



# Green your home and save you money

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Energy efficiency used to be a subject to which only the environmentally conscious gave a lot of consideration. Today though, with rising energy costs consuming a greater share of our household budgets, it is something that all of us are thinking about more carefully. While some energy upgrades, like new windows or solar panels, can require a sizable outlay of funds, achieving significant results doesn't have to be a costly undertaking.

Sealing air leaks for example is one of the most cost-effective ways to help your home operate more efficiently. Closing off drafts around windows and doors can be achieved with a can of spray foam insulation, a tube of caulking and some weather stripping at minimal expense. You might even consider taking these efforts a step further by topping up the insulation in your attic. Planting trees is another cost effective option that offers many benefits. Trees not only trap carbon dioxide and create oxygen; the deciduous type can also provide shade for your home in summer while allowing in light during the winter months. Cutting your home heating and cooling costs can even cost nothing at all: simply turn your thermostat a few degrees up in summer and down in winter to achieve savings of five to 15 per cent.

Similarly, be sure to lower the thermostat on your water heater. For a modest investment you can switch to a tankless water heater so that you are only paying to heat water when you use it. Low flow showerheads and toilets, which use 70 per cent less water, are other options that offer a sizable return on a nominal investment. Even simply turning off the faucet when brushing your teeth or shaving can make a big difference. Washing only full loads of dishes and laundry, and installing an indoor clothesline are other ways to achieve savings without any expense.

Reducing consumption is also the key to saving on your electricity bill. If you have a Smart Meter installed, be sure that you are clear on Time of Use rates to take advantage of off-peak periods. Reduce your household's phantom load by unplugging unused electronics and completely eliminate the costs associated with unnecessary energy guzzlers like additional refrigerators. If you haven't done so already, make the transition to compact fluorescent bulbs, which use approximately 75 per cent less electricity than the old-style bulbs. By 2012 inefficient incandescent light bulbs will no longer be available for sale in Canada anyway.

To gain insight into opportunities specific to your household, consider hiring a professional to conduct a home energy audit. The advice you receive will not only help you save money in the short-term, this type of report can even serve as a selling feature when you're ready to move on.

To help you assess whether your home meets your current needs, be sure to talk to a REALTOR®. They can offer professional insight into features that are in demand in today's market and help you explore the many housing options that may be more suited to your lifestyle. For more information visit [www.TorontoRealEstateBoard.com](http://www.TorontoRealEstateBoard.com) where you can learn about the latest market conditions, government programs for homeowners and homebuyers, upcoming open houses and more.

*Bill Johnston is President of the Toronto Real Estate Board, a professional association that represents 30,000 REALTORS® in the Greater Toronto Area.*

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