

Easy Ways to Darken Your Shade of Green



By Ashleigh Eisbrener

Grayslake conservation community Prairie Crossing resident Pat Iwasaki races around her house, closing windows as the sun rises. She only opens them at night and during cooler hours of the day, in an effort to save energy.

She and her family recently won Prairie Crossing's Energy Conservation Contest by using the least gas and electricity per square foot per person. It wasn't difficult for her family of six. "We changed our light bulbs over to fluorescent ones, and I tried to insulate our house," she says. Iwasaki and her family lived in Japan for six years, where energy prices were high and homes had no central heating. "They use a lower energy lifestyle than we have over here, so we got used to that," she says.

Pat recalls the frigidness of her Japan house. "You could see your breath," she says. "They don't have insulation; they only heat the spaces being used, so the bathrooms, kitchen and halls have no heat at all." She wore tights, long underwear, clothes, three pairs of socks and slippers to keep from getting frostbite. Although they're now back in the United States, they maintain some of their conservation routine.

Pat still uses minimal heat in the winter and no air conditioning in the summer. Instead, she insulates the windows in the cold months and uses the sun's natural heat and night's coolness during warm months. Around this time of year, her ComEd bill reaches \$40—\$30 during summer months. She reminds her children to turn off lights and take short showers. And when Pat does laundry, it's line dried.

Like most teenagers and young children, Pat's kids are somewhat rebellious to energy saving. "They just think 'why do we have to worry about this, can't we just be comfortable,'" she says. Although they were a big part in winning the contest, they weren't as excited as their mom about the outcome. "When they found out we won this contest, the two middle ones were so humiliated," she says. "They thought 'oh no, now everybody is going to think we're really weird.'"

Despite her children's concerns, Pat still encourages her family to live eco-friendly. She grows 80 percent of the family's produce and her husband walks 15 minutes to the train he rides to work. She and her husband also send their children to environmentally-focused Prairie Crossing Charter School—the community's school within walking distance.

This lifestyle comes naturally for the Iwasaki family, but living green can be a difficult task. Many of us aren't willing to give up central air in the summer and warm cars in the winter, but there are small changes you can make to help you go green and save green. We've put together a list of several ways you can darken your shade of green:

The **Water Heater** is the second largest user of electricity in the home, ranging from 20 to 40 percent of total energy usage, according to the United States Department of Energy (USDE).

Mint Green

Water heater jackets reduce heat loss by 25 to 45 percent and save you 4 to 9 percent in water heating costs, according to the USDE. They are available for less than \$20, but make sure you buy one with at least a R-8 insulating value.

Emerald Green

Tankless or instantaneous water heaters provide hot water only as necessary, making them 30 percent more energy efficient than conventional storage tank water heaters. They also usually last 10 years longer than traditional water heaters.

Heating and Cooling your home eats up a large portion of your utility bill. Of the average \$183 spent towards energy costs monthly, at least half usually goes towards heating or cooling.

Mint Green

Bioheat is biodegradable, renewable fuel made when vegetable oils and conventional home heating oil is blended. The National Oilheat Research Alliance found if everyone used just B5, consisting of 5 percent biodiesel and 95 percent heating oil, 400 million gallons of regular heating oil could be conserved.

Emerald Green

Upgrading your home's insulation can save you 30 percent on your heating and cooling costs. Experts suggest adding as much insulation as you afford. Insulation is measured by R-value; the higher the R-value, the greater the insulating power.

Saving Water is increasingly important as the nation's population continues to swell but water supply remains the same. Conserving your water use can take care of the environment and our water supply.

Mint Green

Low-flow shower heads and faucet aerators reduce water consumption by almost 50 percent, according to eartheasy.com. Within three months, these devices pay for themselves.

Emerald Green

It's estimated toilets use 30 percent of each household's total water supply. Your toilet may use up to 13 liters of water in one flush, according to waterwise.com. By replacing your current toilet with a dual flush model, you can reduce your water usage by 67 percent. One flush selection uses less than one gallon of water to flush and the other option uses just over one and a half gallons.

Greening Your Laundry reduces your carbon foot print and helps you save green. These minor changes are extremely easy to make and well worth it.

Mint Green

Ninety percent of the energy used for washing clothes is spent on heating the water, according to the USDE. Using cold water reduces the large majority of the environmental impact of washing clothes. Also help the environment by switching to powder detergent, which cuts down on transportation energy or triple concentrate detergent, which reduces packaging waste and cuts water use in half.

Emerald Green

Line-drying your clothes cuts down on wasted heat and saves on household power consumption. Don't have the space inside and laws prevent you from hanging clothes outside? Make sure you dry full loads, and when doing multiple loads, dry them consecutively while the dryer is still hot.

