



RENTERS GUIDE TO
sustainable living





Start out with small and easy-to-implement changes like shorter showers and collecting waste water for use in the garden. Let your sustainability grow from there.

No matter if you're a home owner or a home renter, you can make changes to your home to make it more comfortable, save money and reduce your environmental impact. With the smallest effort, there are many simple, inexpensive things you can do to make a difference.

This booklet is designed to help you reduce your rental home's energy and water use without the need for major home renovations. Many actions can be done at zero or low cost, or through small changes in your behaviour.

To make it easier we have tips for each room of the house. These range from the simplest tweaks, to improvements that may require permission from your landlord.

Some changes to rental properties require you to consult your landlord, real estate agent or property manager. But don't let this discourage you. You might find that they are more than willing to undertake improvements in the area of sustainability, or grant you permission to make some changes yourself. After all, there are a number of government rebates and tax concessions available to assist with sustainable improvements and these will also improve the property's resale value.



This icon means you will need permission from your landlord.

Get support from the entire household. With everyone's help, the changes you make will be easier to put in place and maintain. You might want to write up an action plan with tasks and dates when you aim to achieve things. If you have kids, get them involved. You will be surprised how enthusiastic kids can be in coming up with ideas for smarter living!

Disclaimer: Each State and Territory has legislation that regulates residential tenancies. Generally, for any changes you wish to make to the rental property you must receive permission, often in writing, from your landlord. You will need to check your own lease document for the requirements relating to your tenancy. If you have no lease then check with your landlord. Please see the sample letter at the back of this booklet.

TIPS FOR THE WHOLE HOUSE

The following tips will help you improve your rental home's efficiency, making it more economical to run and helping to reduce your impact on the environment.

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Lighting

Switch off lights when not in use and change to energy-efficient light bulbs, it'll make a huge difference to your power bills.

■ Turn off lights when not in use

If you're not using a room or an outdoor entertaining area turn the lights off. Leaving outdoor lights on for long periods can double your lighting bill. Smart use of sensors, particularly outdoors, can ensure that lights are only on when needed.

■ Let in natural light

Open blinds and curtains to let in natural light rather than turning on lights.

■ Replace incandescent light bulbs

Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents lights (CFLs) or light emitting diode (LED) bulbs. CFLs are cheap to run – they can reduce running costs by 75% – and they last much longer than incandescent bulbs. LED bulbs are becoming more readily available, and they can be as efficient or more so than CFLs.

■ Don't use halogen downlights

If your house is full of energy-hungry halogen downlights, replace them with good quality LED bulbs. Alternatively, you could buy floor and table lamps and fit them with CFLs or LED bulbs and leave the halogens off.





Heating and cooling

Heating and cooling are the most energy hungry activities in a home, but it doesn't take much effort to reduce their impact.

■ Pull on a jumper

Before turning on the heater, put on a jumper. By dressing appropriately for the weather you reduce the need for turning on the heater or airconditioner

■ Use heating and airconditioning wisely

Reducing the temperature on the thermostat of your heater or increasing it on your airconditioner by just 1°C can reduce the energy used by 10%. In winter, set the heater thermostat to a maximum of 18-20°C; in summer set your airconditioner to a minimum of 26°C.

■ Heat and cool only what you need

Only heat or cool rooms you are using, and keep the heat or cool in by keeping doors closed.

■ Cool and heat the house naturally

On hot, still summer days close all windows, doors and curtains to help keep the house cool. And

when that cool change arrives, take advantage of it by opening windows and doors to let the cooling breeze through the house.

■ Hang heavy, lined curtains

Heavy, lined curtains or blankets keep heat in during winter and heat out on hot summer days. For best results make sure they are close fitting, hang down to the floor, and have an overlap of 100mm each side of the window.

■ Install pelmets

Pelmets are covers over the top of curtains, and they stop hot air circulating behind the curtains. If your house does not have pelmets ask your landlord to see if permanent pelmets can be installed. Alternatively, use a rolled towel, blanket or strips of thick cardboard over the top of curtains for temporary, removable pelmets.

■ Use timer switches

Set timers on your heater or cooler to switch off when not needed.

■ Direct the heat

If your house has central heating consider buying vent directors. These can be placed over vents to help direct the air into the centre of the room instead of straight up to the ceiling – and they're not expensive.

■ Seal up gaps and draughts

Stop draughts by closing gaps around doors and windows. Self adhesive door and window seals are cheap, easy to install and removable when you leave. Or you could use a 'door snake'. Alternatively, ask your landlord if you can install permanent draught stoppers and seals around doors and windows.

■ Shade your windows

External shading of windows is twice as effective as internal blinds in keeping out the heat, so in summer place a removable external blind, shade cloth, sun sail or outdoor umbrella over a window to shield it from the sun. If you want to install a permanent shade solution attached to the house, ask your landlord.

■ Close up ventilation outlets

Check whether chimney ventilation outlets, flues and extraction fans can be sealed when not in use. Removable dampers are available which can be placed over extraction fans which vent into roof spaces. Note that you shouldn't close up ventilation outlets in a house with un-flued gas heaters.

■ Install insulation

Insulation is critical to a home's ability to be heated and cooled efficiently, so if your rental property is uninsulated ask the landlord to install some in the ceiling, assuming it is accessible. There are State and Federal rebates available (see the box), and the landlord might be even more willing to pay for it if you offer to do the installation.

Insulation Rebate

Landlords and tenants (with landlord permission) are eligible for a rebate of up to \$1,000 to install ceiling insulation in their rental properties under the Low Emissions Assistance Plan for Renters.

The Low Emission Plan for Renters is under development. Landlords can subscribe to the online register so that they can be notified of start dates and program details as soon as they become available.

www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency/insulation-renter.html

Switch to GreenPower

One of the easiest ways to make your home more sustainable is to simply choose the GreenPower option from your electricity retailer. Accredited GreenPower is electricity generated from clean, renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, wave and small-scale hydro plants, as well as landfill gas and biomass (waste).

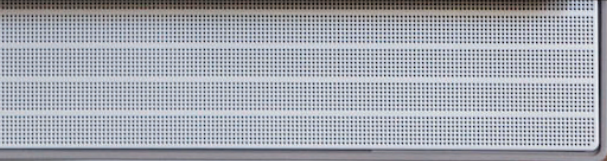
Accredited GreenPower products are individually assessed to verify they comply with high environmental standards. By buying GreenPower you are helping to support the development of the renewable energy industry and reducing the demand for electricity from the burning of fossil fuels. For the biggest impact ask for 100% accredited GreenPower.

www.greenpower.gov.au

www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au







Living Room

You probably spend a lot of time in your living room, so it's the best place to start making your home more comfortable and sustainable.

■ Turn appliances off at the power point when not in use

Many appliances such as DVD players, TVs, stereos and computers use electricity called 'standby power' when they are not being used, if they are left switched on at the power point. Standby power accounts for as much as 10% of household energy bills. Turn off appliances at the power point. To make things easier, place multiple appliances on a single or multiple switch powerboard to avoid hard-to-reach spots and reduce the number of switches to flick.

■ Turn off computer monitors

Set your computer to enter 'sleep' mode after a certain period of inactivity and turn the computer monitor off when you're not using it, even for a short time.

■ Choose an LCD monitor

LCD computer monitors generate around half the greenhouse gas emissions of conventional monitors. Turning the brightness down can cut emissions to a quarter.

■ Don't super-size your telly

A simple rule of thumb is the bigger the TV, the more energy it will use. Indeed, some larger TV models use more energy to run than a standard-sized fridge.

■ Look at the stars

Check the Energy Star label on DVD players, TVs, stereos, computers and printers. Appliances that have the energy star label use much less power when in 'standby' mode.

www.energystar.gov.au

Reach for the stars

When buying new appliances look for the energy label. The Energy Rating scheme rates the energy efficiency of electrical products and appliances to help you with your purchasing choices. The star ratings of all labelled products and appliances are also available on the energy rating website. When comparing different appliances or equipment it is important to look at comparative energy consumption, which is shown in kilowatt-hours, rather than just the number of stars.

www.energyrating.gov.au



Kitchen

While the kitchen is home to one of the house's biggest energy guzzlers, the fridge, simple tips can keep energy use down.

■ Don't open the fridge door too often

In most households, the fridge uses more power than any other appliance. To cut energy use, try to limit the number of times you open the fridge door, and never leave it open.

■ Don't place hot items in the fridge

Wait until a dish has cooled down before placing it in the fridge. Put cold items back into the fridge after use rather than letting them warm to room temperature.

■ Get the temperature right

The recommended operating temperature for a fridge is 3°C to 5°C. For freezers, the recommended range is -15 to -18°C.

■ Switch off the second fridge

If you have a second fridge, consider how often your 'drinks fridge' is really used. Turn it on only when you need it.

■ Keep the fridge well ventilated

Provide at least 50mm of space at the top, back and sides to improve ventilation and let your fridge work at its best.

■ Place the fridge in a cool spot

Locate fridges and freezers in cool spots, away from direct sun and other heat sources such as stoves.

■ Check fridge seals

Check and clean seals on your fridge to make sure the door closes securely. Regularly remove any frost buildup in the freezer.

■ Save rinsing water

Rinse vegetables over a bowl and tip the water on the garden or a pot plant. You can also buy tubs

with a handle and plug, which fit snugly in the kitchen sink to make it easy to transport water to the garden.

■ Boil the water you need

Use an electric kettle instead of the electric stovetop to boil water. Fill the kettle with only as much water as you need.

■ Run a full load in the dishwasher

Wait until the dishwasher is full before running it. It wastes a lot of water to clean a small number of dishes. Also, the less the dishwasher is used the more energy is saved.

■ Scrape rather than rinse

If you have a dishwasher, scrape dishes rather than rinse where possible, or use less water by not rinsing dishes under running water.

■ Cooking toast

Cooking toast in a toaster instead of the grill reduces energy use by up to 75%.

■ Cooking with gas

If possible, use gas for cooking. Gas is generally cheaper and it's less damaging to the environment than coal-fired electricity production. Turn the gas down to keep flames under the pot rather than up the sides. Gently simmer pots with the lid on rather than boiling vigorously. If you have to use electricity to cook, use a microwave where practical.

■ Install tap aerators

Aerators can be fitted to taps to reduce water flow. They can be fitted inside or on the tap. Check with your landlord before installing.

■ Choose energy and water efficient appliances

When it comes time to replace fridges, microwaves and other appliances, buy the most energy and water efficient one. Buy the right size for your needs.



Bathroom

Fixing dripping taps and using the half flush are just two of the many things you can do to save water in your bathroom.

■ Use cold water

When washing your hands, shaving or cleaning your teeth use cold water.

■ Don't leave the bathroom tap running

When brushing your teeth, use a cup of water for rinsing – don't leave the tap running. Put the plug in the basin when washing or shaving.

■ Have short showers

Take shorter showers to save both water and energy. Hot showers cause up to half a kilogram of greenhouse gas every minute, so try to keep your showers to four minutes or less. Use a shower timer as a reminder.

■ Use the half flush

If your toilet is a dual flush system, use the half flush as much as possible.

■ Use a bucket

Put a bucket in the shower while waiting for the water to run hot, then use this cold water on the garden. You can purchase tubs big enough to stand in while you shower, which will capture a full shower's worth of 'grey water' for the garden. Make

sure you use gentle, garden-friendly soaps and shampoos if you do this.

■ Check flow rates of your showerheads

Check your shower's flow rate on the showerhead. If there's no rate written on the showerhead you can measure the flow rate by turning on the shower at its normal rate for 30 seconds and capturing the water in a bucket. Measure how many litres of water are in the bucket and double the figure to get the flow rate.

Inefficient showerheads can use more than 15 litres per minute; a WELS four-star rated showerhead uses 7 litres per minute.

■ Install water efficient showerheads [P](#)

One of the best ways to save both water and energy is to install an efficient showerhead. Water saving showerheads can be easily fitted to existing shower arms. Rebates are available and prices start from \$20. Regulations differ between states, so ask your landlord before installing a showerhead.

■ Fix leaking toilets [P](#)

To check the toilet for leaks take the lid off the cistern and add a few drops of biodegradable food colouring to the water. If food colouring comes into the toilet bowl without flushing this is a sign that the toilet cistern is leaking. Contact your landlord to have the toilet serviced.





■ Reduce water in the toilet cistern

If you have a single flush toilet, place one or two plastic drink bottles full of water in the cistern to reduce the volume of water in each flush. There are also flush modifying devices available which stop the flush as soon as the button is released. Check with your landlord before installing.

■ Fix leaking taps

A dripping tap can waste a lot of water, so install new washers to fix leaks. Regulations differ between states so ask your landlord before installing new washers.

■ Install aerators on taps

Aerators can be fitted to taps to reduce water flow and can be fitted either inside or on the tap. Once again, check with your landlord before installing.

Reach for the stars

The Water Efficiency Labelling Scheme (WELS) shows the consumption of water by appliances. The label gives products and appliances a star rating from one to six and also provides a number that shows the comparative water consumption in litres. The labels will be on the product or packaging to allow you to compare when you are purchasing. The WELS website contains a searchable database on a range of products including washing machines, dishwashers, flow controllers, showers, taps and toilets.

www.waterrating.gov.au





■ Buy detergents made from biodegradable substances

Biodegradable detergents are a safer option for the environment.

■ Use your washing water on the garden

Providing you use biodegradable detergents, you can run a diverter hose, available from hardware stores, straight from your washing machine onto the garden.

■ Buy energy and water efficient appliances

If you need a new washing machine or dryer check the energy and water star ratings. Look for the highest star rating and buy the right size for your needs. Make sure the washer can do a true cold cycle because some machines heat the water even during cold washes.

■ Fix leaking taps

A dripping tap can waste a lot of water, so install new washers to fix leaks. Regulations differ between states so ask your landlord before installing new washers.

■ Install aerators on taps

Aerators can be fitted to taps to reduce water flow and can be fitted inside or on the tap. Once again check with your landlord before installing.

Laundry

Making changes in the laundry can be as simple as hanging up your clothes or as complex as researching and purchasing the latest in energy and water efficient appliances. It's up to you.

■ Wash in cold water

While some clothes need to be washed in hot water, eg, nappies or clothes with oily stains, most clothes can effectively be washed in cold. Washing clothes in cold water saves energy.

■ Hang it up

Avoid using electric clothes dryers. Use the natural power of the sun to dry your washing by placing your clothes outside on a clothes line. During wet weather use a clothes rack inside your house.

■ Wash a full load

Always make sure you wash a full load of clothes. Not only will you save water but the less you use the washing machine the more energy you save.





Outdoor areas

Improving your rental home's efficiency can be as much about what you do outside your home as what you do inside it. Follow these tips to have a real impact.

■ Use a broom

Clean down paths and driveways with a broom or rake rather than a leaf blower or hose.

■ Group pot plants together

Pot plants placed together create their own microclimate, which can reduce the number of times you'll need to water.

■ Water at the appropriate time

Water the garden early in the morning or late in the evening to reduce water evaporation. Watering longer, but less often, will encourage the plants to grow deeper roots which will help them grow more resilient to drought conditions. Make sure any watering complies with local water restrictions.

■ Compost your food scraps

Install a compost bin or worm farm for your food scraps to reduce the amount of organic matter going to landfill. Organic matter buried in landfill produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The compost you'll produce is also great for your garden.

If you live in an apartment consider buying one of the small composting systems that use a mixture of bacteria, fungi and yeasts to produce high-grade fertiliser for pot plants.

■ Mulch garden beds

Mulch on garden beds and pots can help reduce water evaporation by up to 70%. The mulch shields the soil from the sun and reduces run off during watering.

■ Add compost or a wetting agent

Adding compost and wetting agents, available from plant nurseries, to soil to help it hold water, reducing the number of times you'll need to water.

■ Use greywater

Greywater from baths, showers and washing machines can be reused on the garden in most locations. While bucketing shower water can be a chore, small pumps are available that let you pump it straight to the garden via the bathroom window. Some greywater systems are also suitable for renters as they don't require permanent installation if the pipes are accessible from outside the house.

www.ata.org.au

■ Reduce the temperature of hot water

Check the thermostat setting on your hot water system is set at 60°C. If it's set higher than 60°C you will be wasting energy, but any lower could pose a health risk as harmful bacteria may thrive. Instantaneous hot water systems should be set to no more than 50°C.

Setting the temperature on some types of hot water systems requires a plumber; contact your landlord to have the system assessed.

■ Check the hot water system overflow

Check the amount of water dripping from the overflow pipe of the hot water system. If the overflow is excessive contact the landlord to have the system assessed.

■ Invest in a portable rainwater tank

Rainwater tanks which come with a lid, stand and plastic tap are available in small sizes of around a few hundred litres. Just position your tank under a convenient hole in a downpipe to collect water. If there isn't a convenient hole, ask permission from your landlord to make a hole and seal it up when you move.

Reducing waste

Reducing your impact on the environment is as much about your behaviour as it is about your home and its appliances. Reduce waste and you reduce your carbon footprint.

■ Avoiding waste

Being conscious of the amount of waste that is associated with the products that we buy and avoiding products that have unnecessary or excessive packaging is a good first step in reducing household waste.

■ Recycle household waste products

Most local councils supply a service for residents to recycle common waste products such as glass, cans, some plastics, paper and cardboard. If you do not have a recycling bin contact your council to arrange for one to be delivered.

■ A new life

Save useful items from landfill by finding them a new home. As the saying goes, one person's trash is another's treasure. There are many ways to give life to unwanted clothes, furniture and books such as charity stores, markets and resource recovery centres.

■ Reduce e-waste

Electronic waste, or e-waste, is a growing contributor to landfill and a growing concern for the environment. Each year millions of computers, modems, printers and mobile phones are thrown out. This e-waste not only adds to landfill, it contains toxic components which can leach into the water table.

Check with your local council to see if there is a safe way to dispose of old equipment before throwing it in the rubbish. You may also wish to ask your council for contact details of any local charities which collect old equipment and recondition them to give away to the disadvantaged and community groups.

www.recyclingnearyou.com.au
www.mobilemuster.com.au



Getting around

Transport is a major contributor to greenhouse emissions, but there are many choices you can make to reduce your impact while still getting you from A to B.

■ Choose where you live carefully

When you're looking for a rental property, think about its location. Is it within walking or cycling distance of public transport, schools, work, shops and your recreation choices? On average, Australian households generate close to six tonnes of greenhouse gas and spend around \$9000 each year on transport, \$3500 being for fuel. Reducing the amount of time travelling will be better for the environment, your health and hip pocket.

■ Ride a bike or use public transport

Riding a bike is not only an eco-friendly way to travel it's also good exercise. If you are unable to ride catch a bus, train or tram—leave the car at home whenever possible.

www.travelsmart.gov.au

■ Be car wise

If you are looking at buying a new car, choose a fuel efficient one. If you drive a car, minimise fuel consumption by avoiding traffic jams, combining travel tasks within one trip and sharing rides with other people.

www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au

Working with your landlord

Before you undertake any alterations to a rental property you must have the owner's written permission, but don't let this discourage you. Most landlords will agree to improving the resale value of their rental property if it keeps their tenants happy – even better if they're doing their bit for the environment at the same time.

Before contacting your landlord, it may pay to do a bit of research into state, territory and federal government tax deductions and rebates. If you have any concerns about contacting your landlord contact your state or territory tenants union or tenants advocacy service.

The Australian Taxation Office offers tax deductions for energy efficiency improvements made to rental properties. Maintenance, repairs and servicing costs such as sealing cracks and gaps and repairing damaged insulation can be claimed at the end of each financial year. The depreciation on capital improvements such as erecting a pergola or replacing an inefficient hot water system can be claimed over a specified period of time.

When writing to your landlord, point out the benefits of the repairs and any available rebates they can receive to make sustainable changes to the property. If you are offering to make some minor changes yourself, such as installing a water efficient showerhead, outline what you would like to do and how much it would cost so that you can be reimbursed.

If you receive no reply after a few weeks, send a follow up note, asking if they have received your letter and if they have had time to consider your request.

Even with the landlord's approval, once your lease expires certain measures may require you to restore the property back to the condition it was in when you moved in. You need to check your lease document or clarify this with the landlord.

For more information on the available tax deductions go to:

www.environment.gov.au/settlements/local/publications/pubs/brochure5.pdf

For more information on Australian Government rebates go to:

www.environment.gov.au/rebates



Sample letter

[Your name and address]

[Date]

[Landlord's or agent's name and address]

Dear ...

Re: Repairs to [your address]

We would like to undertake the following alterations to the premises to improve the water and energy efficiency of the home.

We are willing to conduct the following repairs and request your permission to do so. We would appreciate reimbursal for the cost of the products outlined below:

- | | |
|--------|---------|
| • Item | Cost \$ |
| • Item | Cost \$ |
| • Item | Cost \$ |

The following repairs we are unable to undertake:

- | | |
|--------|---------|
| • Item | Cost \$ |
| • Item | Cost \$ |
| • Item | Cost \$ |

The Australian Taxation Office offers tax deductions for improvements made to rental properties. I have included a copy of the brochure outlining the tax deductions available. [Attach brochure: www.environment.gov.au/settlements/local/publications/pubs/brochure5.pdf]

I look forward to hearing from you. I can be contacted on [phone] during daytime hours.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

Alternative Technology Association

The Alternative Technology Association (ATA), is a not-for-profit organisation that has been promoting the use of renewable energy, water conservation and sustainable building since 1980. ATA has thousands of members across Australia who are actively walking the talk in their own homes.

ATA also publishes two magazines *ReNew: technology for a sustainable future* and *Sanctuary: sustainable living with style*, available from newsstands across Australia.

Become a member of the ATA and you gain access to a large support network of knowledgeable people and receive a range of privileges to help you achieve your sustainability dreams.

Your ATA membership also provides you with a number of benefits:

- Free advice service, with answers to tricky questions provided by the ATA's experienced advisors.
- Discounts from the ATA Shop and a range of sustainable products and services.
- Invitations to local branch activities. An opportunity to network and exchange information with like-minded individuals.
- Quarterly issues of *ReNew* magazine; packed with practical information on the latest and greatest in sustainable technologies.
- Updates on the ATA's local, national and international projects

**For more information go to:
www.ata.org.au or call (03) 9639 1500**



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