

Save Money Go Green

When budgets are tight, our priorities change. Tasks such as going green around the house often end up on the back burner.

But the thing is, now is actually the best time to start thinking green. With a tight economy, conserving energy, water, and more also helps you save cash—even if it occasionally requires the investment of a bit of time and money up front. I'm all for keeping more cash in my pocket right now—here are some of the ways I spend less.

Conserve Energy

Reducing your energy use can save you money. Lots of money. And you don't have to fork over the cash for a new ENERGY STAR® fridge to benefit. Lowering your water heater temp to 120°, unplugging electronics when they're not in use, and using the microwave rather than the stove for heating small portions of food don't cost a dime, but can save you more than a few dollars. Other actions—such as replacing burned-out lightbulbs with energy-efficient CFLs, installing programmable thermostats, and sealing and weather-stripping your home—require a bit more elbow grease and greenbacks. But the amount you'll save in the long run makes the initial investment worth it.

Save Water

Long, hot showers feel good on chilly days, but your pocketbook will thank you for keeping them under 5 minutes. Shutting the water off when you're

brushing your teeth and tightening leaky pipes help conserve water—for free. Investing in easy-to-install low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators costs a few bucks, but considerably reduces water consumption.

Spend Less on Food

The price of food has increased, but that doesn't mean you're stuck eating ramen noodles for every meal. One of the easiest ways to save on groceries—and cut down on packaging waste—is to buy food in bulk and divvy it up into individual servings. Consider dining on larger portions of inexpensive yet tasty sides such as beans and rice and smaller servings of meat.

Remember to Reuse

Before you toss anything, ask yourself: Does it have another use? Reusing items—whether it's printing on both sides of paper, swapping magazines or clothing with friends rather than buying new, or washing out empty jelly jars to store leftovers—saves you cash and reduces waste.

As for me? My green move of the week is to turn down the thermostat—wearing a big sweater to stay cozy this winter is worth it when it saves money on my utility bills.

Julie Collins is the managing editor of Lexicon, a custom media firm.