



Resource Conservation

Landscaping to Save Water

The average American family uses 320 gallons of water every day, the Environmental Protection Agency says, and about 30% of that goes to outdoor uses.

Landscape irrigation accounts for nearly 9 billion gallons of fresh water every day. You can save some of this fresh, clean water for drinking by choosing landscaping that sips rather than sucks down water.

GO NATIVE

Choose plants that are native to your region. They require less maintenance over all and very little in the way of water, especially after they're established in your yard. They're also more hardy and can improve your soil and create wildlife habitat. Ask the specialists at your local home and garden center about available native plants for use in your garden.

PLAN AND PLANT EARLY

Plan your garden so that you're planting in the spring, which keeps your plants out of the water-sucking summer heat. You can also add compost and mulch to keep the plant's roots nice and wet. Leave space around the base of each plant and resist the urge to mound mulch around plants and trees. You also want to plan to use any sprinklers or



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other irrigation earlier in the day, before the heat of the day evaporates the water for your plants. Drip irrigation systems can also use less water than traditional sprinklers, the American Society of Landscape Architects says, up to 20-50% less.

You may also want to consider adding things to your soil

that will enable it to better absorb water and encourage deeper roots.

REUSE, RECYCLE EVEN YOUR WATER

Use graywater or captured rainwater instead of water from your local municipality. Look for irrigation systems that run off your home's used water

systems — keeping that water out of sewers — or rainwater caught in tanks.

CUT DOWN ON THE LAWN

Consider replacing that thirsty grass with other groundcovers that are drought-resistant or native plantings, cover less area, and

may even require little or no mowing. That'll cut down on your carbon emissions, too, and give you more time in your weekend.

When in doubt, give your water provider a call. Some utility services offer free or low-cost audits to run through your family's water usage and suggest ways to cut it down.

Everyday Ways to Save Energy

Saving energy at home can save you big on your utility bills and save our precious Earth, all at the same time.

The good news is that many of these changes are easy to make and may even improve your life in other ways. Keep reading to learn more.

CHOOSE NATURAL LIGHT

Turn off the lamps and go with natural light. IGS Energy says that studies have shown that natural light can also boost serotonin levels in your brain, making you feel more happy and relaxed. Arrange your working and living spaces to take maximum advantage of any natural light. Choose curtains and blinds that keep out most of the sun's heat while allowing natural light filter through to your space.

HIT THE POWER BUTTON

It seems so simple — turn things off when you're not using them — but we've all forgotten to turn off the TV or the computer before leaving. Set timers to make sure your electronics turn off when you're not using them and get into the habit of turning off lights when you leave the room. Ask your computer to go into hibernate mode after not being used for a certain amount of time.



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GET A SMART THERMOSTAT

Don't be intimidated. Smart thermostats can save you a lot of energy and money, and many of them will even pay for themselves a couple times over in the long run. Some models can even learn your schedule with minimal input from you to automatically adjust for

when you're out or asleep.

CHECK YOUR INSULATION

Have an expert come out to your home and check that your insulation is doing the best job that it can keeping out winter's chill and summer's heat. Improper insulation means that your climate control systems are working hard-

er to keep your family comfortable. Some utility services may offer this for free or very low cost, and there may even be rebates available to help your family home get properly insulated.

CUT BACK ON HOT WATER

A lot of energy goes into

keeping a tank full of hot water.

Reduce the number of baths your family takes in favor of more efficient showers. And limit your time in the shower to use less hot water. Wash your family's clothes in cool or cold water, if you can, and run the dishwasher only when it's full.

Chop Up Food Waste

Every year, the world wastes about 1.4 billion — yes, billion with a B — tons of food.

The U.S. alone tosses out 80 billion pounds of food, sustainable services provider RTS says. Food is the single largest component of U.S. landfills. You can stop that. Here's how.

READ THE LABELS

RTS says more than 80% of Americans discard consumable food because they don't understand expiration labels. The labels that say sell by are not the same as use by or best by. Product dating is not required by federal regulations and the labels on the dates help consumers decide when the food is of best quality, not when it's safe to eat, the USDA says.

EMOTIONAL EATING — AND SHOPPING

America is a land of plenty and we can get most foods whenever and now, with more delivery services since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, wherever we want them. This means that we're more impulsive in our food purchases, tending to buy more than we'll eat. We also fail to compost or otherwise effectively reuse the scraps of food we leave behind.

CHANGING LAWS

Some states are actually legislating food waste, introducing laws to make it more difficult



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to waste food. California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont restrict the amount of food waste in landfills. Pending legislation in California, Colorado and Massachusetts would fund composting and organic-waste collection programs. Maine and Rhode Island have intro-

duced legislation to reduce food waste in schools, and the USDA and EPA have both pledged to reduce food waste by half by 2030.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

RTS has these hints for how to cut down on your family's food waste:

- Freeze food that can't be eaten immediately but may be used later.
- Donate food to food pantries or take leftovers to friends or neighbors who might need it.
- Plan your meals and be deliberate with grocery lists.
- Don't eschew ugly fruits

and vegetables. They still taste the same, even if they have a blemish.

- Think when you eat out and choose to take leftovers home or split a dish with someone else. Rethink all-you-can-eat buffets, which prompt people to take more food than they could eat.

Slowing Down Fuel Usage

America is, by and large, a car-based society. We hop in our cars to go to school, work and play.

In 2019, the Census Bureau said the average one-way commute jumped to 27.6 minutes, increasing about 10% over 14 years. In 2020, those commuters and other Americans burned 123.73 billion barrels of finished gasoline, or about 338 million gallons per day. Here's how you can reduce your fuel bill.

TAKE IT EASY

Speeding, braking and gunning it are all great ways to waste gas. Poor driving habits can drop your fuel economy by 15-30%, Investopedia says, toasting between 31 cents and \$1.24 per gallon.

Gas mileage also decreases above 50 miles per hour, so tone it down all the way around and save big at the pump.

CLEAN IT UP

Most of us haul everything but the kitchen sink (and, OK, maybe that, too) with us in our cars. An additional 100 pounds in your car (that adds up fast if you're in any way connected with youth sports) can reduce gas mileage by up to 1%. Keep totes with sports gear and other things you frequently haul in your garage and change them out as needed.



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TURN IT OFF

Idling your car nets you exactly zero miles per gallon. The California Energy Commission says that cars should be turned off if the expected wait will be longer than 10 seconds. Turn off the engine. You'll save about 3 cents per minute.

DO YOUR MAINTENANCE

Check your tire pressure. Underinflated tires can waste 1.25 billion gallons of gas per year. Check your tires at least monthly (they can lose about 2 pounds per square inch in pressure per month) and pay attention to your check tire light when it comes on.

Follow the guidelines on your vehicle's door sticker and not what's on the tire.

Also have your tires aligned and balanced regularly, according to your vehicles specifications.

You should also replace your spark plugs on a regular schedule. The National

Institute for Automotive Service Excellence says that bad spark plugs can decrease fuel economy by a shocking 03% and cost drivers about 94 cents per gallon.

If you notice a sudden drop in your miles per gallon, have a mechanic check your spark plugs.

Shrink Your Carbon Footprint

A carbon footprint, the Nature Conservancy says, is the total amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by your actions.

To have the best chance of avoiding a two-degree hike in global temperatures, the average global carbon footprint needs to drop under two tons by 2050. The U.S. is no help. It has one of the highest carbon footprints in the world at 16 tons per person. Small changes, however, can add up.

CUT DOWN ON TRAVEL

When you do have to hit the road, do so in an efficient vehicle. Look for ones that consume an alternative fuel (saving 2 tons), use electricity (6 tons) or a hybrid (3 tons). You could also work remotely, saving a little less than a ton a year, or take public transportation, saving about half a ton a year. Cutting down on air travel will save 0.15 tons.

IN THE HOME

Start with one that's as easy as screwing in a light bulb. Change your older incandescent bulbs to more efficient compact florescent bulbs and save yourself a third of a ton of carbon per year. Switching off those lights as you leave a room will get you another 0.17 tons, while lowering your thermostat in winter will save you



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nearly half a ton. Energy Star appliances, guaranteed by the federal government to be efficient, can also save . A new Energy Star fridge will save you nearly a tenth of a ton every year and a new Energy Star printer will save you about a fifth of a ton. Choosing

to purchase green power will save you a whopping 6.5 tons, so will putting in solar panels.

OUT AND ABOUT

Eating organic foods will save you 0.17 tons a year. A low-carbon diet can save you nearly 2 tons. Low-carbon

diets take into account that a third of all food emissions in the U.S. come from red meat and dairy products. Chicken and vegetables have up to ten times smaller carbon footprints per serving. Just by getting the chicken instead of the steak, you can make a big dif-

ference in your carbon footprint.

You can calculate your own personal carbon footprint — and see easy ways to reduce it — by using the Carbon Footprint Calculator at The Nature Conservancy's website, nature.org.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

The good news is that recycling rates are up, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The most recycled products in 2018 were paper products such as corrugated boxes, newspaper and other, non-durable paper products. Major appliances, wood packaging and glass containers were also high on the list. Here's how to recycle some of the most commonly recycled goods.

PAPER AND CARDBOARD

Americans recycled more than half of the paper they used in 2018, the EPA says, and that paper is used to make new paper goods, saving trees and other resources. Do recycle newspapers, magazines and mail. Even pizza boxes are fair game, after you've removed any food scraps. Paper gift wrap with shiny or laminated coatings are not recyclable. Instead, the EPA says, use newspaper, gift bags, boxes or tissue paper, all of which can be recycled.

PLASTIC

More than 35 million tons of plastics were made in 2018, but only 8.7% was recycled. Check with your local recycling agency to see what you can and cannot recycle and bear in mind that chucking non-recyclable items in your bin often results in your bin



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going in the trash. Typically, bottles and caps can be recycled, but Styrofoam usually cannot.

GLASS

Glass can be recycled many times over. Most curbside recycling programs accept glass colors and types all jumbled together. Just avoid put-

ting in broken glass, which can damage equipment and injure workers. Metal bottle caps should be separated from their bottles before going in the bin.

ALUMINUM

The total recycling rate for aluminum in 2018 was 34.9%. Cans don't have to be crushed

and can even be more difficult for some recycling systems to deal with. Foil is also recyclable, provided that any food waste has been removed.

ELECTRONICS

About 38.5% of electronics were recycled in 2018. These items usually cannot go into your curbside bin, but some

areas have special dropoffs for these goods.

Manufacturers of electronic devices may also participate in programs that will let you recycle devices and get a credit.

Before you recycle electronics, delete all your personal information so that it doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

Live Your Most Efficient Life

Energy audits are professional energy assessments that can provide you ways to save money and improve the sustainability and livability of your home.

The professionals that conduct home energy assessments are credentialed for the job, Energy.gov says, and have training in how to assess and improve your home's energy usage.

HOW IT WORKS

The auditor will do a room-by-room examination of your home. They may conduct a blower test and a thermographic scan, looking for sources of energy loss in your house. Also look for other high-tech gear such as surface thermometers and furnace efficiency meters.

You can find an energy assessor through your state or local government, through your energy utility or through services such as the Residential Energy Services Network or the U.S. Department of Energy. Just like contracting with any professional, get references and contact them. Check with the Better Business Bureau for complaints. Ask if their equipment is properly calibrated.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR AUDIT

Before your selected energy



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assessor visits, make a list of any problems you know off in the house. This could be an uncomfortably drafty room or condensation in your windows. Have copies of your home's energy bills ready for the auditor. You might also want to have answers to these commonly asked questions:

- Is anyone home during work hours?
- What is the average ther-

mostat setting for summer and winter?

- How many people live in the home?
- Is every room in use?

DURING AND AFTER THE ASSESSMENT

Your assessor will go through your house room by room. Walk with them and don't be afraid to ask questions as you go. The assessor

will gather information and give you a report including a characterization of your home and steps you can take to reduce your family's energy usage and increase the comfort of your home. Some common recommendations include:

- Adding insulation to your home's attic, foundation or walls.
- Seal and insulate ducts in

unconditioned spaces.

- Remove or repair parts of the home with internal moisture or mold.
- Improve the efficiency of heating, cooling and hot water equipment.
- Install home ventilation, smart thermostats, LEDs, smart power strips, Energy Star appliances, solar panels, electric vehicle chargers and other efficient technologies.