

Smart green shopping for your home

READ THIS BEFORE YOU BUY ANOTHER "ECO-FRIENDLY" PRODUCT!

IT'S A SHOCKER, but about a fifth of your personal contribution to global warming comes from your home—from the paint on your walls to the cleaners you use to scrub the tub to the energy-guzzling appliances and lightbulbs that keep power plants polluting the air. Retailers claim to have the easy answer. They're selling "eco-friendly" lighting, flooring, and everything else for your home. (This room is filled with those products.) But not all so-called green home goods are worth the money, or are even particularly green, as we discovered when we went shopping. And it's sometimes tough to separate the true green products from the wannabes. In this guide, our experts weigh in on all kinds of items so that you can choose the best planet-friendly stuff for your home, get wise to the trade-offs, and save some bucks while you're at it.

GREEN SCENE

This sofa style comes with a wood frame with a water-based finish, soy-based cushions, and pillows made of recycled fiber. The chair is crafted from an old wine barrel and the tables are made from reclaimed wood. The throw pillows are made of hemp and other natural textiles. The carpeting is partially made of corn-based fibers. The vases are made from recycled glass. And screwed into the socket of the lamp is a low-energy lightbulb. For more details, turn the page.



WOOD FURNITURE AND CABINETS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Some of the greenest new furniture is made of recycled wood salvaged from old buildings, railroad tracks, dead trees, and even logs fished out of rivers and lakes. This cuts down on logging. The nonprofit Forest Stewardship Council, which is industry-funded but is nevertheless the leading source of green furniture seals, has established the FSC Recycled label to identify products with 100 percent recycled content. Other FSC labels mean that at least some of the new wood in a product was harvested in a way that the manufacturer says is environmentally responsible.



TIP: Go to www.fscus.org and click on "product search." Also look for upholstery made from organically grown materials and with formaldehyde-free glues and finishes. Manufacturers may have this information on their Web sites.

WHAT TO AVOID

Tropical or exotic hardwoods, especially zebrawood and ebony. Instead, look for FSC-certified or reclaimed woods like teak, mahogany, ipe, or rubberwood.

Save!

Even greener: Shop flea markets or Craig's List for secondhand bargains.

WHERE TO SHOP FSC-certified furniture

- **Crate & Barrel's Lockport Sofa**, \$1,899 (www.crateandbarrel.com), above, has an FSC-certified wood frame, seat cushions made from soy-based foam, and back cushions made from recycled fibers.
- **Whit McLeod's Folding Wine Barrel Chair**, \$145 (www.whitmcleod.com), on the previous page, can be used indoors or out, is made from salvaged oak wine barrels, and even bears the winery name stamped under the seat.
- **Also check out** www.berkeleymills.com and www.shackletonthomas.com. These sites offer a line of handcrafted furniture and accessories in FSC-certified woods. Also, ABC Home has a collection of sustainable home furnishings made of salvaged and reclaimed wood, steel, and other materials. (For info, see www.abchome.com.)



FLOORING

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Bamboo is a fast-growing grass, cork is made of tree bark, and linoleum is mostly linseed oil and wood or cork products—and all are considered eco-responsible alternatives to petroleum-based vinyl flooring and slow-growing hardwoods like oak.

THE TRADE-OFF

If you like cork or bamboo flooring, buy it knowing that these greener options may not wear or keep their colors well. When we tested U.S. Floor's Ronda Cork engineered floor (above), it stained, scratched, and quickly lightened under our sun-exposure test; the Mannington Exotics Collection bamboo floor quickly darkened to a deep brown.

Save!

At up to \$9 per square foot, these green flooring options can be as pricey as solid wood, which can be sanded and refinished several times and last for years. If you want a natural, resilient material, your best green bet may be sunlight- and dent-resistant linoleum, which starts at around \$4 per square foot.



PAINT

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Most latex and oil-based paints contain volatile organic compounds, which release potentially carcinogenic fumes that can pollute the air and cause eye, nose, and throat irritation. Debbie Zimmer, paint and color expert with the Paint Quality Institute, says oil-based paints are being phased off the market due to stricter regulations (they're highest in VOCs). So manufacturers are coming out with low- or no-VOC paints (above, a sampling of shades from Benjamin Moore Aura) to help you breathe easier and keep the planet cleaner. The GreenSeal sticker, issued by an independent group (www.greenseal.org) that sets standards for eco-conscious goods, can help you identify low-VOC paints. Or you can ask local retailers for guidance.

THE TRADE-OFF

Low-VOC paints are premium-priced, and our testing has found that they are not as tough and durable as the top-rated regular paints. But the technology is getting better as demand increases. Our labs will continue to test and report on developments in low-VOC paints.



CARPET

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Most carpet is made from petroleum-based materials like nylon. Eco-friendlier carpets include those made with natural fibers like FLOR carpet tiles (above) or recycled synthetic materials.

THE TRADE-OFF

"Consider where you place natural fiber rugs made from sisal and other materials like sea grass," says Graham Head, vice chairman of ABC Carpet. "These are not hard-wearing materials. Avoid entryways and other high-traffic areas where dirt and moisture will make them susceptible to deterioration."



ACCESSORIES

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Green choices are made of natural, sustainable, or recycled materials, and use nontoxic, water-based dyes. ■ For throw pillows made of water-based dyed linen (above, top left, Amenity) and sustainable hemp and linen (above, top right, Balanced Design), go to www.2modern.com. ■ For pillows made from reclaimed nylon safety belts or Ultrasuede (above, lower left, Fjord), go to www.branchhome.com. ■ For green accents, check out Pier 1's new line of hand-painted, recycled glass bowls and vases (shown on page 21 on the table in alabaster; \$15-\$35 each).

WHERE TO SHOP carpet

- **The Naturals from FLOR** (above) are recyclable carpet tiles (used ones can be turned into new products) made partially from corn-based fibers. They come in four styles so you can create your own rug or wall-to-wall carpet. (Price: \$6-\$10 per square foot; www.flor.com.)
- **Earth Weave's Bio-Flor** biodegradable carpets are 100 percent wool, have jute backing and are made without dyes, stain guards, or other chemicals. (Price: \$40-\$50 per square yard; www.earthweave.com.)
- **Mohawk's EverStrand** carpets are made from recycled Polyethylene Terephthalate or PET plastic bottles. (Price: They start around \$6 per square yard; www.mohawk-flooring.com.)

ALEXANDRA ROWLEY; PROP. STYLING: JAMES LELAND DAY/DANIELE FORSYTHE

Save! Take advantage of daylight. Hanging light-colored, translucent curtains at

your windows will let in more natural light and cut down on your lighting cost.



Bright idea Making the switch to eco-friendly bulbs

You may not think of lightbulbs as primo energy gobblers, but your home's lighting represents a good chunk of your electric bill. An easy way to save while doing your bit for the planet is to switch to compact fluorescent lightbulbs, called CFLs.

WHAT'S GREEN ABOUT THEM

CFLs use around 75 percent less energy and some makers claim they last up to 10 times longer than their incandescent cousins. (How long they last may depend on how and where you use them.) If you make the switch, the environmental payoff could be big. According to the federal government's Energy Star program, if every household in America swapped even one regular incandescent bulb for a CFL, we'd save enough energy to light more than 2.5 million homes and slash greenhouse-gas emissions to what they would be if there were 800,000 fewer cars on the road a year. CFLs have the same cool-burning, energy-conserving advantage of regular fluorescent tubes—just reconfigured into smaller, screw-in bulbs. And because they don't

waste a lot of energy-producing heat, a 15-watt CFL can provide as much light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb.

NOT SO GREEN

The heavy plastic packing the bulbs come in may not be recyclable (check with your local municipality). CFLs also contain a tiny amount of mercury. Old thermometers have 100 times as much, and powering regular incandescent bulbs puts mercury into the environment, too. Still, with 55 million CFLs already sold, their mercury content is a concern. Mercury is a potential neurotoxin that at high

exposure may cause brain and kidney damage. An intact bulb doesn't pose any danger to you or the environment. However, disposing of spent CFLs improperly can add mercury to landfills, where the toxin can potentially contaminate soil and groundwater. So don't throw away your used CFLs; recycle them instead. Go to www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling or www.Earth911.org for recycling options in your area.

THE TRADE-OFFS

Although CFLs can be used to replace incandescent and some halogen light-

bulbs, don't expect the same results. In our tests, CFL mini spirals took around 30 seconds to reach brightness; CFL floodlights took as long as 2.5 minutes. Because of those lag times, you might want to skip CFLs in areas like dark stairways and closets, where you need instant bright light. **TIP:** If you've never used a CFL, start with a 13-watt to 15-watt soft white spiral. It's the closest to a soft white 60-watt incandescent.

Save!

You can buy CFLs in bulk for as little as \$2 each. And the more you use, the less you'll pay for electricity. On average, a 15-watt mini spiral CFL used 3 hours per day will save about \$5 per bulb per year over a standard 60-watt incandescent. Replace five heavily used bulbs, and shave \$25 off your yearly bill. Some utilities offer rebates such as \$2 per bulb for up to half the sockets in your home, making some CFLs free.

CFL BULBS ABOVE: 1. 16-watt bulb for recessed lighting; 2. 14-watt mini spiral for lamps; 3. 20-watt indoor/outdoor floodlight; 4. 15-watt covered spiral; 5. 3-watt cold cathode dimmable fluorescent; 6. 15-watt round decorative bulb

5 CFL DOs AND DON'Ts

DON'T TURN CFLs ON AND OFF A LOT. This will shorten the bulb's life span, so you won't fully reap its energy and cost savings. As a rule, put them in places where they'll be on for extended periods, and switch them off only if you're leaving the room for more than 15 minutes.

DO MATCH THE CFL TO THE TASK AND LOCATION. Some bulbs don't work well in high heat or humidity (like steamy bathrooms), and some are slow to brighten in the cold (for instance, in an outdoor lamppost). So be sure to look for temperature-range information on packaging so you can select bulbs designed for the location you have in mind.

DO CONSIDER DIMMERS. Dimming your lights is one of the most effective ways to reduce power consumption. (This also goes for regular incandescent lightbulbs, by the way). But if you want to use a dimmer switch on a CFL, you must buy a bulb made specifically for dimming, and it may not have the same range of dimming as an incandescent bulb. Some do not dim as low as regular lightbulbs.

DON'T EXPECT CFLs TO MAINTAIN THEIR INTENSITY. CFLs can lose as much as 10 percent of their initial brightness after 1,000 hours and as much as 20 percent before they fizzle out.

DO LOOK FOR ENERGY STAR-APPROVED BULBS. The Energy Star certification will help ensure that the color quality, life span, and performance of the bulbs are close to the manufacturer's claims. Uncertified bulbs may have disappointing performance. Either way, CFLs may sputter, smoke, and melt when they start to go, a technical glitch that Energy Star is working on. (Go to www.energystar.gov for more information.)

What to do if a CFL breaks

- First, avoid breathing any escaping mercury vapors. Try opening a window and leaving the room for 15 minutes while the air clears.
- Wearing disposable gloves, use a wet paper towel to wipe up and collect the broken glass. Don't vacuum or sweep it up.
- Use duct tape to pick up any remaining shards.
- Finally, place the broken glass in a plastic bag, seal it, then seal that in another plastic bag. If no recycling options exist, put it in the trash.

Save! Replace five heavily used regular lightbulbs with compact fluorescents.

You'll save enough energy to slash about \$25 off your yearly utility bill.



ENERGY SMART APPLIANCES

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Water heaters and central air conditioners are among the piggiest power guzzlers, but fridges that run 24/7, dishwashers, and washers and dryers eat up a lot, too. It rarely makes economic sense to replace working appliances with new, more energy-efficient ones, say our number crunchers. But when it's time to replace an old clunker, use the yellow EnergyGuide labels to compare models and look for Energy Star-certified appliances, which use 10 percent to 50 percent less electricity and water than standard ones. You can also sign up for a subscription at

www.ConsumerReports.org to see what our tests show are the most energy-efficient appliances based on simulated real-life use. Annual energy costs may vary by up to \$65 a year on dishwashers alone, depending on local rates.

Save!

Act before year's end and you can earn \$300 in tax credits for installing new central air conditioners, \$150 for furnaces, and other savings for new windows, storm doors, and solar water heaters. You could save as much as \$500 in energy costs. (Go to www.energystar.gov for more info.)

Put your appliances on an energy diet

Use these cut-back tips (numbers are percentage of household utility bill)

<p>10% WASHERS & DRYERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Wash only full loads. ★ Buy a front-loader. (See page 48.) It can cut water consumption by 25 percent. ★ Wash laundry in cold water. It can save up to \$53* a year. 	<p>6% REFRIGERATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Skip the icemaker. It guzzles energy and can add to repair bills. ★ Buy a top- or bottom-freezer. It can shave up to \$32* a year off your energy bill vs. a side-by-side. 	<p>2% DISHWASHERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Don't prerinse. Our tests show most machines can handle even the dirtiest dishes. ★ Wash only full loads. ★ Load efficiently. Put really dirty items at the back and sides.
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*Source: U.S. Department of Energy



SHEETS & TOWELS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If the label says 100 percent organic, that means the cotton in the sheets or towels was grown without synthetic pesticides and other nasty chemicals. Since cotton is one of the most pesticide-intensive crops grown, buying linens made of organic cotton or fast-growing bamboo can be better for the planet.

NOT SO GREEN

Unfortunately, an organic label certifies only the growing methods of the fiber in the item, not the way it was processed into fabric. There's no guarantee that sheets marked organic cotton haven't been chemically treated with formaldehyde and chlorine bleach, or blended with synthetic materials, such as polyester. Also, most bamboo textiles are processed into rayon with strong chemicals. See if the tags have any info on how items were processed and dyed. However, if the tag just says "natural" or "green," don't assume that the fabric has not been chemically treated. There are no federal standards for these labels.

Save!

Shop Target, Wal-Mart, and Bed Bath & Beyond for well-priced green linens.



HOUSEHOLD CLEANING PRODUCTS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Green cleaners can help reduce your exposure to irritating or potentially toxic chemicals, which many regular household cleaners contain. These strong chemicals may be particularly worrisome if you have kids, or if someone in your household has asthma or other breathing problems. Also, many ingredients in regular cleaners are made from petroleum, a nonrenewable resource. Even after they go down the drain and are processed at a wastewater treatment plant, some chemicals, such as phosphates, can damage ecosystems when released in waterways.

NOT SO GREEN

Because manufacturers aren't required to list ingredients on product labels, some market their cleaners as green without disclosing what's in them. Companies that have been criticized for this include Simple Green and Method, although Method states on its Web site that it will list ingredients soon. What's more, there's no government oversight or verification of claims like "biodegradable," "nontoxic," "environmentally friendly," or "natural." We found, for instance, that Seventh Generation's "biodegradable" dishwashing gel has a petroleum-derived

ingredient that doesn't easily break down. So if you want a really green cleaner, only buy products with listed ingredients.

THE TRADE-OFF

If you're used to aggressive conventional cleaners, some greener versions may not work as quickly or effectively. In our tests of green products over the years, we have found that quality can vary a lot.

Save!

Green cleaners can cost more. To save money, look for them at large grocery chains rather than natural food stores, which tend to charge more. And check online for deals: Some manufacturers offer coupons on their sites or specials such as free samples when you place an order. You can also slash costs by making your own homemade cleaners with cheap-o pantry staples like baking soda and lemon juice. (See "Back to Basics," next page).

SHOPPING TIPS

Here are some cleaners marketed as green that passed our mess tests, scoring as well or even better than some conventional brands: Ecover dishwashing tablets and Ecover dishwashing powder

(both are free of phosphates); Citra-Dish powder (phosphate-free); Seventh Generation dishwashing powder (phosphate-free); Trader Joe's dishwashing powder (phosphate-free); Seventh Generation Free & Clear laundry detergent, which is free of water-polluting nonylphenol ethoxylates, or NPEs. (See What to Avoid, page 28, for more details). Here are some good general guidelines on what to look for on the label when shopping for cleaners:

- **Plant or "bio-based" ingredients.** But keep in mind that products made from natural materials, such as citrus oils, can still be irritating to people with sensitivities.
- **Hydrogen peroxide.** It's less harsh than chlorine bleach and an effective sanitizer. Products that have it include Seventh Generation Natural Citrus Kitchen Cleaner and Ecover Non-Chlorine Bleach, but they have not been tested in our labs.
- **Concentrated formulas.** They require less packaging and less fuel to ship. Some mainstream makers are offering concentrated laundry detergents that wash the same amount of clothes with less detergent, like All Small & Mighty, Wisk Multi-Action Concentrate, and

Save! Take care of your refrigerator. If you clean the coils regularly with an

appliance brush, the motor won't have to run as long or as often, saving energy.

Purex Ultra concentrated laundry detergent. (2X Ultra Tide will be available this fall starting in the Southwest.)

■ **Multipurpose products.** The more jobs a cleaner does, the fewer products you need to buy, which cuts waste. For example, one mild, plant-based product to consider is Ecover All Purpose Cleaner, though we did not test this in our lab.

■ **Recyclable packaging.** If the package is made from recycled materials, including #1 or #2 plastics, that's even better. Also, look for refills so you can reuse a spray bottle, which reduces packaging. But fill bottles only with the same product. Never mix cleaners.

WHAT TO AVOID

Watch out for the following five ingredients, which can cause health and environmental problems. Since ingredients often are not listed on the container, look for labels that specifically state what the products don't contain. For example, check for claims like "no phosphates," "ammonia-free," or "NPE-free." Also, pay attention to warnings that signal potential risks. (You may even have to peer through the solution to find them

listed on the back of the front label.) Most cleaners, even natural or eco-friendly ones, can be dangerous and should be kept away from children.

■ **Chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite).** Sold on its own and in a variety of household cleaners. It can be irritating to the eyes, skin, and lungs.

■ **Ammonia.** Used in floor, bathroom, tile, and glass cleaners. Its fumes can cause respiratory irritation, and ammonia can burn skin on contact. Also, it's poisonous when swallowed.

■ **NPEs.** Used in many laundry detergents and other cleaning products. These chemicals are water polluting but can be difficult to avoid. When released into waterways, the chemicals are toxic to aquatic plants and animals.

■ **Phosphates.** Used in many automatic dishwashing detergents. Although they're considered a small source of total phosphate pollution, they contribute to an overgrowth of algae that threatens aquatic wildlife.

■ **Antibacterials (such as triclosan).** Used in a variety of products, including dishwashing liquids and multisurface cleaners. They may cause skin and eye

irritation. Initial studies also suggest that triclosan could form dioxin, a probable carcinogen, in the presence of sunlight and chloroform in chlorinated water. Overuse of antibacterial products may also contribute to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

ALSO SKIP

■ **Aerosol-spray products in cans.** Some of them may use petroleum-based propellants like isobutene, propane, and butane, which can irritate the eyes, throat, and lungs.

■ **Oven cleaners.** The chemicals in these products can be corrosive and irritating to eyes, skin, and lungs. Instead, use a nonabrasive nylon scrubbing pad and baking soda. For tough stains, add salt.

■ **Drain cleaners.** They contain lye (sodium hydroxide) or sulfuric acid, substances that can severely damage eyes, lungs, and skin. Although our tests of "biological" drain openers (which use enzymes and bacteria to eat up drain-clogging organic gunk) found that they're relatively safe, they were also slower and less effective than plungers or plumber's augers ("snakes.")

BACK TO BASICS

The greenest cleaners are probably on your pantry shelf right now. For more information on planet-friendly ways to fight grime, go to www.GreenerChoices.org.



■ **HYDROGEN PEROXIDE**

Mildly bleaches and sanitizes (instead of chlorine bleach).

■ **CASTILE SOAP** For general cleaning around the house.

■ **CREAM OF TARTAR** Lifts stains from sinks, tubs; removes spots from aluminum pots.

■ **BAKING SODA** Removes stains from tile, glass, and china; cleans inside the fridge; removes baked-on food

from pots and pans.

■ **BORAX** Makes an excellent freshener in laundry and is an all-round deodorizer.

■ **LEMON JUICE** Lightens stains and removes tarnish on brass, copper, bronze, and aluminum.

■ **WHITE VINEGAR** Helps kill germs; removes some carpet stains; cleans coffeemakers, countertops.

In the bag

Paper or plastic? Choose neither! It takes energy to make petroleum-based plastic bags and forest-unfriendly paper ones, and they both end up in landfills.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD Tote your own cloth bag. Cloth bags can be used over and over for years. Disposable bags typically get trashed after a single shop, and they add up. According to a WorldWatch Institute report, Americans dump 100 billion plastic bags a year. San Francisco has now banned the nonbiodegradable, petroleum-based sacks in supermarkets and pharmacies. And other cities, including Los Angeles and Boston, may soon follow suit.

THE TRADE-OFF Like all new habits, remembering to schlep your own bags takes practice and planning. Hang a few on a doorknob as a reminder to take them with you.

Save!

Reusing plastic or paper sacks is an eco-move that costs zip—and they're easy to stuff in your purse.



1. Happybags Victoria print cotton tote is great for light loads; www.reusablebags.com, \$20.
2. The Recycled Ad bag is roomy and has extra-sturdy seat-belt straps; www.reusablebags.com; \$30.
3. Ecobags string tote comes in cool colors and can be tucked in a purse; www.reusablebags.com, \$35 for set of 5.
4. LLBean's rugged Boat Tote has a reinforced bottom; www.llbean.com, \$17 to \$30.
5. This synthetic tote comes in purple and other chic shades, and folds into its own compact pocket; www.myownbag.com, \$49.

Save! Spend less for hot water. Make sure to set your water heater at 120° (or on

the "low" setting), which will be hot enough for most of your daily household needs.