

Four ways to be more “green.”

By Alissa Sklar

After dinner, our family follows a simple routine. My husband, three girls and I clear the table, throw scraps into the countertop compost container, put empty boxes, cans or containers into the recycling bin and toss the little that remains into the trash.

While it took us a while to get the logistics of this sorting process worked out, the girls feel proud to see how much less garbage we have to put out on the curb each week. It makes them feel we are making a difference in protecting the environment.

Like a growing number of families, we are trying to adapt habits that will reduce our impact on the environment. But even when families earnestly try to follow the three Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), many wonder if there is even more they can do.

Thankfully, there are many easy, creative ways to go green, many of which have the added benefit of saving money. Consider some of the following ideas this spring and help make the world a better place.



1 Nix the packaging.

To cut down on the amount of trash your family produces, avoid products with wasteful packing. For example, instead of buying a box filled with those individual pouches stuffed with mini-cookies, why not make a big batch of cookies (or at least buy a big box of cookies) and send them to school in reusable containers? You can take the same approach to reducing your dependence on those all-too-familiar juice boxes; try reusable drink containers instead.

As well, check to see if the packaging can be recycled before you buy a product. Montreal mom Janet Raddatz was looking for little yogurt containers that could be recycled and she was appalled that she couldn't find any. “We ended up buying a large container of yogurt and putting it in [reusable containers] for lunches.”

She adds that vegetables and fruit often come in unnecessary packaging, citing a recently observed package of bell peppers on a Styrofoam sheet covered in plastic. “This makes me cringe,” she says.



2 Purchase items made with post-consumer recyclables.

From notebooks to drinking glasses, you can now find more products containing what is called “post-consumer recyclables,” meaning products made from recycled items.

In Montreal, **Coop La Maison Verte** in N.D.G. (5785 Sherbrooke St., W) carries many different eco-friendly products, including many items made from recycled materials.

Also, several grocery stores now stock paper products like tissues and paper towel, which are made partially from recycled paper.

3 Rethink your household energy use.

All homeowners should consider taking advantage of the **Natural Resource Canada Energy Retrofit Assessment and Grants Program** (<http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca>), which ends March 31, 2011. This program, which is available for all low-rise residential properties (including duplexes and triplexes), requires a government-approved energy audit of your home, which takes just a couple of hours and costs between \$175-\$300.

You are provided with a report that offers suggestions on how to improve your home's energy efficiency. The licensed energy advisor will come back when any work is completed (provided it is within 18 months of the initial assessment) and determine the amount of money you will be granted to cover the cost of changes.

Homes built before 1985 will benefit the most, with an average of 35 per cent savings on energy use, with greenhouse gas reductions of approximately four tonnes per house. Moreover, the average homeowner could save up to \$700 on an annual heating bill of \$2,000. Examples of renovations that are covered include new heating and cooling systems, windows, insulation and roofing.

4 Go green with your renovations.

Hisham Shakarchi, president of **Rénovert Solutions Inc.**, a Montreal firm specializing in eco-friendly renovations, says going green doesn't have to be time consuming or expensive. “You don't need to compromise on quality or design,” he says. “There are many alternative products out there that are equivalent to or better than the products we are used to using.” For example, switch to house paint that has zero VOC compounds, which are released into the air and contribute to greenhouse gases. The zero VOC paints are no more toxic than your kids' crayons, so kids can even be involved in the paint job if you choose to do it yourself. Consider installing dual-flush toilets, which provide different amounts of water depending on what needs to be flushed away or look for low-consumption faucets that cut down on the amount of water flowing out each time someone turns on the tap. Shakarchi also urges people to consider recycling the materials pulled out during a renovation. His company helps homeowners segregate all the materials and will then transport them to the appropriate Eco-quartier sites for safe disposal. For more information, call (514) 653-VERT (8378). ■