

ENVIRONMENTAL

TIPS

for your HOME

SAVE THE PLANET AND YOUR WALLET

Are you looking to live healthier, protect the environment **AND** save money? It's easier than you think! A great place to start is in your home. Wisely using our limited resources doesn't mean you have to live in discomfort. The ideas presented in this booklet can actually improve your home's comfort. The best part is that many of our suggestions can be done for **FREE**.

Tips to Use Throughout Your Home

Brrr! It's Cold in Here!

Air conditioning typically accounts for 30-40% of your electric bill. Even a moderate reduction in A/C use could save you big bucks!

- **Turn off the A/C and open the windows.** Even in South Florida there are some months when it's cool outside.
- **Fans help us feel cooler.** A gentle breeze makes our skin feel cooler at almost any temperature. This could mean more days without using the A/C or setting the thermostat a few degrees higher. Don't forget to turn off the fans when you leave the room.
- **Clean or change your filter monthly.** This can help you and your A/C breathe easier. Reusable filters that can be cleaned and used again will cut down on the cost and trash!
- **Say Aaah.** Your air conditioner should get a checkup by a professional every year. An inspection and a good cleaning will not only extend the total life of the unit, but could also save you nearly 10-20% on your A/C costs.
- **Set your thermostat to 78°F.** This moderate temperature combines comfort and energy efficiency. Each degree above that can shave an additional 5-8% off cooling costs.



I Can See the Light!


- **Turn off the lights when you leave the room.** Something that simple can save electricity and make the bulbs last longer.
- **Install compact fluorescent lights in lamps and fixtures.** Initially, these bulbs cost much more than regular incandescent bulbs, but because they use a fraction of the energy and last many times longer, they easily pay for themselves over time. These lights don't get as hot so you save on A/C. Look for special compact fluorescents for dimmable and 3-way fixtures.
- **Clean light bulbs around the house.** It may seem silly at first, but dust can reduce lighting effectiveness by 10%. You should wait until they cool down before giving this a try.




Time to Go Shopping for New Appliances.

- Buying appliances like ovens, refrigerators, washers and dryers is an opportunity to save energy, water and money. Shop for an energy efficient unit. The additional cost will be “paid back” many times over by decreasing your monthly energy or water bill.
- **EnergyStar™.** Products with the EnergyStar™ label have been certified as being more energy efficient. Always try to pick products with this label when you are buying new items.
  - **Not from the top!** Purchase a front-loading washer instead of a traditional top-loading model. They use about half the water and save energy too.
  - **Don't throw appliances away.** When you buy new appliances, don't throw away the old ones. Many old models can be donated or recycled.

Don't Get Burned Heating Your Water.

- Heating water can account for 20% of the energy used in your home. You can save buckets of electricity or gas, water AND money by following these tips.
- **Install a water heater timer.** Most working families only need hot water for a couple of hours each day. You can set the timer to turn on the heater when you normally need hot water and turn off when you don't. Doing this could easily cut hot water costs by 1/3. To find a water heater timer, check your local hardware store. Also look into solar water heaters as well as tank less water heaters.
-  **Tip:** Always consult an expert. Get advice from a professional before handling or making any changes to your water heater.

More Ways to Save.

- **The veggies have frostbite.** Keep the refrigerator between 38°F and 42°F, and the freezer between 0°F and 5°F. A 10°F drop in temperature will add an additional 25% to the cost of running your refrigerator.
  - **Pack it in there!** Wait to do full loads of dishes instead of wasting water and electricity on a half-empty dishwasher. If you only have a handful of dishes, wash them in the sink instead. But remember, don't let the water run for ever. Fill the sink for washing and/or rinsing instead.
  - **Use cold water when washing clothes.** The hot water cycle of most washing machines uses 90% more energy per load than the cold water cycle. Using the hot water cycle can also shorten the life of your clothes.
  - **Size does matter.** Make sure you set the load size for your laundry to the correct setting and only wash full loads of clothes. Don't waste water and electricity on a half-empty washing machine.
  - **Minimize the use of the garbage disposal.** Food waste can clog the pipes in your home and throughout the sanitary sewer system. Dispose of solid food items in the garbage instead.
  - **Buy clothes that don't need to be dry-cleaned.** The chemicals used in dry cleaning are believed to cause cancer and residue on dry-cleaned clothes is considered an indoor air pollutant.
-  **Tip:** If you must dry-clean, remove the plastic cover and hang the garment in a well ventilated area before putting them in your closet.

Tips for Water Conservation

- It's hard to believe that with all the rain that South Florida gets, we would have to worry about water, but it's true. South Florida residents use more water per person than almost anywhere else in the country, and we also experience periodic water shortages. You can cut your water usage in half by changing a few habits and taking advantage of some “pain-free” water-saving devices.
- **Saved by the flush.** Lower the rise of toilet tank water by adjusting the tank float. Another option is to put a small plastic jug filled with water and some weights into the tank to displace water. You could save up to half a gallon with every flush (don't try this with low-volume toilets). If you are remodeling your bathroom, replace your old inefficient 3-5 gallon-per-flush toilet with a new low volume of 1.28 to 1.0 gpf.
  - **Install low-flow devices.** Installing a low-flow showerhead or fitting a flow restrictor into your current showerhead can reduce water use by 50%. A low flow sink faucet aerator can save up to 280 gallons per year. These devices also save on hot water costs and increase water pressure.
  - **Cut down on marathon showers.** A shower almost always uses less water than a bath. Even a five-minute shower can use about 35 gallons of water, so keep it short! Shorter showers save hot water costs and air conditioning bills.
  - **Turn off the water while brushing teeth or shaving.** Only turning on the water to rinse can save up to 10 gallons of water per day.
  - **Get a free water conservation kit.** Contact the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department, listed at the end of this booklet, to get your free water conservation kit.
  - **Don't over-wash.** By eliminating the pre-soak and second rinse cycles when you use your washing machine, you can save as much as 19 gallons of water per load.



Tips for Reducing Garbage

- On average, each single-family home in Miami-Dade County generates 8 pounds of garbage per day! Not only do we have to build trash dumps and incinerators to handle all of this trash, but some of it never makes it into a garbage can. Instead, it winds up littering our streets, parks and waterways.
- **Reduce and Reuse.** Buy products that are longer lasting or that can be reused or refilled several times. For example, try a lunch box and reusable plastic containers instead of a paper bag and plastic wrap. Shop for products with a minimum of packaging. Wouldn't you rather pick out those oranges yourself instead of taking a bunch wrapped in unnecessary plastic?



- **Then Recycle.** After reducing and reusing, be sure to separate and recycle empty products as much as you can. Recyclables can then be manufactured into new products.
- **Paper or plastic?** Neither, thank you. If you're only picking up one or two items, do you really need a bag? Or even better, take your own reusable bags to the store. Buy your own canvas shopping bags and cut down on waste every time you go grocery shopping.
- **Stop junk mail!** A surprising amount of household garbage first arrives through the mail. To stop most of your junk mail, write to: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, Attn: Department 11630860, PO Box 282 Carmel, NY 10512 or visit their website at [www.dmachoice.org](http://www.dmachoice.org).
- **Charge it!** Why buy batteries that you can only use once? Rechargeable alkaline batteries work just as well and can be recharged 20 or more times. NiCad batteries can be recharged several hundred times. Yes, they cost more at first, but think of all those batteries you won't have to buy in the future. Note: it is illegal to put NiCad and similar rechargeable batteries in the garbage. To find a rechargeable battery collection center near you, contact the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corp, listed at the end of this booklet.
- **Recycle standard batteries too!** Alkaline household batteries which are non-rechargeable (AAA, AA, C, D, and 9 volt batteries) they can be placed in the regular garbage. Mercury was eliminated in the manufacturing process of these household batteries, so disposal of these batteries no longer poses the same environmental concerns as before. Rechargeable batteries, Lead Acid Vehicle Batteries, and Silver Oxide batteries should be taken to the County's Home Chemical Collection Centers. For more information, please call 3-1-1 or visit [www.miamidade.gov/publicworks/recycling.asp](http://www.miamidade.gov/publicworks/recycling.asp)

## Tips for Cleaning Alternatives

Spills and messes around the house are harder to clean after they have dried or been stuck onto surfaces. This is usually when people resort to harsh cleaning chemicals. One of the easiest ways to be environmentally friendly and save money is to clean up messes right away and follow a regular cleaning schedule. This way you can use milder cleaners and maintain a healthier, safer home.

### Countertop and Bathroom Surfaces.

- **Are you getting enough fiber?** Before using harsher chemicals, try using a better cloth or mop. Washable micro-fiber materials are the latest rage because more fibers mean more surface area for picking up soils. That means you can use less cleaning solution and less work for you. Disposable mop heads and similar products are not recommended as they generate more waste.
- **A paper towel, please.** If you use paper towels, buy the kinds that are manufactured with recycled content.
- **Team up with Borax.** Follow the manufacturer's instructions and clean surfaces with one tablespoon of Borax dissolved in one quart of warm water. Be sure to wash hands with soap and water after using borax.
- **Arm yourself with baking soda.** Follow the manufacturer's instructions and clean surfaces with four tablespoons of baking soda dissolved in one quart of warm water. For no wax and tile floors, try 1/2 cup Baking Soda in a bucket of warm water.
- **Is life giving you lemons?** Then juice them and use as a cleaner for grease or soap scum and mineral deposits.
- **Some vinegar, please.** For no wax and tile floors, try 1/2 cup of vinegar in a gallon of water.

### Window Cleaner.

- **Use vinegar for the windows too.** A 1/4 cup of white distilled vinegar, two cups of distilled water and up to 1/2 teaspoon of mild liquid soap or detergent makes a good window cleaner. Spray on the solution and then dry with a sheet of newspaper or lint free cloth.

### Air and Carpet Freshener.

- **Floral fresh.** Putting a couple of indoor plants around the house can help to clear the air.
- **Did we mention borax?** Borax is often touted as a versatile cleaner and deodorizer. For tough areas, dampen the spot, sprinkle borax over it, rub the area, and then vacuum after it dries. For general use, sprinkle, let sit, and then vacuum. Just make sure to dispose of the vacuum bag after using. Wash hands after use.
- **Deodorize more than the refrigerator.** Baking soda can be used to deodorize carpets. Sprinkle, let sit for at least 15 minutes, and then vacuum.

### Oven Cleaner.

- **Good for baking and cleaning.** Baking soda penetrates and helps lift off baked-on, dried-on foods from cookware. Shake on a generous amount of baking soda, add hot water and dish detergent, let sit for 15 minutes and gently rub tough spots. Rinse and wipe clean as usual.

### Drain Cleaner.

- **Don't be a greaser!** Never pour grease down the drain; it can clog pipes. Instead, pour it in a non-recyclable container and throw it out with the garbage.
- **Take action before you have a clog.** Periodically treat drains with a build-up remover that contains bacteria and enzymes. This can be bought in your hardware store.



## Tips to Use Outdoors

### Right Plant-Right Place.

The key to having a healthy, low-maintenance landscape is choosing the right plants for the right place. Make maintenance easier and cheaper by grouping plants together that have similar needs for soil, moisture and sunlight.

- **Go native.** Native plants are generally easier to maintain because they have adapted to local environmental conditions, but even native plants need to be placed in the right location within your yard. Select plants that match the existing conditions for soil, moisture and sunlight.
- **Make your landscape work for you.** Trees and shrubs planted to shade the west, east and south sides of your home can help to reduce your A/C costs. In addition, trees and shrubs are usually easier to maintain than grass.

### Yard Care.

- **Mucho mulch.** Mulch looks good, helps retain soil moisture, keeps down the weeds and improves your soil. Apply mulch 2-3 inches deep around plants and out to the drip line of trees. Coarser mulch such as pine bark can be 3-4 inches deep (remember to leave enough space around the trunk of trees and plants). The most environmentally friendly method is to recycle tree cuttings and other non-pest organic debris from your yard as mulch.
- **If you must.** If you do purchase mulch from a hardware store, avoid cypress mulch and any mulch that may contain pressure treated wood. The best kind of mulch is pine bark, which is in big enough pieces to keep the weeds down and allow water to pass through it.
- **It's all in the timing.** The best time to water is in the morning before 9am or in the evening after 5pm. In fact, watering during the day isn't just wasteful, Miami-Dade County residents should be aware of Permanent Landscape Irrigation Restrictions that prohibits watering between the hours of 9am - 5pm.
- **Tree pruning is an art and science.** Some things are just best left to qualified and certified professionals. Hat racking and causing other severe tree damage is illegal in Miami-Dade County and can end up costing you a lot of money. Get all of the right information first, and prune later. For more information, contact DERM.
- **Don't use "weed and feed."** It can actually harm your trees and pollute the ground water.
- **Bricks are better.** Don't pave over your lawn. Instead, use porous pavers or bricks for your driveway. This will allow rainwater to soak back into the ground.



### So, there you have it.

Now that you've learned all of these great environmental and money saving tips for your home, get out there and make these simple changes! These new habits will allow you to live healthier, save our environment and at the same time, put a little money back in your pocket. Remember to pass these useful tips on to your family and friends, too!

## Important Contacts

#### Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources (RER)

RER 24-Hour Hotline.....(305) 372-6955  
RER Main Information Line.....(305) 372-6789  
RER's Environmental Education & Communications Office.....(305) 372-6784

#### Emergencies (911)

National Pesticide Telecommunications Network.....1-800-858-7378  
Poison Control.....1-800-222-1222

#### Energy Conservation

Florida City Gas.....1-888-352-5325  
Florida Power and Light.....1-800-DIAL-FPL

#### Other Important Numbers

Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).....(850) 245-8719  
Miami-Dade 311 Answer Center.....311  
Miami-Dade Cooperative Extension Service.....(305) 248-3311  
Miami-Dade Public Works & Waste Management.....(305) 594-1500  
Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department (WASD).....(305) 665-7471  
Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corp.....1-800-8BATTERY  
South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).....(305) 377-7274

For more information call 305-372-6789 or visit us at  
[www.miamidade.gov/environment](http://www.miamidade.gov/environment)



Department of **Regulatory and Economic Resources (RER)**  
Division of Environmental Resources Management (DERM)  
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