

## 5 Ways to Celebrate Earth Day, Improve Your Home

Earth Day on April 22<sup>nd</sup> can be a pretty energetic day, with people celebrating environmental health at festivals and other events.

Let that enthusiasm motivate you to start the home projects that you've been putting off.

Whatever your goal, be it saving money or the earth or both, some simple energy efficiency upgrades and habit changes can save some money and create a healthier, more comfortable living space. Plus, by tapping incentives and rebates, you often can reduce your upfront costs.

**1. Rebates and incentives.** Check with your utility providers. Many offer deals on products like lightbulbs and power strips, some will pay you for the chance to cart away your old, inefficient refrigerator, and others will do home energy assessments for free. Some also have hourly pricing programs that notify you when power is most expensive so you can take steps to reduce consumption during peak demand periods and save money. Find all the rebates and incentives that apply to your region at: <http://bit.ly/2ppF1tk>.

**2. Smart technology.** Smart home technology is evolving quickly and some of the tried-and-tested basics could save you money.

Programmable thermostats like the Nest, for instance, learn your occupancy habits and automatically turn down the heat and air conditioning when you're not home. Motion sensors and automatic timers can reduce your lighting costs with little effort on your part. Other smart technologies – locks, carbon monoxide detectors, and cameras -- can improve safety and convenience. In addition, smart technology may help you better market your house when you sell. A January 2018 Coldwell Banker survey shows that potential homebuyers prefer to have smart technology already installed in a prospective home.

Smart products that interest them most include:

- Thermostat (77 percent)
- Fire detector (75 percent)
- Carbon monoxide detector (70 percent)
- Camera (66 percent)
- Lock (63 percent)
- Lighting system (63 percent)

**3. Replacing aging equipment.** Investigate the newest systems and appliances so that when your current unit is on its last leg, you've done all the upfront research and know what you want to buy. That way, you're not making buying decisions under pressure and potentially losing out on the best products and deals. Look at options for new appliances, on-demand water heaters, and HVAC units. Also search for any rebates and incentives available for each system.

**4. Reduce consumption.** Small changes in your daily habits can reduce your monthly utility bills. Shut off lights, take shorter showers, and turn down the temperature on your water heater. Also insulate your pipes and get a blanket for your water heater.

**5. Low-maintenance, fire-safe landscaping.**

Spring gardening season is nearly upon us. Consider a gardening strategy that relies on plants native to your region, which reduces the need for water and chemical inputs. Plus, if you remove your lawn and opt for native plants and grasses, you can drastically reduce the cost and time associated with yard maintenance. And if you live in an area prone to wildfires, consider creating an outdoor space that resists fires. That entails things like creating safe zones around your house, choosing high-moisture plants, opting for trees that are less flammable than others (maple, poplar and cherry, rather than pine and fir

trees), and creating fire breaks with things like rocks and flower beds. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/2c1o7ct>.

### First-time Buyers' Must-haves

If your market features lots of first-time buyers and you've been tweaking your home to appeal to that audience, you may be interested in a recent National Association of Homebuilders' poll. It lists the top home features this group consider essential. They are:

1. Living room
2. Laundry room
3. Dining room
4. Garage storage
5. Walk-in closet in master bedroom
6. Both shower stall/tub in master bath
7. Front porch
8. Great room
9. Two-car garage
10. Kitchen double sink

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