



SUSTAINABILITY

STARTS AT HOME

How to Reduce Your Family's Footprint

by Karen Kicinski

The most logical place to make a sustainability difference is the place where a substantial portion of our nation's energy and water resources are consumed, in our homes. Our dwellings reflect our tastes and our personality, but they also reflect our priorities and since one of those, for most Americans, is our impact on the environment and the cost of power and water

usage, making our homes more sustainable is a great place to start. This trend is generating a steady stream of innovative products and solutions, along with homebuilders that specialize in this type of construction. LifeStyle Homes, a leader in sustainable home building in Central Florida, identified 10 technologies that can improve a home's efficiency and performance. ►

These and other innovations are reshaping our personal spaces into cost-effective and low impact expressions of our aspirations and our concerns.



COOL ROOFS

If you're building a new home or replacing your existing roof, here are some tips to improve efficiency: First, if you choose a shingle roof, pick a light color that won't absorb as much heat. Second, install a radiant heat barrier or "sun control layer" under your shingle roof. A radiant heat barrier is a reflective foil that intercepts much of the sun's heat. Metal roofs, meanwhile, are known to be energy and environmentally friendly. They deflect solar radiant heat while acting as a reliable home insulator.



SOLAR POWER

Installing a rooftop solar system is perhaps the most effective way to improve your home's energy-saving performance. Solar panels capture the power of the sun and convert it to household electricity. As a result, your family will purchase significantly less electricity from utilities and therefore your bills will be substantially reduced (or even eliminated). LifeStyle Homes has built nearly 100 solar homes on the Space Coast, and oftentimes our customers report electric bills in the ballpark of \$10 during sunny months.



DOUBLE-PANE LO-E WINDOWS AND GLASS DOORS

These improved windows and doors have been around for some time, and with good reason. Double-pane Lo-E windows and glass doors help to insulate your home with a vacuum-sealed or gas-filled interior space and low-emissivity (Lo-E) coated glass. These superior windows reduce the amount of heat and ultraviolet rays entering your home on hot Florida days, without blocking natural light.



EFFICIENT HEATING AND COOLING SYSTEMS

According to the Department of Energy, heating and cooling systems make up roughly half of a home's energy use. That said, it's important to find an air-conditioning system with an optimal SEER rating for your family's needs. The SEER rating (or Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) is a performance rating of the system's efficiency. While multiple factors come into play, typically a 15-16 SEER system is a solid investment.



ADVANCED WATER HEATERS

Water heaters consume 14% to 25% of a household's energy use—more than any other household appliance. So it's good news that water heaters have come a long way with regard to improved efficiency. Today's popular high-performance water heaters include tankless, which only produces hot water as needed; solar, which uses rooftop solar panels to heat water; and heat pump, which extracts and transfers heat from the air into an insulated storage tank.



ENERGY STAR® APPLIANCES

Look for the Energy Star® label when shopping for kitchen, laundry, and other common household appliances. Energy Star® products are independently certified to exceed federal minimum standards of efficiency, oftentimes saving you quite a bit of money in the form of lowered electricity bills.



LED LIGHTING

Changing out outdated light bulbs is one of the easiest and fastest ways to improve the performance of your home. LEDs give off little heat and only emit light in one direction, reducing energy waste by as much as 75% when compared to traditional incandescent bulbs. LED bulbs do cost more than incandescent bulbs, but they can last 8 to 25 times longer.



INSULATION

If you're in the market for a new home, or if you'll be remodeling your existing one, think about barriers to heat flow into your home. There are a multitude of insulation materials—ranging from reflective foils, to fiberglass, to spray foam, to many others—on the market today. When choosing insulation, consider the product's R-value. The higher the R-value, the greater its insulation effectiveness.



WATER CONSERVATION

Water conservation is a key element to sustainable, eco-friendly homes. It typically consists of three elements: water-saving appliances, like low-flush toilets and water-saving washers and dryers; water-saving landscaping, and water-saving irrigation techniques. Certain programs, like the Florida Water Star® program, put forth research-backed standards and guidelines for smart water conservation practices.



LOW VOC BUILDING MATERIALS

Install building materials with low VOCs (volatile organic compounds) to ensure a healthier living environment for your family. From paints and stains, to floors, cabinets, countertops, caulks and adhesives, opt for healthy building products that don't give off toxic fumes. In general, look for natural materials and recycled products to create a healthy living environment at home.