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## Easy steps toward a greener kitchen

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

**This is the first in an occasional series on simple ways to green your home, room by room. Today we start in the kitchen.**

The term "green kitchen" conjures images of a fancy designer kitchen with thousands of dollars' worth of eco-friendly appliances, countertops and flooring.

But you can make your current kitchen significantly greener and more healthful just by taking simple steps over a weekend at a palatable total cost of under \$100.

### Pots and pans

Start with cookware. If your nonstick pots or pans are more than 2 years old or if the coating has started to flake, replace them. That nonstick coating — Teflon or similar brands — can degrade and cause potentially toxic emissions when the pan is overheated, according to the Green Guide ([www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com)).

Greener replacements include stainless-steel, cast-iron or anodized aluminum cookware.

### Faucet



Gabi Campanario / The Seattle Times

#### Green resources

**Green Guide — nonstick pans:** [www.thegreenguide.com/doc/ask/nonstick](http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/ask/nonstick)

Conserve water at the kitchen sink by installing a low-flow aerator, which screws on to the end of the faucet and adds air to the spray. If your kitchen faucet is fairly new, it will probably have an aerator. Imprinted on the aerator in tiny numbers is its rated flow of gallons per minute (gpm). New faucets today typically have 2.2 gpm aerators. Consider installing an aerator with a lower flow, such as 1.5 or 1.0 gpm.

Low-flow aerators can be found online or at hardware and home-improvement stores for under \$10. Take along your old aerator or faucet screen to the store to find the proper size. If you have an old faucet with no threads in the tip for screwing in an aerator, you will not be able to use one.

## Light bulbs

If your kitchen currently has regular incandescent light bulbs, change as many as possible to compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).

For the best durability and quality of light, choose bulbs carefully, using Internet research and recommendations from friends. In some fixtures in the kitchen you may want an especially bright CFL, such as the N: Vision Soft White bulb sold by Home Depot, which scored highest in recent lab tests by Popular Mechanics magazine.

If you have recessed fixtures or dimmers in your kitchen, you can also now find CFLs for those. When CFLs do eventually burn out, be sure to recycle them properly, since they contain small amounts of mercury.

## Cleaning products

Save money and reduce the clutter of products under your sink by eliminating several of them. For example, replace general cleaners or window cleaners with baking soda or diluted vinegar. If you haven't used one of your chemical cleaning products in a year, ask if a friend can use it, or take it to a household hazardous-waste collection facility if necessary.

Then examine your kitchen sponges. In her 2007 book, "The Five-Second Rule," California-based

**Environmental Defense — CFLs:** [www.environmentaldefense.org/go/maketheswitch](http://www.environmentaldefense.org/go/maketheswitch)

**Consumer Energy Center:** [www.consumerenergycenter.org/home/appliances](http://www.consumerenergycenter.org/home/appliances)

**GreenHomeGuide:** [www.greenhomeguide.com](http://www.greenhomeguide.com)

**Household toxics disposal in King County:** 206-296-4692 or [www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house/disposal](http://www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house/disposal)

**Alternatives to toxics:** [www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house/alternatives](http://www.govlink.org/hazwaste/house/alternatives)

**Kitchen remodel:** [www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/greenbuilding/documents.asp#technical](http://www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/greenbuilding/documents.asp#technical)

microbiologist Anne Maczulak says, "Hot, soapy water and a clean sponge are excellent tools for kitchen cleaning. Always follow by rinsing surfaces with water." But she notes that most of us make the mistake of repeatedly using dirty sponges.

To clean a sponge, Maczulak recommends microwaving it when moist for two minutes, then letting it dry. If a sponge is discolored or smells, replace it. Never use a sponge to clean up raw-meat juices; use paper towels (preferably unbleached, with recycled content) instead.

## **Recycling**

Ask household members for ideas on how to make recycling and composting collection in the kitchen easier for them, and try to put their suggestions into practice. One common, efficient system consists of a container under the sink for mixed recyclables (with possibly a separate one for glass) and a small canister on the counter for food scraps. Some folks also keep their food scraps in the refrigerator, in a reused plastic tub.

## **Appliances**

Reduce electric bills by keeping your refrigerator set at 36 to 40 degrees and your freezer at 0 to 5 degrees. Keeping them colder "will do little for your food but will waste electricity," according to GreenHomeGuide.

For your dishwasher, decide on the most efficient settings and ask everyone in your household to use those. The California Energy Commission advises using the short cycle, or energy-saving cycle, for all but the dirtiest dishes. And using the dishwasher's air-dry setting instead of heat-dry, will cut its energy consumption by more than 15 percent.

## **Big-ticket items**

During your weekend kitchen green-up, also make plans for any upcoming major kitchen purchases or renovations. If your refrigerator or dishwasher is more than 15 years old, you can save money and greatly reduce energy use by replacing it sooner rather than later. And when it's time for a serious makeover, rest assured that an abundance of innovative new green products such as countertops, flooring and light fixtures is now available that could make your eco-dream kitchen a reality.

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