

Earthmatters

Friends of the Earth's
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Friends of
the Earth

Special issue – turning the tide on climate change

Wave goodbye to the carbon age, say hello to clean, green energy

Generation game – the future for millions of people will depend on the way we produce and use electricity

Be part of the solution – take our Climate Challenge

Stars in their eyes – Orlando Bloom on staying cool

Plus low-carbon cars, kitchens and classic reads

Kitchen think

Designer Oliver Heath continues his series investigating practical ways to green your home

No 2: The kitchen



Oliver Heath/Friends of the Earth

For most of us the kitchen is the hub of the household. It is also where we consume the most products – think fork to splashback to cooker – so it's a room where I think we should be able to get to grips with making our homes more environmentally responsible. There's bound to be something everyone can do – whether you're going for a complete refit or simply want your kitchen to be a bit more efficient. The "reduce, re-use, recycle" principle can be applied to virtually everything going in and out of the kitchen.

Floors: These need to be easy to clean and water resistant as well as hard-wearing. You could investigate the colourful new interlocking recycled vinyl floor tiles from companies such as Interface (www.interfaceeurope.com), which has an impressive environmental policy. If you're worried by reports that vinyl can give off toxins, you might want to look into linoleum – which is made from natural products such as linseed – cork and wood, with a Hessian backing. Cork (in tile form) is a renewable material that's hard wearing and dead easy to keep clean. If you're after a wooden floor, make sure it comes from a sustainable source – look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo (supplier details at www.fsc-uk.info).

Cabinets: If new cabinets aren't made from solid wood, chipboard – wood

chips pulped and bonded together is generally considered to have the lowest levels of formaldehyde (which off-gases and is carcinogenic) of the manufactured boards. Chipboard can also be recycled at the end of the cabinet's useful life. Instead of replacing old cupboard doors think about repainting them using a suitable primer to make the paint stick.

Low-energy kitchen tips

- Put lids on pans when cooking and use a pan that fits the size of the hob to reduce heat loss
- Only fill the kettle for the number of cups you need at one time
- Use a washing-up bowl to do the dishes to prevent excess water usage
- Make sure you have both natural and artificial ventilation (now required by law to prevent build-up of smells and gases)
- Reduce chemical waste going down the sink by using naturally based detergents like those supplied by Natural Collection
- Buy fresh foods that don't come in excessive packaging
- If you've got the oven on try doing a batch of baking rather than a single item.

Work surfaces: If you're really going for it, you can get work surfaces made from 85 per cent recycled crushed glass, encased in a non-toxic coloured resin. It can look spectacular (www.eightinch.co.uk). For professional chef-style you could price up a custom-made stainless steel surface – stainless steel can be recycled again and again. A solid wood work surface will give a long-lasting and beautifully warm, natural feel to your kitchen. Again check for the FSC logo to be sure it's from a sustainable source. It will need attention every so often, depending on the finish – try using organic varnishes or oils. Tip: avoid repainting work surfaces as the paint invariably chips off.

For splashbacks – how about using coloured recycled glass tiles made from old bottles as a tiled splashback surface (www.rgbc.co.uk)?

Lighting: Low-energy lights in the ceiling for casting a general light last 10 times longer than conventional bulbs. Over work surfaces short, compact, low-energy fluorescents are less wasteful than the ubiquitous halogen downlighter.

White goods: Before you go out and buy a new fridge, cooker or blender, check to see if you can get the old one fixed. If it can't, your local council will be able to advise how to dispose of it responsibly. There are energy-saving fridges, freezers, washing machines and



Wood can be finished with water-based and organic varnishes and paints. Left: A draining board made from recycled glass. Above: Look out for the energy-efficiency rating of new appliances.

Eco Homes

GreenSource Photo Library

dishwashers that save you money in the long run. A long guarantee (up to five years) suggests the appliance is built to last. For information on energy efficient appliances, contact www.saveenergy.co.uk/appliances/ or the Energy Efficiency Helpline on 0845 727 7200.

Tables and chairs: Rather than new low-quality flatpack tables and chairs, why not think about buying older pieces at a boot sale, market or antiques dealers? Second-hand and reclaimed furniture will often be better built, last longer and add character. Old chairs can also be freshened up with a lick of paint or a new fabric cover. For a funky touch, look into furniture made using new materials such as wonderfully coloured recycled plastics (www.smile-plastics.co.uk).

Waste: You'll find it handy to have a bin for separating cans, plastic, bottles, paper – most kitchen retailers now sell them, or you can set up your own series of boxes. Contact your local council for details of its doorstep collection or nearest recycling depot. And of course you can compost organic waste for use on your garden. The Natural Collection sells a range of compost and recycling bins manufactured with sustainability in mind (www.naturalcollection.com).

Bon appetit.

Recommended reading

National directory of reclaimed furniture suppliers (2003), free from Fauna and Flora International, tel: 01233 571 000, email: info@fauna-flora.org.

Don't throw it all away, Friends of the Earth's popular guide to reducing waste, fully updated and expanded for 2004; £6.50 plus £1.50 p+p from 020 7490 1555, or write to Publications Despatch, 56-58 Alma Street, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU1 2PH.

Useful contacts

- Forest Stewardship Council, Unit D, Station Buildings, Llanidloes, Powys, SY18 6EB, tel: 01686 413916; www.fsc-uk.info.
- www.reuze.co.uk – enquiries by email only via the website.
- Wood Recyclers' Association, 16 High Street, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 4TU, tel: 01480 455249;
- For a map of national wood recycling schemes: www.woodrecyclers.sagenet.co.uk
- Check out Salvo's online directory of dealers and restorers of architectural, garden antiques and reclaimed building materials at www.salvoweb.com.
- eight inch, Oblique Studios, Stamford Works, Gillett Street, Hackney, London, N16 8JH, tel: 020 7503 3400, www.eightinch.co.uk.
- Richmond Gale Braddyll, 122-126 High Road, London NW6 4HY, tel: 0207 692 0769; www.rgbc.co.uk.
- Energy Saving Trust, 21 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BP,

tel: 020 7222 0101; www.est.org.uk.

- Industrial Council for Electronic Equipment Recycling, 6 Bath Place, Rivington Street, London, EC2A 3JE, tel: 020 7729 4766; www.icer.org.uk.
- Interface Europe Ltd, interfaceurope.quba.co.uk/, tel 0800 028 0686.
- Natural Collection, PO Box 135, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 0FQ, tel: 0870 331 3333, www.naturalcollection.com
- For information on commercial recyclers of kitchen machines, check out www.icer.org.uk.

Eco Home Show – special offer

The Eco Home Show is offering Friends of the Earth supporters two tickets for the price of one (normal price £8 for adults). This new home improvement and sustainable lifestyle show for the environmentally-conscious offers practical solutions and products to reduce the effect on the environment. The Eco Home Show will be at the Business Design Centre, Islington, London N1, from 3-5 September.

To book your tickets call 01920 463645 / 465292, quoting "Earthmatters". For more info email info@ecohomeshow.com, or visit www.ecohomeshow.com.