

## Homes & Real estate

---

Originally published April 19, 2013 at 8:00 PM | Page modified April 20, 2013 at 12:54 PM

### 10 green trends and innovations

No longer a novelty, companies manufacturing green products in the Northwest make an important contribution to our regional economy.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

#### Ecoconsumer

Earth Day arrives every year on April 22, along with the warmth and flowers and optimism of spring.

Those all occur with regularity, but the challenges and opportunities of living a “green” life keep changing. It’s hard to keep up, so today we’ll celebrate Earth Day by checking out 10 of the latest green trends and innovations.

#### 1. Brighten up.

Energy-conserving, long-lasting LED (light-emitting diode) light bulbs have finally become affordable. Some now cost under \$10, so consider them for all your future home lighting needs. Most of these bulbs send out an agreeable, bright light and work well in dimmers. They don’t contain mercury like CFLs (compact fluorescent lamps) and don’t shatter as easily. Choose LEDs with at least a 5-year warranty.

If you already use LED bulbs, make sure they were not subject to a recent recall, which was limited in scope but did affect several major brands.

#### 2. Go green to make jobs.

No longer a novelty, companies manufacturing green products here in the Northwest now make an important contribution to our regional economy. Here’s a sampling: Two companies in Western Washington, Silicon Energy in Marysville and Itek Energy in Bellingham, make residential solar panels. [Alchemy Goods](#) in Seattle continues to expand its production of recycled-content bags and accessories. North Mason Fiber makes Oly Mountain Organic Compost in Belfair, near Hood Canal.

#### 3. Reinvent food growing.

All over our region, gardeners are transforming patios, balconies, flower gardens, front yards and empty lots into vegetable gardens. You can grow food anywhere!

But alas, another aspect of this trend is that many of these next-generation food gardens get neglected a couple months down the road. It’s easy to lose interest, but let’s all try to avoid that this summer.

#### **4. Drink with less waste.**

It may be a reflection of our consumption-oriented, you-can-never-have-enough-choices society, but a zillion kinds of reusable water bottles are now available, made out of every material imaginable. In this case it's a good thing, since it makes it easier to say no to single-use plastic water bottles. Reusable coffee cups have also evolved, with Starbucks now offering a plastic reusable cup for \$1 that looks just like its standard paper cup.

#### **5. Paws for the cause.**

Americans now spend \$55 billion a year on pet products and services, compared with \$17 billion in 1994, according to the American Pet Products Association. This means more "stuff," which could be seen as a negative green trend. Thankfully, green pet products are increasingly available, although you may have to sniff around a little to find them. As one fun example, Krebs Recycle, a family business on Mercer Island, makes dog leashes from used climbing ropes.

#### **6. Share your ride.**

Car-sharing has sped into the fast lane in the Seattle area. Our choices now include Car2Go (with its spiffy little Smart cars), RelayRides and Zipcar. To share rides, consider the new SideCar service, a smartphone-enabled version of hitchhiking.

#### **7. Make a stand in the streets.**

With several horrific, high-profile deaths of pedestrians and cyclists locally in the past year, walker and biker safety has become a priority. Grass-roots projects like the "walking school bus" in many Puget Sound communities help keep walkers protected. In early April, a group of bicyclists calling themselves the "Reasonably Polite Seattleites" built a temporary, protected bike lane on Cherry Street under Interstate 5 to make a statement about cyclist safety.

#### **8. Green your love life.**

Sexual aids and related products have gone mainstream, discussed on prime-time TV shows and everywhere else, so the logical next step was to green them up. As one example, more personal lubricants are now available without petrochemicals. The National Personal Lubricant Association, a trade group, recommends using "a lubricant that is not loaded with artificial colorants, chemical preservatives or sugar" (especially to help avoid yeast infections in women).

#### **9. Go ultra-local green.**

If your home is green, why not your neighborhood? An EcoDistrict, such as the new Capitol Hill EcoDistrict in Seattle, provides a framework for intensive resource conservation and sustainability in a small community. A neighborhood can also be a hotbed for green businesses. For instance, the Sodo District is home to the [Second Use](#) and Earthwise used-building-materials stores and the Green Depot building-products store.

#### **10. Take climate change personally.**

This last trend is the most significant. It's the growing awareness that Americans, and all global citizens, actually need to address climate change. This awareness is turning into local and national action, from individual conservation to political activism. Climate change, as embodied by droughts, flooding and other extreme weather, affects us all, and denying it or ignoring it no longer makes sense.

The great thing about environmentalism is that it can be tons of fun and deadly serious at the same time. Keep on going green, and happy Earth Day!

*Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at [tom.watson@kingcounty.gov](mailto:tom.watson@kingcounty.gov), 206-296-4481 or [www.KCecoconsumer.com](http://www.KCecoconsumer.com)*