

Greening Your Kitchen

You may not know it, but your kitchen is one of the biggest energy hogs in your house. You use electricity and natural gas for your appliances. You use water in your sink and dish washer. Your fridge is stocked with foods grown and transported from all over the world that require chemicals, water and fuel to be produced and transported. And then there's the non-recyclable packaging and shopping bags that goes straight to a landfill.

Environmentally-friendly options for your kitchen are everywhere. Here are some good places to start looking:

- **Bamboo.** The latest in environmentally-friendly kitchens includes fast-growing bamboo. The material makes great cutting boards and it can also be used for backsplashes and flooring.
- **Scrap wood.** IKEA kitchen designer Martha Saldumbide says, "Where we can spare the environment, we do. We use a lot of scrap wood in cabinets. It's the wood that nobody else wants but it's still really good hard wood."
- **Lighting.** To cut down on lighting costs, try using compact fluorescent lights (cfl's). Whenever possible use natural light to brighten up your kitchen and bring down your electrical bill. Avoid recessed cans, unless they use fluorescent bulbs and are airtight, to keep air from escaping around the can and into the attic. Motion and occupancy sensors save money by automatically turning lights on and off as needed. They are fairly inexpensive and can be mounted in standard switch boxes. LED lighting, which is new to the market, promises long life and extremely efficient operation, but it is not widely available and can be pricey. If you live in a one story home, consider sky lights or solar tubes to bring in natural sunlight during the day, essentially, free lighting.
- **Cork.** This renewable resource is made from the bark off a tree. It's also sound-absorbing, hypoallergenic and resistant to mold and mildew, making it an excellent choice for kitchens.
- **Recycled glass countertops.** These countertops resemble granite and are just as durable. NEIDS has samples for this beautiful recycled product. Give us a call to see them.
- **Top and bottom freezer/refrigerator units.** These are more energy-efficient than side-by-side models because not as much cold air escapes. Look for the Energy Star label. Not sure if your fridge can pass the eco-friendly test? Shut the door on a dollar bill — if it slides out easily then it's a sign the seal needs to be replaced.
- **Recycling stations.** Handy recycling stations pull out for easy access.
- **Convection ovens.** This type of oven uses a fan to drive heat rapidly from source to food so it cooks it 25 percent faster than a conventional oven.
- **Natural fabrics.** Choose cotton or wool for your dining chairs and window dressings since man-made fabrics are made with chemicals that harm the environment.

- **Indoor Air Quality:** One of the first things to consider is indoor air quality. Since we spend the majority of our time in the house, making sure the air is clean is priority number one. With today's homes being built tighter, proper ventilation is a necessity. One simple way to improve air quality is to install a range hood that exhausts to the outside.
- **Cabinets:** The wood in most cabinetry contains urea-formaldehyde, which off-gasses and can be harmful to your health. Look for cabinets made from solid wood, or alternative materials such as wheat board.
- **Water-Saving Features:** Choose faucets with aerators, which inject air bubbles into the water stream to achieve the same pressure with less volume. Recirculation pumps keep hot water at the tap, saving hundreds of gallons per year by eliminating the need to run the tap while the water gets hot. Tankless hot water heaters also heat water at the source. Because they are smaller than standard water heaters, they use less water and 10-20 percent less energy.
- **Flooring:** Cork click flooring from Torly's here in Salem is an excellent choice for green flooring. Warm in winter, cool in summer and extremely resistant to water, cork is available in a variety of stains and finishes. Linoleum, also at Torly's, is enjoying a comeback. Made of natural materials such as linseed oil, rosin and wood flour, it is durable and easy to clean.
- **Finishes:** Eco-friendly paints, stains and finishes reduce exposure to these harmful compounds. Seek out water-based finishes with "No VOCs" on the label. Eco-friendly wallpaper products are also available, with low- or no-VOC compositions and glues.

Today's Tip: Buy Local According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, most produce in the United States travels an average of 1,500 miles before being sold. Reduce all that shipping by rediscovering the fresh bounty of your surrounding area. Also, consider growing your own vegetables. Plants not only help soak up excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, but it can help clean toxins from the air. And it reconnects you with nature!

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254 North Broadway, Suite 109, Salem, NH 03079

www.neidslc.com Contact: info@neidslc.com

603-553-9050 or 603-560-7016