

Clean & Green

Clotheslines Make a Comeback



Eco-minded people who love to save money on their utility bills, shun dryer-sheet chemicals on their clothes, and adore snuggling into fresh-smelling, sun-dried bedding are part of a growing movement that is choosing

line drying over machines. The Pew Research Center's triennial U.S. survey gauging demand for household appliances reports a public U-turn: These days, 66 percent of Americans consider a machine dryer as a necessity, down sharply from 83 percent in 2006. While 75 percent of U.S. households currently own a clothes dryer, they are considered a luxury in Europe, where only about half of households on the continent own one, according to the Netherlands Statistical Office.

According to the recent Residential Energy Consumption Survey by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, clothes dryers consume as much as 6 percent of total residential household energy in the nation. In the process, an electric dryer emits more than a ton of carbon dioxide each year—a gas dryer about half the amount. Even line drying just one load of laundry instead of using an electric dryer keeps 3.35 pounds of CO₂ out of the atmosphere. Furthermore, line drying itself emits no CO₂.

Natural outdoor drying time is much easier on fabrics, especially knits and elastics, and sidesteps shrinkage. "Where do you think lint comes from?" inquires Project Laundry List; it's your clothes literally falling apart, due to tumbling and overheating.

Line drying can be a boon to busy people who don't have to worry about being present when the dryer shuts off to avoid wrinkling; it can also eliminate the need for ironing, yielding additional energy savings. Line dryers save money on whiteners and dryer sheets, because sunlight is a natural bleaching agent and disinfectant that delivers the genuine, fresh smell of sun-dried clothes that chemicals try to mimic. As a further bonus, line drying eases wear and tear on an expensive appliance, so that the machine can stay in service longer and stay out of the local landfill.

A variety of different types of clotheslines are available today for use both indoors and outdoors, from a simple do-it-yourself clothesline to retractable lines and collapsible umbrella models. Drying racks also have folding frames for space-efficient storage.

All of these free benefits can work to effectively counter those who mandate consumption and waste by arguing against clotheslines because of perceived aesthetic and property value concerns. Individuals who get a negative response from their community or homeowner's association about installing a clothesline may need to address community covenants, landlord prohibitions, and zoning laws. *LaundryList.org* offers helpful counsel and resources through its advocacy programs.

As an easy first step, sign the Right2Dry.org online petition.