

7 Tips to Make Your Rental Unit Environmentally Friendly

Rental-living tips that reduce your ecological footprint and save you money

It may seem difficult to make your living space environmentally sustainable if you don't own it, or don't plan to settle in that space for the long-term. However, there are small things that you can do at home to reduce your impact on the environment.

1. Location, Location, Location

Think about the location you plan to live at before moving to a new place. Should your budget allow, you may want to consider living close to work, which would allow you to walk or bike, or in a neighbourhood with good public transit options. This would allow you to easily decrease your carbon footprint, and save money on gas, by not requiring a car to get to work or to run errands. Use [Walk Score](#) to locate nearby amenities, shops and businesses that are essential for your daily needs and activities.

2. Communicate with your Landlord

Try talking to your landlord or property manager. You may not have a lot of power in making upgrades to your living space, but approach your landlord to see if they might be amenable to do so. If they pay for your utilities, show them the money they could be saving by upgrading their appliances and fixtures. Remember, LEDs can use 75% less energy and last much longer than regular incandescent lighting and low-flow toilets can use 20-60% less water than older toilets. Other things you can ask your landlord or property manager about is ensuring there is organics and recycling pick up for your building, and asking to convert your building's roof into a community garden.

3. Buy Consciously

If you're the kind of person that moves often, try to minimise the amount of things you own, so that when you move out you will spend less time packing, waste less packaging materials and throw fewer things out. When furnishing your space, think about environmentally-conscious options. Peruse your local thrift stores for what you might need. Try buying lightly used items or [giving new life to old pieces of furniture](#) with some [low-VOC paint](#) (VOCs are Volatile Organic Compounds, commonly emitted from new paint, furniture and adhesives, which can be harmful to your health and to the environment). Not only will you give your home more character, but this will be kinder to your wallet and the environment! Alternatively, you can evaluate how much furniture you really need to buy, by considering other options for how to use a room.

4. Create a Mini Garden

If digging up the garden or installing a large planter box seems like a large investment (even if it is allowed by your landlord), consider using small planter pots and other [creative techniques to grow your own herbs and vegetables](#). This will save you the cost of purchasing them at the grocery store and the trip there.

5. Talk to your Roommate

Living with a roommate is a great way to decrease your environmental impact per square footage. However, if you notice that they don't seem to switch the lights off or separate their waste, talk to them. Volunteer to be the one who takes out the organics bin, or show them how much they could save by reducing their electricity use. The best ways to get them on board with a more sustainable lifestyle is to make it easy and incentivise them!

6. Consider Alternatives to Power your Home

When buying appliances, there are a variety of blenders, choppers, slicers and grinders that are hand-powered. They use less electricity, and are often cheaper to purchase and maintain than their electrical counterparts. In addition, there are many utility providers who offer green power options, as well as other companies who inject clean energy onto the grid to offset your power use for a small fee. Research what is feasible in your locality and consider switching to clean energy.

7. Conserve Water, Decrease Energy use and Reduce Waste

Lastly, remember that changing your habits will help to reduce water and energy use, and reduce the amount of waste you send to the landfill. Reducing shower time and installing aerators on faucets will lower your water consumption; turning off lights and moderating your use of the air conditioner in the summer and the heater in the winter (put on a sweater!) will go a long way in keeping energy consumption down; and remembering to recycle, separate organics and buying things with less packaging will send less things to the landfill.

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