



STEPPING UP HOME ENERGY SAVINGS

by Brita Belli

Green guru Ed Begley, Jr. likes to break down saving energy and reducing waste at home into doable steps that help us get the most out of our homes, so that we not only learn to live efficiently, but learn to love doing so! The how-to advice in his books comes packed with personal anecdotes and insights; it's like a friend explaining the basics, as opposed to a know-it-all.

Almost any energy-saving journey, Begley notes, begins with a green home audit. The one he had conducted for his home cost \$1,000 because it was very thorough; basic audits cost \$100 to \$175 per hour. But he's convinced it was well worth it because the auditor found many places where Begley could make simple minor adjustments to potentially save hundreds of dollars a year. What's more, he advises, "A good

green home audit will help you prioritize bigger changes, so you spend your money wisely."

Here's how to move up the energy-saving ladder, one step at a time.

Step One: The Low-Hanging Fruit

- Switch from incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent models.
- Turn off lights and fans when leaving a room.
- Change air filters.
- Take shorter showers.
- Turn off the faucet while shaving and brushing teeth.
- Plug in power strips and use them to fully turn off electronics when not in use.
- Recycle everything possible and compost all organic matter, from vegetable cuttings to coffee grounds.

Step Two: The Middle Road

- Install a programmable thermostat.
- Get a Cool-N-Save attachment for household air conditioners—a valve and mister system that activates when the AC is on to drop temperatures around each unit by as much as 30 degrees (not recommended for mineralized well water).
- Add insulation to drafty walls, ceilings, basements and even foundations.
- Install new double- or triple-pane windows.
- Add blinds or other window treatments to help retain heat in winter and block it in the summer.
- Purchase a new, energy-efficient dishwasher, refrigerator and other appliances.
- Replace the lawn with drought-tolerant grasses or native plants and vegetable/fruit/herb gardens or even an artificial lawn made of recycled rubber and plastic.

Step Three: Major Commitments

- Purchase and install a solar hot water system; at minimum, install a timer to avoid wasteful heating of water 24/7 (a thermal blanket can help, too).
- When updating a standard HVAC system, consider the value of switching to a heat pump model.
- If building a new residence or looking to upgrade an outdated heating/cooling system (particularly for larger homes), opt for a geothermal heat pump, which uses 25 to 50 percent less energy than a traditional heating and cooling system.
- Evaluate the home's solar potential and install solar photovoltaic panels on the roof.
- Consider a home's wind energy potential and install a home wind turbine.

Primary Source: Ed Begley, Jr.'s Guide to Sustainable Living