

Go green, without the envy

> Small steps to greener homes and sustainable living

BY ALYSSA J. OON

THERE is a general misconception that living green is expensive. Truth is, there are quite a number of small and easy steps one can take to make the home “greener” yet not exhaustively deplete those green notes in your bank account.

FASHIONABLE YET SUSTAINABLE

Textiles play a huge role when it comes to homes deemed fashionable. However, when dealing with textiles and trying to keep to “sustainable” principles of living, a better option is to choose natural fibres as opposed to synthetic ones. Freshome writer Cynthia Bowman suggests swapping out the area rug with one made of jute, sisal or wool for an eco-friendly choice. Moreover, while the touch adds texture to the room, its natural form and visible feature take the “green” theme a notch higher.

Hemp is another great option as a “green” fabric that is ideal for upholstery. Not only is it produced free of chemical, but it is also known for its durability, hence, a great choice for furniture that is hardy enough to take a beating.

As for cotton and wool however, it is advisable to source for the organically-produced. Aim for cotton grown without the use of pesticides and chemicals and wool from sheep that are fed and treated well.

However, some homeowners still prefer synthetic fabrics due to its many perks and advantages. Those who abide by sustainable living practices should look for 100% recycled polyester made from bottles or plastic containers.

KNOCK ON WOOD

For furniture identified under the sustainable banner, it isn't just about how and what it is made of. Durability is an important criterion when deciding on sustainable furniture pieces.

Another point to consider is the simple notion of buying cheap, which usually encompasses items with a short lifespan. Things that do not last, breakdown frequently. Eventually, the item is chucked out as trash. Referred to these days as the throwaway culture; this mentality is not just bad for one's wallet, it leaves a negative impact on the environment.

Today, bamboo is fast gaining traction as one of many eco-friendly choices available for furniture. Not only does bamboo grow quickly, it is extremely durable. Rattan however, a palm byproduct, is made into wicker furniture and is another sustainable option. Like bamboo,



your glass windows facing the east-west, this will pave way for better natural ventilation. So make sure to place your glass windows towards the north-side,” Lee said.

Practise cross-ventilation by opening windows or doors on both sides of the house. This creates high and low pressure areas, resulting in a cross breeze that will draw the heat out.

The simple act of choosing the right paints can also help maintain a comfortable indoor temperature as certain paints have been formulated to include “sunblock technology” that help reduce surface temperatures.

Painting the roof white or choosing tiles that are light in colour will reflect heat and give the home a modern futuristic vibe.

The type of window treatments used also play an important role in keeping the heat out. Although it sounds counter intuitive to use thick curtains, the US Department of Energy found that “medium-coloured draperies with white plastic backing can reduce heat gains by 33%. Draperies should also be hung as close to windows as possible and allowed to fall onto a windowsill or floor to reduce heat exchange.

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PHOTO: SUBURBAN B'S.COM

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BRIGHTER FUTURE

Unlike the traditional incandescent bulbs and compact fluorescent lamps (CFL), light emitting diode (LED) bulbs “use at least 75% less energy, and last 25 times longer, than incandescent lighting”, reports the US Department of Energy.

LEDs do not experience “burn out” or fail; instead, it goes through “lumen depreciation” where the brightness of the LED diminishes with use. Besides its energy-saving ability, LED bulbs are known to be a better choice for the environment as they are recyclable. Older bulbs contain mercury, poisonous material that affects the earth if not discarded properly.

Besides, the best part about LEDs is the wide spectrum of colours available. For homeowners who prefer the warm yellow of incandescent bulbs, there is an LED bulb for that! Look for warm white or soft white LED bulbs for that yellow hue that sends a sense of warmth and cosiness.

In all, before starting out on your “green” journey, do a little more research to see what will work for your home. Seek experts in the field if unsure. Tour other green homes to look and learn. Even if you decide to make minor green adjustments around the house, you have already helped the environment in some way, better than none.

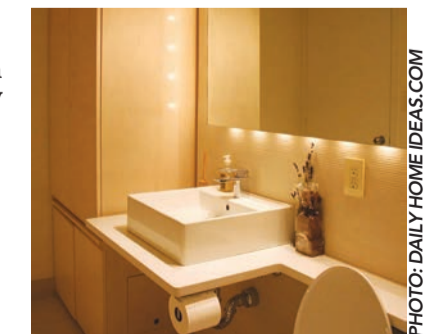


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rattan grows rapidly and can hold off wear and tear.

When choosing sustainable furniture, made from wood, look for ones with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. This verifies that the wood used in its making was grown and harvested responsibly. Some examples of sustainable-sourced wood include teak, walnut and eucalyptus.

Another option is to use or buy furniture made from reclaimed wood. Buying locally-sourced furniture is another good step solution within the sustainable practising culture, it reduces the carbon footprint by shortening the manufacturing supply chain.

BREATHE DEEP

A green home also attributes to a healthy home. To keep the air healthy for inhabitants, one must be aware of the products used. Look out for those which pollute the air due to “off-gassing”. Off-gassing is explained as gas-releasing process that takes place in furniture pieces and other household goods, discharging volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air. These are said to take a toll on one's health.

House plants do more than just add character to a room. Certain plants have been proven by Nasa to be more effective in filtering out toxins for healthier air, reported a study conducted in 1989. Dutch researchers in a 2008 experiment also found that indoor plants effect lower stress levels.

Spider plants are among the list of Nasa-approved. They don't look spectacular in any way but are easy to maintain. The plant is known for its long, skinny leaves that point downward, resembling the legs of spiders. For maximum visual appeal, plant these in a hanging pot or on the top of a cupboard or shelf.

Another easy plant to care for, is the Snake plant. The unique colour and shape of the snake plant (also known as Mother In-Law's Tongue), also make it a great

addition to any part of the home. Stick it in a mid-century style four-legged planter and place it in the corner of the living room or keep it small and simple with a mini planter on your bedside table.

Besides having plants in the home, there are also other ways to ensure the air circulated within the home is clean and healthy, as in using an air purifier.

Paints are another huge VOC offender. The “fresh paint” smell is really off-gassing in motion and it can last anywhere from three to five years for it to fully “gas off”. Choosing low-VOC paint is not enough, instead look for zero-VOC and odour-free paints.

LET THE BREEZE IN

Ensuring there is proper ventilation in the home is important. It not only helps clear out the air indoors but also maintains a cool temperature, much needed in our hot and humid climate. When the home maintains a comfortable temperature, there is a less constant need for fans and air conditioners.

In an interview with Home & Decor Malaysia, New Bob Group managing director Dr Lee Ville dished out advice for natural ventilation. “If you orientate the building at the right orientation by not facing the sun and avoid placing



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