

December 23, 2013: Time and Time Again

One of the basic tenets of sustainability is using only what we need when we need it, and not wasting anything. This simple reality is one we can better accomplish with a little help from appropriate technology. Countdown timers are an easy way to cut down on wasted energy used by lights and fans by pre-setting the duration these fixtures can be on. This ability is great for adults, but may be particularly useful when children are the users. Countdown timers replace a standard light switch plate and fit a standard decorator switch plate. Replacement is easy, but any home electrical work is best done by trained professionals. Many are compatible with compact fluorescent bulbs, and each lets the user extend the run time or on time by simply resetting the timer for another cycle.

December 17, 2013: Buy Green

It is well known many retailers depend on the holiday season to insure a successful fiscal year. Many are increasing awareness using environmental criteria to inform purchasing decisions is becoming more common. GreenEdge Supply is pleased to offer a number of environmentally sensitive products and materials that can help satisfy your desire for eco-sensitive alternatives to conventional gifts. Our friends at *eartheasy* have some good general rules for buying green during the holidays or any time.

http://eartheasy.com/give_sustainchristmas.htm

- *Look for locally made gifts.* Many gifts in today's marketplace come from halfway around the world, and the impact of transportation contributes significantly to greenhouse emissions. Local craft fairs and artisan shops are a good source for gifts that come without the added costs of transportation. And gifts made locally often have a story which goes with the gift, since the artisan and the origin of the gift are known. GreenEdge Supply carries a number of products, materials and home care items made in the USA.
- *Choose gifts made from recycled sources.* Many individuals and small businesses have developed great products using recycled materials. Supporting these businesses helps reduce the waste stream while promoting the concept of making best use of available materials. Here are some examples for you to consider: [Gifts from recycled materials](#) GreenEdge Supply carries numerous items made with recycled content.
- *Give 'battery-free' gifts.* According to the EPA, about 40% of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Discarded batteries are an environmental hazard. Even rechargeable batteries find their way into the waste stream eventually. Here are a few examples of gifts that have less of an impact on the environment: [Naturally-powered toys](#) Contact GreenEdge Supply for information on how and where to recycle your used batteries.
- *Avoid children's toys that promote violence.* There is growing awareness about the potentially negative impact of social media and the new wave of video games for children. Remember one theme of Christmas is "Peace on Earth." It is good to remember there are many toys and games that are fun which nurture children's creativity and sense of active play. Here are some examples: [Educational toys and games](#)

- *'Re-gifting' is OK.* Many of us have questions about the etiquette behind the trend to 're-gift', that is, to pass on a gift you received but do not want or need. In each case, re-gifting makes perfect sense. If you receive something you really don't need, look for ways the gift can be passed on to someone who can use it. Of course, re-gifting needs to be done with care so as not to offend the original giver, but keeping a gift you don't need is wasteful, especially when it can fill a real need for someone else.

December 9, 2013: Green-light Your Green Lights

Decorating our home for the holidays often includes exterior lights. Part of the pageantry is in who has the best display, often determined by which home has the most lights and illuminated displays. But today an added aspect of what makes a holiday display beautiful can be expressed through showing a concern for the environment. The cost of electricity goes way beyond the utility bill. Electricity drains natural resources. Our friends at *Eartheasy* have some great tips on how to celebrate the Season of Light in environmentally friendly ways.

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Use LED lights for house and Christmas tree lighting. LED (Light Emitting Diode) holiday lights use up to 95% less energy than larger, traditional holiday bulbs and last up to 100,000 hours when used indoors. LED holiday lights use .04 watts per bulb, 10 times less than mini bulbs and 100 times less than traditional holiday bulbs. Over a 30-day period, lighting 500 traditional holiday lights will cost you about \$18.00 while the same number of LED lights costs only \$0.19. As an added bonus, if one of the LED lights burns out the rest of the strand will stay lit.

Outdoor Mini-lights will also save energy. A 100-light string uses only 40 watts. If you're buying a new set of lights, compare based on equal 'lighted lengths'. Some higher priced brands have 100 mini-lights for only 8 1/2 feet of length, while some 100 mini-light strings cover up to 40 feet in length. For the most efficient outdoor holiday lighting, consider the new solar LED strings now available.

Turn tree lights and outdoor house decorative lighting off at bedtime. It's simply a waste of energy to leave the holiday lights on at night after everyone's gone to sleep. Remember; never install lights with the power on. Test lights first, then unplug to install.

November 18, 2013: Water, Water Everywhere

Bottled water is everywhere, driven mainly by convenience and the belief bottled water is far superior to tap water. Clearly, drinking enough clean water to keep us hydrated and healthy is an important part of our daily regimens. But we are paying a heavy price globally for the convenience of consuming bottled water. The Sierra Club has a link that details what our concerns should be. http://www.sierraclub.org/committees/cac/water/bottled_water/bottled_water.pdf Among these is the fact 30 billion plastic water bottles are discarded every year. Only a small percentage of these are recycled. The remainder continues to accumulate, year after year and across generations, further degrading the environment while wasting precious fossil fuel supplies. The problem is so pervasive plastic bottles used for water and numerous other beverages and liquids, now constitute a large fraction of the growing plastic waste tonnage found in the world's oceans. And, several surveys show the water standards commercial water bottlers are subject to are not as stringent as those applied to most municipal water supplies in the US. So, while many municipal water supplies may be questionable, we need to be aware there is no guarantee bottled water is any better. Lastly,

when the cost of bottled water is compared to other ways of providing safe and clean water, it is obvious bottled water is by far the most expensive option.

The good news is there are several cost effective, reliable and eco-sensitive alternatives to drinking water from plastic bottles. GreenEdge Supply inventories a number of much more environmentally sensitive alternatives, from filters installed on your sink spigot, to filters for pitchers and a variety of reusable water containers. Each can last several lifetimes with proper care. The filters themselves are recyclable, and the need to purchase "disposable" water bottles is eliminated.

November 11, 2013: There is no more "away"

We always had a garden when we were growing up. Invariably, any organic kitchen waste ended back on the garden, either a few "coffee cans" at a time, or in larger buckets when we were hard about the task of canning our fall harvests. Composting then was a little labor intensive as our habit was to frequently spade the compostable materials directly into the garden earth with a shovel. This was effective, but certainly not convenient, and not the best method in the winter. All of this was driven by my parent's belief we should never throw anything away that is useful.

Today, interest in composting is being driven in part by the growing awareness we can no longer throw things away. There is no more "away," or places to discard things. More home, school and community gardens, and even commercial lots, are using compost to rebuild and enrich the soil. This leads to higher, more robust yields while lowering the amount of material going to landfills. The market is responding to the demand for high quality composting equipment. GreenEdge Supply and 84 Lumber are pleased to inventory a number of products to help make home composting convenient, safe and effective. First are a number of kitchen containers for receiving and temporarily storing the small amounts of compostable material we generate every day. The second are larger outdoor bins that receive our aggregate kitchen and yard waste. GreenEdge Supply sells kitchen and outdoor containers, and composting material accelerator additives as composting "kits" to get you started. All of our products are manufactured with materials that have a high percentage of recycled content. They are strong, lightweight and portable, and have the ability to rotate the contents for more efficient composting. Some can be unloaded directly into smaller garden carts making moving the compost much easier. Each is very low maintenance. An occasional washing (hopefully with captured rain water!) is all that is necessary for cleaning. The compost "tea" mine produces is a high quality, odorless, granular material I spread directly onto my garden, knowing the material is as completely organic as the original constituents enable it to be.

November 4, 2013: Feel Good! Build With Wood!

Wood has always been one of our most common building materials. Throughout most of our history it has been abundant, widely available, relatively inexpensive and very flexible in where and how it is used. Wood has played an important role in constructing our buildings as well as major parts of our industrial heritage and national infrastructure. The capabilities and limitations of wood in structural systems and energy and resource efficient buildings are well understood. Wood is widely recognized as a material that is both renewable and recyclable. And, wood is appreciated for its enduring beauty and its tactile qualities. In short, it is a great material. But wood is not without its controversy. Environmental interests have long decried the practice of clear cutting large tracts of land, often in some of our most beautiful wild and scenic areas. Detractors of reforestation by planting monocultures of same species trees point to the loss of biodiversity, soil depletion because of the reduction in recycled biomass and suitable habitat. Fortunately, organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (www.us.fsc.org) address the need for environmental stewardship, social equity and balancing the needs of industry with the need to maintain healthy ecosystems when supplying wood to consumers. Customers using FSC certified wood know their material has been subjected to FSC's rigorous standards, and are thereby supporting the environment while fulfilling their building needs. GreenEdge Supply and 84 Lumber are pleased to inventory a number of FSC

certified wood products. Our knowledgeable sales staff is ready to answer any questions you may have about the environmental aspects of purchasing and installing FSC certified wood.

June 6, 2013

Use the garbage disposal minimally and compost instead. Composting is most valuable when there is a garden or other use for the organic material, which is otherwise discarded. It is considered one of the best ways to naturally fertilize a garden and build the organic component in soils. Not using the garbage disposal saves water and energy.

May 28, 2013

Use the right grade of gasoline and don't top off your tank unless anticipating a long trip. Check your vehicle owner's manual to find out what's right for your car. Most cars run fine on regular grade fuel, and filling up half a tank at time is equivalent to not carrying a small passenger with you as you travel. Removing roof and bicycle racks and removing anything stored in the trunk can also improve gas mileage. Fuel prices can vary 10% within a few blocks, and regular grade fuel may cost as much as 20-cents per gallon less than premium grades, so look for the best price on line at stations in your area with the lowest prices before going out.

May 20, 2013

Common vinegar is well known as an effective, nontoxic cleaning agent. In many cases, it can replace bleach and other potentially harmful products in doing some important cleaning chores. Dilute one part water to one part vinegar to clean almost anything in your house. Keep vinegar away from marble, and be sure to dilute properly or it could eat away at tile grout. Use straight vinegar in empty toilet bowls to tackle the water ring. Vinegar will be pungent at first, but any smell will subside once it dries. And, you can always add mint leaves or fragrant natural essences to freshen the air.

May 13, 2013

Landscaping can save you money in summer or winter. Carefully positioned trees can save up to 25% of a household's energy consumption for heating and cooling. Computer models devised by the U.S. Department of Energy predict that the proper placement of only three trees will save an average household between \$100 and \$250 in energy costs annually. On average, a well-designed landscape provides enough energy savings to return your initial investment in less than 8 years. An 8-foot (2.4-meter) deciduous (leaf-shedding) tree, for example, costs about as much as an awning for one large window and can ultimately save your household hundreds of dollars in reduced cooling costs, yet still admit some winter sunshine to reduce heating and lighting costs. And, shading with fruit trees can add to the value and enjoyment of saving energy.

May 6, 2013

Green activities from recycling to composting are more likely to be successful if they are convenient and easy. Investing in, or making, sturdy, lightweight and easily cleaned containers that are clearly marked will help your recycling and composting efforts. Visitors and house guests will be more inclined to "pitch in" if containers are in easily located, logical locations. Built in recycling and composting stations that do not clutter or take up valuable work space in the kitchen are more likely to add value to the home, while "out of sight, out of mind" alternatives may not be fully utilized.

April 29, 2013

Spring is here and that means spring cleaning is too! Be sure to get to those "out of sight" places like your refrigerator condensate pan and your home's ductwork. Each can harbor dust and mold that

can cause building related illness. Cleaning your refrigerators coil will improve its energy efficiency. So will cleaning or changing your furnace and air conditioning filters. Each is a low cost way of improving home energy efficiency while making the home a healthier place to live.

April 22, 2013

Fans use less energy than air conditioning and can provide adequate comfort unless you live in a very humid climate. Properly sized *ceiling fans* cool by creating a low-level “wind chill” convective cooling effect. As long as indoor humidity isn’t excessive, they can be quite effective. Look for ENERGY STAR rated ceiling fans to minimize the energy used for convective cooling. Remember fans cool people; they do not reduce room temperature. So, turn fans off when you leave the room.

April 15, 2013

To keep high-angle summer sun out, consider deep (long) horizontal trellises over east and west-facing windows. Protect south-facing windows with deciduous trees or climbing foliage to shade them in summer, but take advantage of low-angle sun in the winter when the leaves fall. New windows should have low-e glazing to minimize heat loss and block unwanted heat gain.

April 8, 2013

Turning off your video games you can save a significant amount of energy. An Xbox or PlayStation 3 left on 24/7/365 can use as much energy as two modern refrigerators. If you have a PlayStation or Xbox, you can reduce the energy use of these consoles by selecting the auto-power down option in the menu.

April 1, 2013

Don’t keep your refrigerator any colder than necessary. 37° to 40°F is generally considered adequate for the refrigerator compartment, and 5°F is recommended for energy efficient operation of the freezer. Make further adjustments based on the performance of the appliance at that setting. An inexpensive appliance thermometer should be used to verify the compartment temperatures if the setting dials do not indicate temperature. Some older refrigerators have the ability to slightly warm the door seals to prevent condensation. This switch can sometimes be turned off, and should be, unless excessive condensation occurs. Also, refrigerators and freezers work best when they are as full as possible. More energy is devoted to cooling the stored foods, and not the interior air of the appliance.

March 27, 2013

Locate water heaters as close as possible to those things that are used most frequently. This can reduce the amount of heated water left in hot water supply lines between uses, saving energy and money. In new construction and renovations it may be better to use a number of strategically located tankless or in-line water heaters to service fixtures and appliances that do not need large quantities of hot water per cycle, and / or which can be satisfied with moderately warm water temperatures. All hot water supply lines routed through crawl spaces or unheated basements should be properly insulated, regardless of the water heating apparatus.

March 19, 2013

If energy use is your only consideration, use your microwave oven as much as possible. Microwaves draw less than 50% of the power of their counterparts, and can cook items in half the time, or less. For example, an item that requires one hour in a 350 degrees F can be prepared in approximately 15 minutes in a microwave if the high setting can be used. Many microwaves have settings optimized for cooking popular foods, further increasing their energy efficiency and probability the food will be properly prepared.

March 12, 2013

Never place your spare refrigerator in the garage. Foods can melt if the garage temperature is 42 °F or lower in winter months as the refrigerator temperature sensor may keep the refrigerator from cycling. In some locations, garage temperatures can exceed 100°F in the summer, making it very difficult for the refrigerator to function properly. The best place for a spare refrigerator is in the basement, or in another room of the home, such as a Laundry, Mud Room or Pantry.

March 7, 2013

People in the United States use more water per person than citizens of any other country. According to the US Geological Society, Americans use water at a pace of 1,383 gallons per day. Conserving water is not difficult, nor does it represent any significant sacrifice, loss of comfort or inconvenience.

March 1, 2013

Place a bucket in the shower to catch excess water to use to water plants later. This simple habit has the added benefit of “off-gassing the water” of any chlorine present and need only be done on plant watering days. This also works for washing dishes or vegetables in the sink, and the balance can go on the garden, yard, house pets and bird feeders.

February 19, 2013

Post-consumer recycled content refers to materials in a product that were once circulating in the market, and have been used by consumers. Typical examples include beverage cans or bottles, plastic packaging, and newspapers. Pre-consumer recycled content is material in a product that originated in a manufacturing or industrial process that otherwise would be wasted. Examples include fly ash from industrial stack scrubbers that ends up in concrete as a cement substitute, or mulch made from commercial tree services. Some green building materials contain both post-consumer and pre-consumer content.

February 12, 2013

Anything plugged into a typical 120V outlet is commonly referred to as a plug load. We need to understand that even when many of these items are “switched off” or are in a sleep mode, they are still consuming energy. The best way to insure your household items are completely off is to plug them into energy saving plug strips with “on / off” switches. These devices often feature surge suppression or lighting protection, an added benefit that can protect very expensive equipment or data that cannot be replaced. A Plug strip with surge suppression costs about \$20. If we assume they can save half the \$150 per year plug load energy in our homes, or about \$75, the payback for the Plug strip is about four months.

February 6, 2013

Maintain your equipment to prevent future problems and unwanted costs. Keep your cooling and heating system at peak performance by having a contractor do annual pre-season check-ups. Contractors get busy once summer and winter come, so it's best to check the cooling system in the spring and the heating system in the fall. Schedule the check-ups around the time changes in the spring and fall.

January 30, 2013

If you live in an older home, consider replacing your existing plumbing fixtures with low-flow fixtures and low-flush toilets. Old fixtures in disrepair can use twice as much water as modern water efficient options. Water conserving dual flush toilets use half the 1.6 gallons per flush required by current plumbing codes.

January 21, 2013

There is no question commercial salt based de-icing compounds effectively melt snow and ice but there are more eco-friendly ways. Remember, the job of a de-icer is to loosen ice from below to make it easier to shovel or plow. Using excess amounts of de-icer isn't necessarily more effective. The recommended application rate for rock salt is around a handful per square yard. Calcium chloride will treat about 3 square yards per handful. Any more is a waste of money and material.

January 15, 2013

Seal your heating and cooling ducts. Ducts that move air to-and-from a forced air furnace, central air conditioner, or heat pump are often big energy wasters. Sealing and insulating ducts can improve the efficiency of your heating and cooling system by as much as 20 percent - and sometimes much more.

Focus first on sealing ducts that run through the attic, crawlspace, unheated basement, or garage. Use duct sealant (mastic) or metal-backed (foil) tape to seal the seams and connections of ducts. After sealing the ducts in those spaces, wrap them in insulation to keep them from getting hot in the summer or cold in the winter. Next, look to seal any other ducts you can access in the heated or cooled part of the house.

January 9, 2013

Use the right sized pot on stove burners. A 6" pot on an 8" burner wastes over 40 percent of the burner's heat. Also, cover pots and pans to keep heat in. Using the right sized pot on stove burners can save about \$36 annually for an electric range, or \$18 for gas.