

Eco-Tips: Practical Ideas for Earth-Friendly Living. *Everyone is looking for ways to cut spending these days, and to prevent harmful climate change, we need to cut our energy use as much as possible. Here are things we can do FOR FREE to save energy AND money. Please share them with others.*

Put your PC to sleep. Don't leave your computer and its monitor turned on around the clock. You stand to use 80 percent less electricity by shifting to sleep mode when it is not in use. Simply turning off your monitor will save \$1 a day!

Turn down the heat in the winter, and turn down the cool in the summer. Lower the thermostat (in winter) 5° to 10° F when you're sleeping, or are out of the house. "A 10° decrease can cut your heating bill by as much as 20 percent." In the summer, for every degree you raise the thermostat setting for the air-conditioner, you can expect to cut your cooling costs by at least 3 percent.

Lower the shades and raise the windows. Be old-fashioned and use your windows and shades to help cool your house. Pull the shades in west-facing rooms in the afternoon. At night, if the forecast calls for cooler temperatures and low humidity, give the AC a rest. Open windows upstairs and down, and use window fans.

Take care of your air conditioner, and it will take care of you. Your air conditioner will run more efficiently if you clean or replace its filter every other week during heaviest use. Keep leaves and other debris away from the central air's exterior condenser, and keep the condenser coils clean.

Drive steadily—and a bit slower. Hard acceleration and abrupt braking uses more fuel than starting and slowing more moderately. Keeping down your overall speed matters, too, because aerodynamic drag increases dramatically as you drive faster. If you travel at 65 mph instead of 55, you are penalized by lowering your mileage 12.5 percent. If you get your vehicle up to 75 mph, you're losing 25 percent compared with mileage at 55 mph.

Roof racks are a drag. Most cars are reasonably streamlined, but you work against their slipperiness if you carry things on the roof. A loaded roof rack can decrease an SUV's fuel efficiency by 5% and that of a more aerodynamic car by 15% or more. Even driving with empty racks wastes gas.

Stick with regular. If your car's manufacturer specifies regular gas, don't buy premium. You'd be spending more with no benefit. Most cars have built-in sensors that adjust the engine timing to the gas in the tank. Even if the owner's manual recommends high-octane gas, ask the dealership about switching to regular.

No loitering. Don't let the engine run at idle any longer than necessary. After starting the car in the morning, begin driving right away; don't let it sit and "warm up" for several minutes. An engine actually warms up faster while driving. With most gasoline engines, it's more efficient to turn off the engine than to idle longer than 30 seconds.

Spend less for hot water. Set the hot water heater at 120° F (or the "low" setting), which is hot enough for most needs. If the tank feels warm to the touch, consider wrapping it with conventional insulation or a blanket made for that purpose. To help conserve the water's heat on its way to the faucets, insulate the plumbing with pipe sleeves; with these, you can raise the end-use temperature by 2° to 4° F.

Wash clothes in cold water. You might guess that most of the energy used by a washing machine goes into vigorously swishing the clothes around. In fact, about 90% of it is used to heat the water

for the load. You can save substantially by washing and rinsing at cooler temperatures. Warm water helps the suds to get at the dirt, but cold-water detergents will work effectively for just about everything in the hamper.

Hang it up. Clotheslines aren't just a bit of backyard nostalgia, and this works even for busy people! You spare the energy a dryer would use, and your clothes will smell fresh without the perfumes in fabric softeners and dryer sheets. You'll also get more useful life out of your clothes - all that lint in the dryer is just your clothing wearing out!

Let the dishwasher do the work. Don't bother pre-rinsing dishes- this added step can waste 20 gallons of heated water a day. All you need to do is to scrape off leftover food. Enzyme-based detergents will help make sure the dishes emerge spotless.

Think twice before turning on the oven. If you have a microwave, know that it uses only 20 percent of the energy required by a full-sized oven. And while the second-hand heat from the oven may be welcome in winter, it can put an added load on your air conditioner in warmer months.

Use the right pan. When cooking on the stovetop, pick your pan - then put it on an element or burner that's roughly the same size. Steam foods instead of boiling - there is less water to heat and you lose fewer nutrients. If you do boil, be sure to put a lid on the pot to make the water come to a boil faster.

Dust off the Crock-Pot. Slow cooking in a Crock-Pot uses a lot less energy than simmering on the stove.

Clean the coils on your refrigerator using a tapered appliance brush. Your fridge's motor won't have to run as long or as often. In addition to saving energy dollars, you'll prolong the life of the appliance.

Read the label. The EnergyGuide label, that is. When you shop for a new appliance, look for the label that gives an estimate of annual energy consumption. To help make sense of that statistic, the label states the highest and lowest figures for similar models.

AND IF YOU DON'T MIND SPENDING A FEW DOLLARS...

1. A tighter home is a toastier home. Insulation is an important way to tighten your house, but first, seal those leaks with inexpensive foam strips and caulking. This can cut your heating and cooling bills by 5 to 30 percent.

2. Try do-it-yourself low-E windows. If your windows don't have a low-E coating, consider applying a self-adhesive film on the glass. This treatment is a lot cheaper than replacing the units, and better-quality films are quite durable.

3. Use a programmable thermostat. Heating and cooling eat up roughly half of a typical home's energy bill, according to the Department of Energy. The easiest way to save, short of sweating or shivering, is to use programmable thermostats. They can pay for themselves in about a year.

4. Switch to those funny-looking fluorescents. A single CFL bulb can save from \$25 to \$45 over its life. And it's a long life: Manufacturers claim that CFLs last between 5 and 13 times longer than standard incandescent bulbs