

Kitchen Greens by Anne Bertino

Seriously? You're putting your organic, locally-grown produce in that old, energy hog of a refrigerator?

Your fair trade coffee and free range chicken deserve better accommodations. It's time to bring your kitchen in line with your eco-conscious self. In the long run, this is going to help you save money and the planet at the same time!

As an interior designer who specializes in helping clients make eco-friendly choices, I am often asked about what makes a kitchen green. Here are some of the tips I've collected so far:

Appliances

Your refrigerator, dishwasher and stove/range are the biggest culprits of energy consumption.

On average, new refrigerators use 42 percent less electricity than a 30-year-old counterpart. Energy Star-qualified refrigerators can use less energy than a 75-watt light bulb. Remember, refrigerator units with top or bottom loading freezers are more energy-efficient than side-by-side models.

Dishwashers use energy to heat water. Buying one with a heat booster option allows you to turn your hot water heater down. Air-dry options help to conserve, too. Don't think that hand washing is better. A study done at the University of Bonn, Germany proved the dishwasher uses only half the energy, 1/6 the water and less detergent than washing an identical set of dirty dishes by hand.

The hottest thing in efficient kitchen accessories is just breaking here in the U.S., but it has been around in Europe for several years: induction cooktops.

Induction cooktops work by using electro-magnetic fields to make pots and pans the heating elements. The cooktop stays cool to the touch and only the cookware gets hot. Induction cooktops heat cookware 25% faster than gas cooktops and 60% faster than electric cooktops. The most important factor to note is that pots and pans used on an induction cooktop must be comprised of "ferrous" metal (such as iron, which will readily sustain a magnetic field).

How are induction cooktops energy efficient? Aside from not heating up your entire kitchen when in use, you can think of it somewhat similarly to why a compact florescent light (CFL)

bulb is more efficient. The induction cooktop and the CFL both convert more of the electricity used to power them into useful energy. In case you thought gas was more efficient, the U.S. Department of Energy has established that the typical efficiency of induction cooktops is 84%, while that of gas cooktops is 40%. Check out Siemens avantGarde® cooktops. They feature mess-free touchSlide® controls.

Below: Induction cooktops are 40% more efficient than gas ranges.





Above: Modern dishwashers use half the energy, 1/6 the water and less detergent than washing dishes by hand.

Cabinets

Remember the frog you dissected in sophomore year biology class? Formaldehyde was the chemical used to make that little, postmortem amphibian stay so “fresh” and research-ready. It’s a preservative and classified as a human carcinogen by the EPA. It’s also a major ingredient in particleboard; the base material in most manufactured kitchen cabinets. If you are looking for new cabinets the best option would be solid wood cabinets from sustainably-harvested forests. The next option is a non-formaldehyde emitting particleboard such as Primeboard or Purebond. Also, make sure to use zero to low VOC stains and glues. Formaldehyde is banned from use in furniture products made in Europe, so check out imported kitchen cabinetry options. NYLoft features Maistri la Cucina from Italy and IKEA has some very economical choices.

Countertops

Clients often ask why granite countertops are not considered green. As soon as I show them a picture of a granite quarry they understand. Granite and stone of any kind are natural and beautiful but they are not considered sustainable since they are not being reproduced anytime soon. Eco-friendly alternatives to granite include IceStone, a gorgeous countertop of 100% recycled glass; PaperStone, a stone-looking countertop made from recycled paper and resin; and concrete, which gets more eco-friendly when you use fly ash (a byproduct of coal burning) instead of Portland cement.

We’ve covered some main tips for greening your kitchen. There are many more, but as always, common sense goes along way too! At least now you know how to help your locally-grown, organic bok choy feel more appreciated.

Contributors

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After fifteen years as an aerospace engineer, Anne Bertino decided to come back to earth to help save the planet she loves. So, she took her technical skills and merged them with her creative calling.

Accustomed to searching other planets for signs of life, Anne decided to help make our planet life a little better instead.

Anne is owner and principal designer of the Bertino-Baumann Design Group, an interior design firm specializing in people and planet friendly design. Striving to lead a balanced life, you can often find Anne communing with nature and her peers at committee meetings of the US Green Building Council and Valley Forward. - thebbdgoup.com

