

# **Green Living Tips for Boomers**

**For the Home, Office and Workplace**

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The boomer generation is more aware than ever of the impact their lifestyles has on the environment for the present and for future generations. They want the knowledge and they're willing to step up to do their part in making the world a better place for all. Boomer men and women are ready to become green. Indeed, yesterday's baby boomers are the environmentally conscious consumers of today. In fact, a recent AARP survey indicated that "40 million boomers use their purchasing power to buy environmentally safe brands." More than 70 percent of those interviewed expressed a desire 'to make the world a better place."

If you are still wondering whether it's worth your time and effort to live greener, here are five reasons to live greener whether or not you're not worried about global warming.

1. **Living greener saves boomers money.** Making small changes in your daily activities doesn't have to cost a lot but it can save you lots of money. Investing in a few reusable water bottles and coffee mugs can save you tons of money you might spend on bottled water and coffee house coffee. Replacing light bulbs with more energy-efficient ones and turning off lights and electronics when not in use saves you money on your electric bill. Fixing water leaks and conserving water saves money on your water bill.
2. **Baby boomers who live greener are healthier.** Eating less meats and processed foods will help you to live a healthier life. Riding your bike or walking to your destination cuts back on gas usage and gives you more exercise,
3. **By living greener, boomers have the opportunity to protect marine life and wild animals.** When plastic items aren't recycled or disposed of properly they pose a risk of choking or internal damage to marine animals and wildlife who mistake plastic items as food.

4. **Boomers have been using up the landfills but now you can reduce the amount of trash you contribute.** It's estimated that the U.S. will run out of space in the next 10-20 years. By following the three R's, reduce, reuse, and recycle you can reduce the amount of trash.
  
5. **Boomers who are eco-friendly don't have to sacrifice an active, productive and romantic life.** By making simple changes in your lifestyle you can live greener without much personal sacrifice. Simply by reducing your waste, recycling, not buying unnecessary items and conserving energy and water you can make a huge impact on the environment.

Here are some tips that you will help you to keep living green.

### **Living Green At Home**

**Use your dishwasher!** This is one appliance that actually uses less energy than the manual alternative. Dishwashers are efficient devices using less water than someone standing over a sink. There are a few things to keep in mind:

- Always use the dishwasher with a full load (but not overloaded). That way it works at its most efficient level and provides the greatest savings.
- Don't rinse off food waste; scrape it off to save on water.
- Set the dishwasher to the lowest heat level you safely can. Check the manual for this.
- Don't use the automatic air-dry function. Simply let the dishes air dry naturally. It takes a little longer, but costs nothing!
- Don't use the rinse function on your dishwasher. It can use up to seven gallons of hot water! You normally don't need it.
- Buy an Energy Star Rated dishwasher if you don't already have one. You can

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save 33% off your old dishwasher bill. An Energy Star Rated dishwasher uses at least 40% less energy than an old dishwasher will.

Your **water heater** is probably set to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. You can reset it lower to 120 degrees and still have all the benefits. However, your water heating costs will drop by up to 10% and the environment will benefit from lower energy consumption. You could consider the benefits of installing a tankless water heater.

Tank-based water heating systems suffer from standby heat loss. This is because your water tank needs to have hot water in it at all times, but most of the time it simply waits for you to need it. When you don't need hot water, the system cycles between heating the water and waiting for it to cool to the level where it needs re-heating again.

When you do use hot water in any quantity, cold water flows back into the tank to keep it full. This has the effect of actually lowering the temperature of the water, requiring even more energy to heat it up again! A tankless water heater simply heats the water on demand. Water pipes are heated directly when the hot water tap is turned on and the water keeps being heated until it is switched off. This is extremely efficient and minimizes waste, saving you money and minimizing the negative impact on the environment at the same time! A tankless water heater costs a bit more to install, but you will make your money back within a year or so. After that you can expect to save up to 50% on all your water heating bills every year.

**Insulate your water heater tank** with an insulating blanket if you still use that system. You can save half a ton of carbon dioxide emissions escaping every year by simply doing this. You'll save money big time too. Don't stop with the tank; insulate the pipes leaving the tank as well. Usually the hot water has to heat the cold pipes before it is able to provide hot water at the sink faucet, which may be some distance from the tank. The better insulated the whole system is, the more you save both in cash and reduced CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

Your **washing machine** puts 90% of its energy consumption into heating up the

water. You can save considerably on this by using a cold-water detergent and switching to a cold, or at best, warm water setting.

If all washing machines in the country ran on cold water, clothes would get just as clean as they do now, and we'd save 1% on CO<sup>2</sup> emissions nationally as some 30 million tons of CO<sup>2</sup> would no longer be poured into the atmosphere. You may be able to get discounted rates if you run your washing machine and other appliances during off-peak hours, typically during the night. Check with the utility company for this.

**Stop using fabric softener in your washing machine.** You don't need it, but there's a more compelling argument against it: fabric softeners contain damaging toxins that will be released into the environment. There are eco-friendly softeners available that will soften, but do not contain toxins. Use those instead if you still feel the need for softening your clothes.

**Don't use a dryer!** These are the greatest energy guzzling appliances there are. Your grandmother used a clothes line and air-dried her clothes. The amazing fact about this method is that it works, it's free and it doesn't hurt the environment – not one single drop of CO<sup>2</sup> or any other greenhouse gas escapes from clothes freely drying on a line!

However, if you **MUST** use a dryer you can lessen the negative impact by taking a few simple common sense measures:

- Use a large super absorbent towel in the drier. This will cut down the drying time by up to 10%, saving money and energy.
- Keep the lint filter super clean. Check it after every drying cycle.
- Make use of the cool-down cycle. This lets the clothes finish off drying with the residual heat in the drier as it cools down.
- Check the drier vent regularly and clean it out if necessary.

Keeping your drier in tip-top condition will lessen its negative impact on the

environment and cost you less.

**Your refrigerator** should not be kept too cold. This appliance is for keeping food cool and it should do this at a temperature of between 37 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Many refrigerators have a freezer compartment too. This should be kept at 5 degrees Fahrenheit. To check these temperatures you will need a good thermometer. Place it in a glass of water in the middle of the fresh food storage area of your fridge and leave it for 24 hours. If it reads outside of 37 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, adjust the setting and check again until you get it just right. You can check the freezer compartment of your refrigerator by placing a thermometer between two frozen packages. Packs of frozen peas are ideal for this.

**Defrost your refrigerator** on a regular basis. I've seen fridges with two inches of solid ice at the back of the freezer compartment. This is a great waste of energy. Ice build up in a fridge should never exceed one quarter of an inch, and even that is too much. You'll save a surprising amount of money by keeping ice build up down, and you'll use less energy too.

Make sure your **refrigerator door seal** working properly. You can test it with a one dollar bill. Open your fridge door and close it again on the dollar bill. With the bill half in and half out of the fridge, try gently pulling the bill free of the door. If you can do this easily, you may need to re-seal the door. If there is a fair amount of resistance, then the seal should be fine.

**Never leave food or liquids uncovered in the fridge.** Apart from a burning effect a fridge may have on uncovered foods, they may also release moisture. This makes the compressor work harder, using more energy and costing you more.

Most of your appliances can become vampires, sucking the power from sockets even when switched off. This is especially true when an appliance is placed in standby, such as with a TV. You need to actually **switch off** the TV at the set! Then **unplug** it from the socket when you have finished watching it for the evening.

You should do this with every appliance you have. Read the appliance manual to

make sure you're doing this correctly.

According to CNN, while each appliance, TV, VCR, DVD, computer, printer, or blender may only drain a very small amount, together they can account for up to 5% of your electricity bill. That's \$5 for every \$100 you pay. It adds up! Unplug every time or **invest in a power strip** that can be completely switched off. This is the easiest way to do it and will save you money while helping the environment too.

You probably have the heating turned up in winter higher than you need it to be. Try **lowering the thermostat just one degree**. You won't notice the slightest difference, but you will notice a difference on your electricity bill.

**Lower it two degrees** and you'll still be warm. Say you start off at 72 degrees Fahrenheit, a common room temperature, and you lower it to 70 degrees. That's still very comfortable! You probably could survive in a room temperature of a mere 68 degrees. Try it for a few days and see. You'll save a lot of money over the winter, and you'll be helping the environment.

It gets hot in summer and boomers tend to live from air conditioned room to air conditioned room. We leave the air conditioned house, step into the air conditioned car, and drive down to the air conditioned mall or market. **Turn the temperature control up on your air conditioning** unit this summer. Think of it this way. If the outside temperature is a quite hot 90 degrees, then an indoors temperature of 85 degrees will feel relatively cool. You don't need to have your house – every single room – set to 70 degrees in summer. It will still feel cooler at a much higher temperature. Try slowly increasing the temperature a degree at a time until it feels uncomfortable, then set it down a degree or so and leave it at that. You'll be amazed at how much heat you can comfortably stand, and how much you save too.

You can save water in your shower in several ways. The obvious one is to take shorter showers. The other is by **fitting low-flow attachments to your shower**, you can save an amazing amount of water, plus save money and energy into the bargain. A low-flow shower head will save around 3,000 gallons of water for each person

every year. Remember, you can (and should) fit low-flow attachments to all your sink taps. You can fit a low-flow toilet too. This will save even more water for you and your family.

**Change your lighting.** You may not think of your house lights as appliances, but they are. If you use incandescent bulbs, the old standard light bulbs, then you will benefit all round from changing to CFL bulbs, or compact fluorescent light bulbs. They use around 75% less energy and will last around 10 times longer. They also produce 60% less heat because most of the energy they use goes into producing light. That might seem obvious. I mean, that's what a light bulb is designed to do. Well, the older incandescent light bulbs produce more heat than they produce light. That's a measure of their inefficiency, so change to CFL bulbs and save on everything.

Check out the newer LED lights. You may not find them entirely suitable as main house lights, although many people do. But the good news is that LED's are even more efficient and cost even less to use than the highly efficient CFL light bulbs.

Your entire water system can be costing you money if there are leaks. A single steady drip can account for up to 250 gallons a month! That's 3,000 gallons a year, and you will be charged for it – water you didn't use or even see. **Check your toilet system for leaks** by adding a few drops of bright food coloring to the toilet water tank. Don't flush for at least 30 minutes and see if the color appears in the toilet bowl. If it does, then you have a leak and it will need to be repaired. If the color doesn't appear within 30 minutes, then everything is fine.

If you don't have a low-flow toilet, then you can improvise by filling a half gallon plastic bottle with water, securing the cap on firmly, and placing it in the toilet water tank. This can **reduce the toilet flush by up to 40%**, but still leave enough water to flush everything away efficiently.

In summer, use the dishwasher, washing machine and any other **large appliances in the morning or later afternoon** when it's cooler. These appliances give off heat,

which will only make your air conditioner work harder if you use them at the height of the day. Conversely, in winter you should use them at the cooler times of the day to help heat up the house and take some of the burden off the heaters!

**Don't use a hair dryer!** This appliance is among the top three of power-guzzling appliances. Besides, it's better for your hair to be gently dried with a soft towel before being left to air dry. Make the time because you are saving money and helping the environment here.

## **Office and Workplace**

The office and workplace are traditionally places of unnecessary waste. Employees seem to think that because what they waste belongs to the company, it doesn't matter if they are wasteful.

Not so! Waste is waste whoever owns what's being wasted and the waste costs money. We all need to be a lot more responsible and try to limit the drain on resources. In most offices it's the management who leads and is the role model for environmentally friendly usage of products. If the boss is wasteful it's likely the office staff will also be wasteful. Regardless of who sets the example, we can all do better in the workplace by taking positive steps to reduce or even eliminate wasteful habits.

The biggest single cost in many offices and workplaces is the electricity bill. You can overcome by **installing CFL bulbs, or compact florescent lights**. They are more efficient and use less energy.

**Put all electric devices at each desk on a power strip** that can switch off. Computers and printers that are left plugged in drain power and cost money.

When you are replacing a **printer**, consider **getting an all-in-one device** that combines printer, scanner, copier and fax. Each component in an all-in-one device works as good as a dedicated one, and having a four-in-one machine is more cost-

effective than having four separate ones.

**Telecommute** if possible. Increasingly, companies are seeing the advantages of having their workforce working from home. There are distinct advantages for the workers too. You don't have to commute for a start. In most cases you just need a good high-speed Internet connection, a computer and perhaps a printer and fax.

Give customers the option of receiving their **bills by email** instead of sending out paper bills. Everyone saves this way and it works just as effectively.

Reduce the need for business meetings by **conferencing on line**. Today's computers are fast and efficient. They can easily cope with a web cam for virtual face to face meetings. Also, there are plenty of software choices for on line conferencing. Business travel is an expense that is not always needed although some workers may view it as a perk.

**Print double sided** (duplex printing) and **recycle all used paper**. Some 21million tons of paper gets thrown away by businesses every year. That works out at around 175 pounds for every office worker in the country! Think whether or not you actually need a physical printed copy of a document. You could save paper, money and trees by printing to PDF instead!

When you replace **office equipment** such as printers and computers, **find a good home for them**. Most old office equipment is still in fine working condition and is just being upgraded. There are plenty of charities or low income families who will gladly accept your old equipment and give them a second life.

Consider changing over to an **environmentally-friendly web host**. They are as competitively priced as the ones who don't care, and they usually take steps to reduce their ecological footprint.

If business travel is essential (and it usually isn't), then consider putting employees on **trains instead of planes**. It may take a little longer to reach the destination, but trains are much more ecologically friendly than planes ever will be. You will save

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money and carbon emissions!

If you are advertising a job, allow applicants to submit their **applications on line**. Your business may not advertise for jobs very often, but consider a large employer like a city administration who advertises for say, four jobs a month. Let's say that around 150 people apply for each job and around 50% of the applicants are qualified. The usual way is to have 75 printed applications for review by the Board. Each application is on average five pages long. That's 375 sheets of paper. Only five of them, one application, will be kept on file, the rest is thrown away. If you have an on line application, on the other hand, you will save 375 sheets of paper for every job advertised (in this example). That would be 1,500 sheets of paper a month (four job postings a month). That's 18,000 sheets of paper a year. Let's say that the average sheet of paper measures .004 inches thick. That's a paper stack standing six feet tall! And every year it gets thrown away.