

Add value to your home, go green

ALEX BROOKS

Feel warm and fuzzy about your eco footprint and add value to your property.

I heard that going green is all the rage and can add value to my house - how much more money can I expect to get if it has all the right eco bells and whistles?

How long is a piece of recycled string? Answering questions about property value is complex. While prospective buyers could be willing to pay more for a property that uses energy wisely, just how much more depends on price range, location and features.

After all, that harbour view could add a few million dollars but installing one energy efficient light bulb may not add one cent. A report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics studied sale prices and eco star ratings in the Australian Capital Territory - it found that for a house worth \$365,000, increasing the rating by half a star would add, on average, nearly \$4500 to its price.

With electricity prices in NSW expected to increase by a whopping 64 per cent over the next three years, improving your property value is just one more motivation to take up eco renovating. Everything from shower roses to solar panels can alter a property's carbon footprint, so it's worth starting somewhere.

How can I make my kids turn the lights out and save me money?

Tell them Earth Hour is every day in your house - kids today are aware of the environment. I want my home to be better for the environment - where do I start?

This whole green-living thing can baffle even the most zealous eco lover but it's best to start with your own home's energy and water audit. Gather your water and energy (gas and electricity) bills from the last 12 months and check out your consumption on the graphs on the bill.

You can usually work out roughly how many units of water, electricity or gas your home consumes. Most homes have seasonal spikes caused by winter heating or summer watering of the garden.

Going green is not about embracing one solution such as rainwater tanks or solar panels but more about reducing overall usage. For most of us, easy behaviour changes such as taking shorter showers are simpler than installing a grey water recycling system.

NSW's Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has confirmed the average electricity bill will skyrocket by between \$577 and \$918 a year by 2013 - so there is a hip pocket incentive to be more energy efficient. If you have a plan now, you might just pay for some of those eco renovations by reducing your electricity costs in the future.

If electricity costs are going up so much, what's the best way to keep warm in winter?

The old-fashioned way - dress warmly, wear ugg boots and hug someone you like. Heating is usually responsible for a third of your home's energy bills and that cost blows out if you heat a large open-plan family room.

The choice of heating has an effect on the environment, with radiant electric heating used in radiators, electric heaters, or fan heaters often being the most expensive and carbon-intensive. Natural gas has one-third of the carbon pollution and costs less.

The best option is direct heat, so a hot water bottle can be cheaper than a smoky open fire - which is usually inefficient, with more heat going up the chimney than inside. Slow combustion heaters are good but choose wood carefully if you're in an area where smoke pollution can be a problem.

Those old-fashioned door snakes are perfect to put under door or window gaps, keeping rooms toasty warm.