

Living Green In Your Kitchen

Your kitchen combines many of today's environmental concerns such as energy consumption, waste, toxics and genetic engineering. Here are some tips for a healthy lifestyle and a cleaner environment.

Appliances

Your refrigerator uses more energy than any other appliance in your home, but there are a few things you can do to keep energy consumption to a minimum:

- The fridge should be kept at 38 F, the freezer at 10°F.
- Try to open the fridge door less frequently and for a shorter duration to conserve energy.
- Do not place your fridge in a warm spot – near a heater or in direct sunlight.
- For efficient operation clean the condenser coils on the back or bottom of your fridge at least once a month.
- Dried food can break the seal on your refrigerator; keep the gasket clean to preserve the seal.

You should also:

- Check and compare energy ratings before buying large appliances. These tell you how many kilowatt-hours of energy it uses per month. SNAP has available the book, "Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings".
- Electric kettles use half the energy to boil water than boiling water on your stovetop.
- Water will boil more quickly if there is a lid on the pan.
- The bottom of your pans or pots should be the same size as the burner to use the minimum amount of energy.
- Pressure cookers use very little energy and are best for food that is "low on the food chain".
- Do not waste energy preheating your oven, most ovens do not need it. For pastries and cakes, preheating 10 minutes is plenty. You can also turn your oven off 15 minutes early for major items like roasts and casseroles – the heat left in the oven will finish the job.
- Turn the heat down once water boils. Lightly boiling water is the same temperature as a roaring boil.
- Thaw frozen food before cooking, frozen food uses more energy.

Food

- Eat lower on the food chain – fruit and vegetable production requires far less energy than meat production.
- Buy free-range, organically raised meat and poultry products when possible, if you eat meat. These have been raised humanely and on untreated feed.
- Grow your own vegetables, fruits and herbs without using pesticides.

- Eating organically grown fruits and vegetables is healthier for you and reduces the amount of pesticides released into the environment, it is also healthier for you, the farmers and food handlers. Just look for the “certified organic” label.
- Local fruits and vegetables are better to eat, are fresher, and are less likely to be waxed. Also, some imported produce may have been treated with pesticides and chemicals that have been banned in Canada and the U.S.
- Cut excess fat off of meat and poultry and avoid high fat dairy products. Many chemicals released into the environment are stored in fat tissue and are cumulative.
- Use reusable glass containers for storing food in the refrigerator, but be careful, not all glass containers can be frozen.
- When using plastic for storage, use containers specifically designed for this purpose.
- Never microwave food in a plastic container. Even plastics approved for food storage and are ‘microwavable’ may leech chemicals into your food when heated.
- If you must use plastic wrap, do not let it come in direct contact with your food and make sure that it is not made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl).

Waste

- Shop with reusable bags. Canvas or string are both durable and many stores will also give a small credit for bring your own bags.
- Buy in bulk. It is cheaper and uses less packaging.
- Buy vegetables loose, not in plastic bags.
- Avoid plastic containers when possible; they are costly and difficult to separate and recycle.
- When shopping choose products in refillable or reusable containers.
- Compost your food scraps.
- Look for products made from recycled materials.
- Use cloth instead of paper napkins and towels.

Water

- Keep a covered container of water in the fridge for drinking - you will not have to run the tap until the water is cold every time you want a drink.
- Keep a bowl of water in the sink while preparing food for quickly rinsing your hands.
- If you must use a dishwasher, only do full loads and use the economy setting. To save energy, stop the machine after the rinse and open the door to let the dishes air-dry.
- Do not let the water run while doing dishes.