

10 Things You Can Do to Protect the Environment



1. Use cloth bags instead of plastic bags to carry home your groceries.

Plastic bags are made from nonrenewable petroleum and require the use of toxic resources during production and processing. Plastic bags don't biodegrade, they photodegrade—breaking down into smaller and smaller toxic bits contaminating soil and waterways and entering the food web when animals accidentally ingest. Plastics production produces 14% of toxic air emissions in the United States.



2. Adjust your thermostat up two degrees in the summer and down two degrees in the winter.

You can conserve energy in the winter by setting the thermostat to 68°F while you're awake and setting it lower while you're asleep or away from home. During the summer months, lower the thermostat setting to 78°F when you are home. Programmable thermostats help to avoid discomfort by regulating the temperatures for times you are sleeping or regularly out of the house for work or school. You can save as much as 1% for each degree if the setback period is eight hours long.



3. Keep your water heater at no higher than 120°F.

For each 10°F reduction in water temperature, you can save between 3%–5% in energy costs. Although some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140°F, most households usually only require them set at 120°F. Reducing your water temperature to 120°F also slows mineral buildup and corrosion in your water heater and pipes. This helps your water heater last longer and operate at its maximum efficiency.



4. Unplug electronic devices as they may use electricity even when turned off.

Many electrical appliances continue to use a small amount of energy when turned "off." In order to easily turn off electronic devices when not in use, connect several appliances to a surge suppressing power outlet strip with an on/off switch. When the devices are not in use, flip the switch and your devices will not draw electricity.



5. Use Sylvania compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs and LED display lights instead of regular bulbs.

CFLs last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, use two-thirds less energy, and give off 70 percent less heat. If every U.S. family replaced one regular light bulb with a CFL, it would eliminate 90 billion pounds of greenhouse gases, the same as taking 7.5 million cars off the road. Alternatively, LEDs are low-voltage, low-current devices and efficient light sources. LEDs produce no UV radiation and little heat.



6. Change your home air filter as recommended by the manufacturer.

Regularly replacing or cleaning your air conditioner's filters ensures the efficiency of the unit because clogged and dirty filters block normal air flow. With normal air flow obstructed, air that bypasses the filter may carry dirt directly into the evaporator coil and impair the coil's heat-absorbing capacity. You can lower your air conditioner's energy consumption by 5%–15% by keeping your air filter clean.



7. Only run your dishwasher when it is full.

The average dishwasher in American homes today uses 8.7 gallons of water a load. Washing by hand for 10 minutes with water running can use 20 gallons. So, running your dishwasher is greener than hand-washing, but only if you running full loads to conserve more water.



8. Use less hot water by installing a low-flow shower head and washing clothes in cold water.

A low-flow shower head and faucet aerators can reduce your water heating costs by approximately 50 percent. They also save the amount of water you use, and thanks to advanced technology, you can save water and energy without sacrificing water pressure. Additionally, wash your clothes in cold water to reduce your use of hot water and the energy required to produce it. That change alone can save at least 500 pounds of carbon dioxide annually in most households.



9. Minimize packaging and recycle more of your household waste.

Choose reusable products instead of disposables. Reduce waste by buying products with minimal packaging and buying economy sizes. Recycle paper, plastic, newspaper, glass, and aluminum cans. By recycling half of your household waste, you can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide annually.



10. Plant a tree to help absorb carbon dioxide.

Trees and other plants absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, but there are too few of them to counter the increases in carbon dioxide caused by automobile combustion, manufacturing, and other human activities. A single tree will absorb approximately one ton of carbon dioxide during its lifetime.

Resources

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