

Make neighbors green with envy

by Brett Marlow
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THERE'S A green movement that's in bloom and more people are becoming interested in ways to shrink their environmental impact. Individuals who want to implement a little Mother Nature into their own place don't have to worry about breaking the bank. It can actually pay off, for them and the environment in the long run.

Although renters can't make changes to the apartment's existing structure, they can make changes in their own living spaces that are environmentally friendly.

"People who rent have a real problem because most of the things that affect whether or not a place is green or not, they can't do," said Lloyd Alter, correspondent for the environmental blog TreeHugger.com.

However, making an apartment more green really comes down to being a little more conscious of a few things like watching what is bought, used or brought into the apartment, said Jessica Mondo, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design accredited professional at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill architectural firm.

There are even local stores like Greenmaker Building Supply Co., 2500 N. Pulaski Road, and resources like the Chicago Center for Green Technology, 445 N. Sacramento Blvd., that can help.

If a building's landlord isn't attentive to making sure things are running efficiently, there are things to check for, said Meghann Maves, a resource librarian at the Chicago Center for Green Technology.

Check for open cracks in the spaces between windows and doorways that allow heat to escape in the winter. Weather proof-

ing strips are available at home improvement shops to solve the problem.

"Renters can be more involved by checking their appliances, see if they're Energy Star or are being maintained efficiently," Maves said.

Changing regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFLs, is one of the most important things renters can do, Alter said.

"Lighting is usually 6 to 7 percent of your utility bill," Maves said. "By using CFLs, you're saving money in the long run."

Maves said in order to get the most out of the bulbs, be sure to use the bulbs in "high-frequency areas" where they'd be on for long periods of time.

Plugging in gadgets, or "ghost energy consumers" like a cell phone charger, mp3 player charger or a computer into a surge protector and turning it off when not needed can also save a little on the electric bill, Mondo said.

There are also things a renter can do to cut down on water usage.

Switch out existing fixtures like shower heads or add a component called a retrofit handle for the toilet, which allows the renter to control how much water goes with each flush, said Josh Hirsens, a sales associate at Greenmaker Building Supply Co. The shop sells goods like environmentally friendly products for the home and garden, remodeling and building supplies. Changing an existing shower head in the bathroom for a low-flow, oxygen-infused shower head aids in water conservation, Hirsens said. The bonus to these products is that the water pressure isn't lost, but water is saved.

Furnishing a place can be fun, but knowing what that sweet chic couch



Greenmaker Building Supply Co., 2500 N. Pulaski Rd., specializes in environmentally friendly products for home repair.

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is made from might not be worth it. Alter recommends avoiding purchasing cheap furniture made from particle board because it contains formaldehyde. Vinyl is another material to avoid, Alter said. Vinyl is made with chlorine, which Alter explained is a "bad greenhouse gas" made from oil. When vinyl is disposed of it emits harmful chemicals.

Instead of going for the new stuff, take advantage of thrift shops or look on websites like craigslist.org or on a free-cycle website to see who is giving away furniture for free that they no longer need, Alter said. The reason to buy used items is that new items, fresh out of the box are full of chemicals. By reusing old items, they have already emitted many of their chemicals, Maves said.

Even decorating can translate to being green. Greenmaker sells a line of paint called low VOC, volatile organic compound, which does not have an odor like regular paint.

Another concern for renters is their indoor air quality. Mondo recommended open-

ing the windows and letting fresh air in. A space's indoor air quality can improve if plants are placed around the room, Mondo said.

A good tip to go by is one house plant per each 100 square feet, Maves said.

It's also important to watch what cleaning substances are used in the space.

"It's best to buy products that say they are non-toxic, biodegradable or safe enough for a baby to be in an environment with. A bleach smell does not always mean clean," Maves said.

Seventh Generation is a company that makes a line of eco-friendly household cleaners and recycled paper goods which are available at stores like Whole Foods, Walgreens and online. The products might cost more on the shelf, but the cost toward protecting the environment pays off.

"Being green does not have to be difficult," Mondo said. "Just think smart."

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