

Homes & Real Estate

Originally published December 27, 2013 at 8:01 PM | Page modified January 4, 2014 at 9:30 AM

Looking ahead: 14 green ideas for 2014

In the Northwest — a land of ever-increasing green opportunities — you can also have fun doing it. To welcome the new year, let's consider 14 practical ways to get greener in 2014.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

Whether you've been green since the last century or you're new to it, you can always make your life a little greener.

In the Northwest — a land of ever-increasing green opportunities — you can also have fun doing it. To welcome the new year, let's consider 14 practical ways to get greener in 2014.

Eat regionally. Delectable, locally produced foods can be found everywhere. Retailers such as PCC Natural Markets and newcomer Stockbox have reinvented the marketing of regional, sustainable foods. Farmers markets continue to boom, with Seattle's Broadway Farmers Market going year-round beginning next week.

Whidbey Island-based conscious-living expert and author Vicki Robin shares her local-eating odyssey in "Blessing the Hands that Feed Us," to be published in January.

Localize. We're also in a golden age of high-quality, Northwest-made clothing, furniture and household items. Many are crafted from sustainable materials. Buy these local gems (or make and sell your own) at stores of all sizes, online or at crafts fairs.

Solarize. In 2014, find out if solar will work for your home. Get a free analysis from solar contractors, and explore innovative discount solar programs such as those offered through Solarize Washington (solarizewa.org).

Recycle more. Keep informed about residential-recycling guidelines. These may change for various reasons, such as cities awarding new collection contracts. For example, Burien will upgrade its recycling and garbage services in June.

Be "bag-tastic." If you shop in Seattle or other communities that recently banned retailers' distribution of plastic bags, don't forget your reusable bags. Look for durable, easy-to-clean tote bags made from sustainable materials and/or made locally. Issaquah residents will vote in February on the future of that city's plastic-bag ban.

Go cargo. Is the cargo bike Seattle's next Prius? With the increasing availability of these utility bikes, it's easy to find out for yourself. If our region's steep hills give you pause, consider an electric-assist model.

Get lit. Several main types of incandescent light bulbs will be phased out in 2014. Highly efficient

LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs typically provide the best alternative for the home. Numerous reasonably priced LEDs were introduced this year, and more are coming.

Take back. Manufacturers continue to work with governments and retailers to expand take-back options for consumers' unwanted medications, electronics, fluorescent bulbs, mattresses and more. Find regional listings of locations at takeitbacknetwork.org and takebackyourmeds.org.

Plug in. Electric cars are a fast-moving work in progress. Keep up on the latest models, the availability of charging stations and financial incentives. A good place to start is westcoastgreenhighway.com, particularly the Resources page.

Prevent poisons. The most hazardous products are those with "Danger" or "Poison" on the label. Keep as few of those in your home as possible, and dispose of them properly. Congress will likely consider changes in federal chemical regulations in 2014.

Grow big. If you're game, eat super-local by raising food in your yard in ways you never imagined. (Exotic crops? Rabbits? Ducks? Vertical gardening?) Check with local governments to confirm regulations, and always be respectful of neighbors.

Let go. Americans have so much stuff these days that a rented storage locker has become the new closet. If you've had items chilling in a storage locker for more than two years, you probably don't need them. Sell or donate.

Get appy. If you use a smartphone, pick at least one new app in 2014 to reduce your environmental impact and save time or money. Search online for "green apps" to find the latest, or grab an old favorite like locally-based (and free) One Bus Away (onebusaway.org).

Know why. Going green or getting greener offer personal rewards, but the dire global effects of environmental problems should motivate us, too. In 2014, commit to learning more about climate change, toxics and pollution, and what you can do to prevent them.

Thanks for helping to make our region one of the greenest places in the world, and have a happy, rewarding new year!

Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, and EcoConsumer is his biweekly column. He can be reached at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, 206-477-4481 or via KCecoconsumer.com.