

Go GREEN, Save GREEN

You don't have to build from scratch to have a greener home. These quick and easy home fixes will shrink your consumption and your monthly bills.

RATE IT. Look for Energy Star-rated products. This government program helps people make energy-efficient choices, which can lead to savings of up to a third of energy costs.



SWITCH THE LIGHTS. Compact fluorescent light bulbs use up to 75 percent less energy than traditional bulbs. Replace them in highly used fixtures such as porch lights, bathroom vanities and office lamps.

GO WITH THE FLOW. Use low-flow showerheads and consider installing low-flow toilets to reduce water usage and save on water-heating costs.

PLUG IN, TURN OFF. Use a power strip for your home office or home entertainment center. Even in standby mode, consumer electronics — which account for 15 percent of household electricity — use a little juice, so turn the power strip off when you can.

COOL IT. Turn the water temperature for your washing machine or dishwasher down to 120° F to cut water-heating energy consumption.

SEAL IT. Search for hidden air leaks in your attic, basement or crawl space, and seal them with caulk, spray foam or weather stripping. Home sealing can be an inexpensive way to cut energy consumption by up to 10 percent.

Sources: www.energystar.gov, www.eere.energy.gov

Stage Coach



Even if your bowling trophies and musty shag carpet feel like home to you, they might turn off potential buyers. That's why staging — as seen on TV — has become a popular technique to help sell houses. But home staging is more than just redecorating; it's a way to help potential buyers feel like your house could be their next home.

It might seem counterintuitive to spend money on a home that you're leaving, but the cost might be worth it. According to StagedHomes.com, a leading home-staging organization, the final sale price on staged homes increased an average of 3 percent versus those that were not. Staged homes also typically spend 80 percent less time on the market.

Staging doesn't have to be expensive or overwhelming. If you don't know where to begin, talk to your REALTOR®, who can offer advice or help you find a professional stager. A basic consultation with a home staging professional might cost \$200 to \$400 depending on the market, but some are complimentary.

If you want to do it yourself, start outside. Clean the sidewalk and driveway and, if possible, add a fresh coat of paint to the house, garage door or railings. Use potted plants and new light fixtures for flash at the front door.

Inside, keep things clean and clutter-free. Pick impersonal art over family pictures. Purge unnecessary belongings, and stow what you can't throw away in decorative baskets. Sparsely arrange furniture away from walls. Add accents with mirrors, plants, rugs, pillows, colorful cookbooks, fruit bowls and other accessories. Focus on lighting, from soft bedroom lamps to natural light from open drapes.

Sources: HGTV.com, StagedHomes.com

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Think of Benjamin Franklin when you "spring forward" on March 8. Many credit a humorous essay he wrote in 1784 as a source of the idea for Daylight Saving Time.

Source: www.realsimple.com



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