfalls. Also maintain proper chemical levels to prevent water quality issues that require draining your pool.

North Texas Municipal Water District is a wholesale treated water provider to 61 cities and water supply corporations north and east of the DFW Metroplex, serving approximately 1.6 million citizens. Contact 972.442.5405 or www.ntmwd.com.

WASTE REDUCTION

By Jeffrey Jacoby, Texas Campaign for the Environment

TIP 1: BUY LESS STUFF

The most effective way to reduce the amount of waste your household produces is to buy less stuff. When we consume a given product, the amount of energy used and waste generated in the manufacturing process is often many times greater than disposing of the product itself. In fact, 71 garbage cans' worth of industrial waste are produced for each can of discarded products and packaging set out at curbside. Whenever possible, reuse or repair old stuff rather than simply buying new.

TIP 2: PLAN AHEAD

Reduce your footprint with just a little foresight. Use recycling bins and canvass shopping bags, fill up a long-lasting metal or hard plastic water bottle at home or from a fountain instead of buying the single-use variety to eliminate your contribution to the 40 million plastic bottles a day that end up in landfills and save hundreds of gallons of petroleum (used in making the plastic) over a lifetime. Rather than picking up that disposable coffee cup from Starbucks, bring a thermos or travel mug to reduce paper waste.

TIP 3: COMPOST ORGANIC WASTE

If Americans kept organic materials such as food scraps, yard trimmings and paper out of landfills, we could cut our annual waste stream in half. Regrettably, only a few cities in North Texas provide curbside pickup and compost operations for organic waste. Unless you live in one of those cities, you have to take matters into your own hands. Check out online composting guides and the EPA's grasscycling site for more information.

TIP 4: ADVOCATE FOR TAKEBACK INITIATIVES

In the high-tech industry, companies are beginning to take back their old products for reuse and recycling. Because these companies want to maximize efficiency by recovering reusable raw materials while minimizing the cost of disposal and recycling, producer takeback gives them an economic incentive to design recyclable products that last longer, contain fewer toxins and create less waste. One initiative is the Texas Computer TakeBack Law, which passed last year with the support of tens of thousands of Texans. The law takes effect this year on Sept 1. Tell your lawmakers to extend these takeback initiatives to include other electronics and anything needing a viable recycling option.

TIP 5: NOT OUT OF SIGHT, NOT OUT OF MIND

More than anything, waste reduction is a mindset. When we buy something, use it for a minute and then toss it in the trash, it's typically hauled off to a dump somewhere — out of sight, out of mind. Conversely, when we pay attention to the potential repercussions of our actions, we are already moving away from the disposable culture that creates mountains of waste toward a sustainable environmental future.

Texas Campaign for the Environment is a grassroots nonprofit working locally and statewide to press for sustainable waste and recycling policies. 214.599.7840 or www.texasenvironment.org

