

Earth Day Checklist

Written by Lindsey Clinkingbeard



Are you looking to make your own contribution to the environment in honor of **Earth Day** (April 22) this year? Being a good global citizen starts right at your doorstep. Making a few small changes around the house can dramatically reduce greenhouse gases, save you money, and add up to a real benefit for the environment. Here are some tips to help you do your part in supporting Mother Nature:

- 1. Change your lights.** Replacing only your five most frequently used light fixtures with Energy Star qualified products will help the environment while saving an average of \$70 a year on energy bills. Energy Star lighting provides bright, warm light while generating less heat, less energy, and lasts about 10 to 50 times longer than other standard lighting.
- 2. Heat and cool your house properly.** Simple steps like changing air filters regularly, making sure your thermostat is properly programmed, and maintaining your heating and cooling equipment annually by a licensed contractor can save energy and increase comfort, while protecting the environment. If you choose to use Energy Star equipment, it could cut down your annual energy bill by more than \$200. Sealing and insulating your home can increase your comfort while reducing air leaks which can save an average of 20 percent on heating and cooling.
- 3. Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** Doing this in your home will help conserve major energy and reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from resource extraction, manufacturing, and disposal of waste. Goods like newspapers, beverage containers, paper, and other items are perfect for recycling. Visit the EPA's Individual Waste Reduction Model ([iWARM](#)) to learn more about the benefits of recycling rather than sending all your trash to the landfill.
- 4. Manage your household emissions.** Click [here](#) to see the list of options for residents in Arizona. These renewable generation systems for energy are available for installation, and help save toxic emissions that other power sources may emit. Using the EPA's [Household Greenhouse Gas Emissions Calculator](#) is also a handy tool you can use to estimate your household greenhouse emissions that come from energy use, transportation, and waste disposal. This helps you understand where your emissions come from and can help you even further identify ways to reduce them.
- 5. Clean green.** Stop buying household cleaners that are potentially toxic to both you and the environment. In his book, "[The Safe Shopper's Bible](#)," David Steinman suggests reading labels for specific, eco-friendly ingredients that also perform effectively. These include grain alcohol instead of toxic butyl cellosolve, commonly found in carpet cleaner and some window cleaners as a solvent; coconut or other plant oils rather than petroleum in detergents; and plant-oil disinfectants such as eucalyptus, rosemary or sage rather than triclosan, an antifungal agent found in soaps and deodorant. Or, skip buying altogether and make your own cleaning products. Use simple ingredients such as plain soap, water, baking soda (sodium bicarbonate), vinegar, washing soda (sodium carbonate), lemon juice and borax and save money at the same time.
- 6. A "Green Home Makeover."** Do you want to remodel your home this year? For new hardwood floors, bamboo is the right choice. It is considered an environmentally friendly flooring material due to its high yield and the relatively fast rate at which it replenishes itself. It takes just four to six years for bamboo to mature, compared to 50-100 years for typical hardwoods. Just be sure to look for sources that use formaldehyde-free glues. Don't forget to repaint with a healthier type of paint. Conventional paints contain solvents, toxic metals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can cause smog, ozone pollution and indoor air quality problems with negative health effects, according to the EPA. These unhealthy ingredients are released into the air while you're painting, while the paint dries and even after the paints are completely dry. Opt instead for zero- or low-VOC paint, made by most major paint manufacturers today.