

Top 10 Tips

Here are 10 highly effective ways to go greener. Hit it.

1. Audit yourself

A home energy audit is a way to inventory your home's energy use, where energy is lost, and where it can be saved. You can do an energy audit yourself or get a pro. Many utilities also offer home and business energy audits for free.

2. Reduce your use

The lowest hanging fruit just begging to be picked are simple energy-saving practices. They're also the most cost effective. Top tasks include:

- Replace your light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) or even cutting-edge LEDs.
- Turn off lights and other devices when they're not needed (also see [How to Green Your Lighting](#) [link to our version of article]).
- Electronics that sleep on a standby setting continue to pull a current even when "turned off."
- "Wall warts," those clunky AC adaptors on many power cables, pull current, too, so those should be taken out of the wall when not in use. Your best bet is a "smart" power strip, or a power strip that can be turned off at night, etc.
- Clothes driers gobble up a lot of power, so line drying can be a great energy saver.

3. Put your house on a diet

Homes consume an enormous amount of energy, especially in heating and cooling, and American homes consume around six times the world average. Once you've audited your home for energy use (even if you haven't) some simple moves can cut your electricity bill.

Keep your house cool with natural ventilation instead of air conditioning as much as possible. Use in-room, ceiling, or whole-house fans to move air throughout the house. Blocking sunlight during hot hours of the day can help lower your cooling load. If your house uses electricity for water heating, wrapping your water tank in an insulating blanket can save on power. Also, if your house is heated with electricity, see [How to Green Your Heating](#) [link to our version of article] for more in-depth advice.

4. Buy wise

After cooling and heating, appliances and other plug-in devices are the next biggest users of energy in your abode. When looking for new appliances, seek out the most energy-efficient models. Most new appliances come with a yellow EnergyGuide label which, like mileage ratings on cars, shows its consumption in terms of kWh per year. Also look for Energy Star rated products (more on Energy Star below).

Electronics like computers and audio equipment can be big power suckers, too. See below for more on greening your computer usage. Being smart with lighting is another

key way to green your power usage. See [How to Green Your Lighting](#) [link to our version of article] for more.

5. Homemade juice

You think making your own bread at home feels good? There's nothing quite like the feeling of making your own electricity from the sun, wind, or water. Installing a home alternative energy system is becoming more and more cost effective as technology improves and assistance programs spread.

Photovoltaic, or solar electric, systems are the most common. Depending on your available space, local climate, budget, and local utility, a solar electric system can provide all the energy needed for a typical home (and possibly more). Check with your local power utility about subsidy programs or other available programs.

Small, home-sized, wind turbines are a rapidly growing field. Time Magazine called the Skystream 3.7 one of the best new inventions of 2006. These can be pricey little whirly-gigs, but depending on your local wind conditions, it can take a big chunk out of your energy use and replace the dirty with clean. There's also a thriving DIY wind movement. See below for more on that.

6. Charge up your toys

For all the portable electronic gizmos in your life, consider feeding them green power with a solar charger. Some look like notebooks, cell phones, flashers, or are built into backpacks. Your MP3 player, laptop, PDA, cell phone, and camera can all be charged with portable solar, and you'll never find yourself searching for a plug (see below for a list of chargers that TreeHugger has covered).

7. If you build it ... you will save

A home or building designed and constructed around energy efficiency can realize enormous savings. Everything from the positioning of the house, use of daylight and natural ventilation, lighting and appliances, and renewable energy system can push a building closer and closer to net zero energy consumption. If you are considering building a home, do serious renovations, or an addition, make sure that energy efficiency is a key design criterion.

The [Energy Star rating system has a home certification program](#), and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) now has a [rating system for residential homes](#). One of many great books to consult is [Your Green Home](#) by Alex Wilson.

8. Sign up for green power

Getting green power may be as easy as checking a box on your energy bill. About 600 of the U.S.'s 6,000 power utilities offer a green power option of one kind or another. In this sort of program, the local utility buys renewable energy (wind, solar, etc.) and then passes it along to customers. It often costs a bit more, but not much, and it helps support the industry for clean, green power.

Before you sign up, though, ask where they're getting their power from. If it's a source like waste coal or waste-to-power, you might be better off buying your credits elsewhere.

9. Buy renewable energy credits

Another way to support renewable energy and "offset" your own environmental footprint is to buy renewable energy credits (RECs). There are many web sites that will help you calculate your energy consumption and buy a requisite amount of RECs to compensate for it.

RECs are a pretty new idea; they're not well understood and there are many rumors of not-so-green or altogether fake credits being sold. The most recognized certifier of RECs is [Green-e](#), an independent, non-profit group that verifies renewable energy credits and certifies that they are what they claim to be.

10. Think lifecycle

We all use energy. It's just a fact. Even an off-the-grid house is filled with embodied energy. Everything from the power it took to manufacture the solar panels (which was a lot), to the fuel burned in transporting the micro wind turbine from the factory, embodied energy, or lifecycle energy, is in everything we buy and use.

Manufacturing, advertising, packaging, shipping, etc. are all part of a product's energy history. We should all learn to think of things this way. Solar panels, for example, have a great deal of energy embodied in them, much more than, say, a passive solar water heating system.

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1. Drive a green car

There are now hybrids to match almost any need: two-door, four-door, SUV, luxury sedan. They get better mileage than their conventional counterparts, have cleaner emissions, and save money on gas. If a hybrid isn't in your future, try for a car with the best MPG you can find; and remember that hybrids aren't always the most efficient option, either.

Biodiesel can now be found in almost any state in the US. This clean, domestic, veggie-based, carbon-neutral fuel will run in any diesel car or truck with little or no modification to the engine. Straight vegetable oil is an option for the more ambitious green driver and can make fueling up almost free. Another veggie fuel is ethanol, and there are between 5-6 million flex-fuel vehicles already on the road -- you may even be driving one and not know it.

Also, affordable, practical electric cars and plug-in hybrids aren't too far off, either. But whether or not you drive a hybrid or alternative-fuel vehicle, there's lots you can do to green your car right now.

2. Best practices

Driving technique has a lot to do with your fuel economy. Avoid sudden starts and stops and go the speed limit. Not only does speeding and herky-jerky driving kill your MPG, it's dangerous. And even if no one gets hurt in a fender bender, how green is it to get a new bumper or have your car re-painted?

As a general rule of thumb, keep your engine speeds between 1,200 -- 3,000 RPMs, and up-shift between 2,000 -- 2500 RPMs. Also, drive wise and minimize unnecessary miles by doing errands in one trip, getting good directions, and calling ahead.

3. Stay in tune

Getting regular tune-ups, maintenance, and having clean air filters will help you burn less gas, pollute less, and prevent car trouble down the line. Pump up: if every American's tires were properly inflated we could save around 2 billion gallons of gas each year! (Check your manual for optimal pressure). Lastly, get the junk out of the trunk! All that extra weight is sapping your fuel economy.

4. Car minus the carbon

There are many services out there now that can help you calculate your yearly emissions from driving and offset those greenhouse gasses through various means. Check below for a few carbon offset opportunities.

5. Carpool

Of course. Find coworkers, neighbors, and fellow students headed the same direction. Start with one shared trip per week. Also look into car sharing programs like FlexCar and ZipCar.

6. Leave the car at home.

For shorter adventures, walk, take public transit, ride your bike (regular, electric-assisted, or something fancier), skateboard, rollerblades, or even look into an electric scooter. Carrying groceries or other bulky stuff can still be done on a bike with a backpack or some slick modifications. Check out the Xtracycle, for example.

7. Drive part of the way

If getting where you're going by bike or public transit alone isn't going to happen, consider driving part of the way and then jumping on public transit or your bike (a folder would be perfect). A great way to beat traffic!

8. Go easy on the AC

Use the windows to help keep the car cool. Or try an electric or solar fan. Parking in the shade and using a reflective windshield shade can keep your car cooler when parked, meaning it takes less to cool it off when you get back in. If your car is new, however, let it air out. That new car smell is not friendly stuff.

9. Telecommute

Drive less with the wonders of working from home (or internet café, tree house, Mojave desert, etc.) With instant messaging, video chat, teleconferencing, and other world-flattening technologies, making the rush-hour trek to work and back might not be that necessary. Ask your boss or offer your employees a teleconferencing day once a week. Hey, it works for TreeHuggers and 44 million Americans.

10. Aspire to carelessness

Not everyone is going to be able to do it, at least not cold car-free. It will probably entail a shift in thinking and some time, but living car-free might be more within reach than you think. Living closer to work and school is a big part of it. Walking, biking, public transport, car sharing, car borrowing, and teleconferencing are a strong arsenal of tools to help reduce the need for a car. Give it some thought.