



# The Victorian Green Renters' Guide

Sustainable living tips for renters



# Contents



<u>Sustainable renting and the law</u> .....	4
<u>The grand house tour</u> .....	5
<u>Kitchen</u> .....	6
<u>Living room</u> .....	15
<u>Bathroom</u> .....	21
<u>Bedroom</u> .....	23
<u>Laundry</u> .....	23
<u>Outside</u> .....	24
<u>Getting around</u> .....	27
<u>And one more thing or two</u> .....	29
<u>Making flats and apartments more sustainable</u> .....	29
<u>Approaching your landlord</u> .....	29
<u>Rebates</u> .....	29
<u>Tax deductions</u> .....	31
<u>What to look for when finding a place to rent</u> .....	32
<u>So what now?</u> .....	34
<u>Tell me more</u> .....	35
<u>Index</u> .....	37
<u>Endnotes</u> .....	38

# Introduction

Sometimes being an environmentally aware renter can be a little frustrating. There's lots of advice out there on installing rainwater tanks, better heating systems and solar panels, but only some lucky renters have landlords willing to spend much money on sustainability.

You can still make a huge impact on your ecological footprint, however, even without the solar panels. With the help of a few handy tips and a bit of cunning, you can do most of it on a shoe string budget (and save on your bills along the way). Environment Victoria has produced the Victorian Green Renters' Guide to help you out.

This booklet will take you on a tour of your home, room by room, to find out what you're doing well, and suggest some cheap and easy ways of doing some things better. But first, read the section on [sustainable renting and the law](#), to make sure your sustainability actions also keep your landlord and your real estate agent happy.

It's also worth keeping your eye on the big picture, and making sure you don't let the minor energy and water consuming parts of your house distract you from tackling the big ones. The biggest energy users in the home are easily heaters and air conditioners, followed by your hot water system (which means that showers make a big difference). Gas hot water systems and heaters emit a lot less greenhouse gas than electric ones, and driving and electricity generation are some of our major source of greenhouse gases. The biggest water user in the home is the bathroom (those showers again), followed by the laundry and the garden (although it depends on how big your garden is and how much you water it). But we also consume lots of water indirectly, by eating food which has been grown using large amounts of water. In fact, food and the goods we buy are one of the biggest contributors to our ecological footprints (and easier to change than installing double glazing).

If you make a fair chunk of the changes in this booklet, chances are you'll be streets ahead of your neighbour with the solar panels.



# Sustainable renting and the law

In Victoria, the law on making changes to your rental property is frustratingly unclear. For example, you are not allowed to install “fixtures” or make “alterations” without your landlord’s permission, but the law for renters doesn’t clearly define what a fixture or an alteration is. If you install a showerhead without your landlord’s permission, they may not take you to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (which hears disputes between landlords and tenants). But they could. If they did, the results would depend on the tribunal’s interpretation of the law – is a showerhead a fixture or not? Is it an alteration? It’s a change to the property, but so is changing a light globe...

A lot of the suggestions in this booklet are changes which most landlords wouldn’t be bothered by, might well support, and in fact are unlikely to even notice. If you have a friendly and supportive landlord, the best bet is to ask permission before making any changes (and get the permission in writing and keep it). If you don’t, you could make your own judgement of how your landlord or real estate agent might respond and how the law will be interpreted by the tribunal. However you need to be aware that you are taking a risk.

If you make any permanent changes without permission, you are taking a bigger risk. If you make any changes which you can undo before moving out — leaving the property how you found it — you’re less likely to have problems. If you do any damage to the property you could be made to pay for it, so you need to be careful with things like installing water saving showerheads yourself, in case you damage the shower fittings. If this is all sounding a bit daunting, don’t worry. There are lots of suggestions in this booklet which are changes to your behaviour, which anyone can do.

If you do have problems, or just want more advice, contact the Tenants Union of Victoria on 9416 2577, or check out their many fact sheets on renters’ rights at [www.tuv.org.au](http://www.tuv.org.au).

## THE TECHNICAL JARGON

If you feel confident reading legal jargon, you might like to know that the information above is based on the Residential Tenancies Act, which governs rental properties in Victoria. The Act is available on the Tenants Union website (<http://www.tuv.org.au/advice/resources.aspx>) and the most relevant bit is section 64:

### **64. Tenant must not install fixtures etc. without consent**

*(1) A tenant must not, without the landlord’s consent—*

*(a) install any fixtures on the rented premises; or*

*(b) make any alteration, renovation or addition to the rented premises.*

*(2) Before a tenancy agreement terminates, a tenant who has installed fixtures on or renovated, altered or added to the rented premises (whether or not with the landlord’s written consent) must—*

*(a) restore the premises to the condition they were in immediately before the installation, renovation or addition, fair wear and tear excepted; or*

*(b) pay the landlord an amount equal to the reasonable cost of restoring the premises to that condition.*

*(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—*

*(a) the tenancy agreement otherwise provides; or*

*(b) the landlord and the tenant otherwise agree.*

What is defined as a fixture (as opposed to a moveable object) is decided on a case by case basis, and depends on “the intention with which it has been placed within or attached to the premises”.

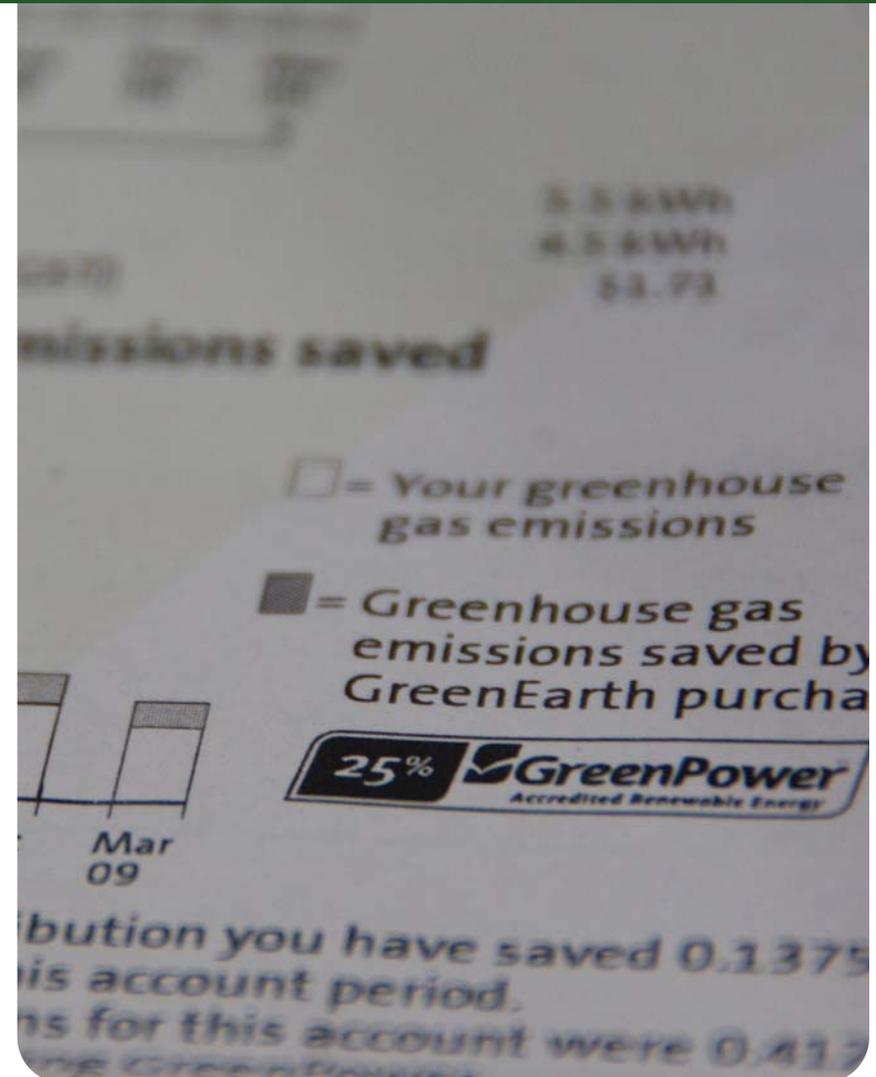
# The grand house tour

This section of the booklet is designed for you to take around your home, room by room, to find out how to decrease your environmental impact. When you come across something you want to change, make a commitment to it by ticking the box next to it. But before heading into the kitchen, have a look at where your electricity is coming from:

## Do you have GreenPower?

- No
- 50% GreenPower
- 100% GreenPower

In Victoria, we're dependent on brown coal to generate our electricity, and it's a big part of the reason that we are one of the worst per capita greenhouse gas emitters. GreenPower is **the** easiest way to cut your greenhouse gas emissions by up to 70%<sup>1</sup>. When you sign up for GreenPower, your electricity retailer buys electricity from renewable sources on your behalf. This means that you are supporting the renewable energy industry instead of the coal industry, and that emissions from your electricity use should be virtually zero. GreenPower costs a bit more. The exact amount depends on where you buy it from and how much you use, but as a rough indication, 100 per cent GreenPower should cost you about \$5.50 extra a week. If this is beyond your budget, you can always get less than 100 per cent – 20 per cent GreenPower should cost you about \$1 extra per week.<sup>2</sup> Make sure you switch to accredited GreenPower, and not just any company claiming to be sustainable. To find out who's accredited, go to [www.greenpower.gov.au](http://www.greenpower.gov.au) or call Sustainability Victoria on 1300 363 744.



## FRIDGES

**Where is your fridge located?** \_\_\_\_\_

It doesn't have to work as hard if it's away from heat sources, like direct sunlight and the oven, and if it's in a well insulated room (i.e. not the garage or the shed). It's also important to make sure that there's a gap for ventilation between the back of the fridge and the wall.

**Are the coils at the back of the fridge dusty?**

**Very**    **A little**    **Not at all**

Dust on the coils at the back of older fridges makes it harder for the coils to release heat, and so makes the fridge work harder and use more energy.

**Does the freezer need defrosting?**

**Definitely**    **A little**    **No**

Newer freezers don't need defrosting, but older ones get a buildup of ice. Try to keep it down to a few millimetres of ice to keep the freezer working efficiently.

**Can the door seals hold a sheet of paper?**

**No**    **Kind of**    **Yes**

Try putting a piece of paper between the fridge and the fridge door. If it stays there your fridge door seals are working well. If it slides down you need to replace them. New seals should cost roughly \$40-\$55, and you can replace them yourself. If your landlord owns the fridge, you should ask them to replace the seals.

**How many fridge/freezers do you have switched on?**

**More than one, all the time**  
 **More than one, occasionally**  
 **Only one**

Fridges and freezers use a lot of energy. If you can live without a second fridge or freezer, switch it off and make a big dint in your greenhouse gas emissions.

**Are you thinking about getting a new fridge?**

**Yes**    **No**

Sometimes it's more environmentally damaging to buy a newer, more efficient fridge than to keep an older fridge going (see [page 7](#) for more on this). If you do decide to buy a new fridge, try to get one with a high star rating for efficiency, and one that's the right size for your needs (bigger fridges tend to use more energy). Also, fridges with the freezer at the top or the bottom tend to be more efficient than having the freezer at the side. If you need to buy a new fridge but can't afford it, you could buy a cheap one through the Phoenix Fridge Project (see the box below), and you might be eligible to have one bought for you, or to get a no-interest loan (see the box [on page 8](#)).

### THE PHOENIX FRIDGE PROJECT

The Phoenix Fridge Project collects old fridges and fixes them up to make them more efficient. The project will pick up your old fridge for free if you live in the Melbourne metropolitan region or its surrounds (call 1300 366 283), and it trains and employs disadvantaged job seekers in fridge maintenance and repair. The repaired fridges, which are cheap and energy efficient, are for sale through Brotherhood of St Laurence shops in Brunswick, Deer Park, Geelong, Footscray and Heidelberg. For more information, see <http://www.mefl.com.au/business/project/49/>. The project is a partnership between the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Moreland Energy Foundation.

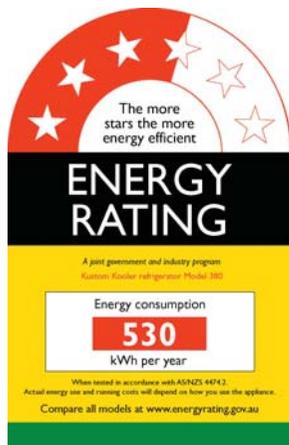
## APPLIANCES

Do the appliances in your kitchen have high star ratings for their energy and water use?

● No ● Some ● Most

Efficient appliances can cost a lot less to run, as well as producing less greenhouse gases and water – an efficient fridge could be as much as \$145 a year cheaper to run than an older, inefficient one.<sup>3</sup> The Australian Government has star ratings systems for both energy and water use by appliances. Look for labels on the products – the more stars the better. You can also compare the efficiency of different appliance models online. Go to [www.energyrating.gov.au](http://www.energyrating.gov.au) for energy ratings, and [http://www.environment.gov.au/wels\\_public/searchPublic.do](http://www.environment.gov.au/wels_public/searchPublic.do) for water ratings. However while the efficiency of an appliance is important, it is sometimes more environmentally sound to keep a working appliance going than sending it to landfill and buying a new one – [see the box to the right for more on this](#). If you need to buy a new appliance but can't afford it, you might be eligible to have one bought for you, or to get a no-interest loan (see the box [on page 8](#)).

## ENERGY AND WATER RATING LABELS



## IS NEW AND EFFICIENT ALWAYS BETTER?

Appliances, fridges, cars and the like, have an environmental impact not just in their use, but in how they're produced and how they're disposed of. Mining for the materials to make them can be destructive to both communities and ecosystems, while materials like aluminium and steel use huge amounts of energy in their production. If their parts aren't recycled or reused at the end of their life, they can end up in landfill. As a result, it is sometimes more environmentally sound to keep an old appliance or car going, instead of sending it to landfill and buying a newer, more efficient model.

Do you switch off appliances at the power point when they're not in use?

● Never ● Sometimes ● Always

See the section on turning off TVs, DVDs and other appliances at the wall on [page 19](#).



## EFFICIENT APPLIANCES FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

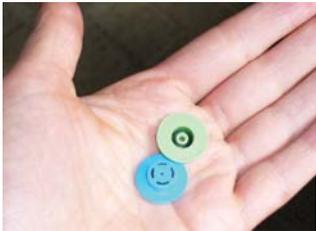
People on low incomes can get help with buying essential household appliances, like fridges and washing machines, through the No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) and HomeWise. NILS is a loan, while HomeWise will pay for appliances if you can demonstrate that you can't pay for them yourself. Both will make sure your new appliance is efficient. For more information on Homewise, see <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions/entitlements/view-all/hardship/home-wise>, or call 1800 658 521. For more information on NILS, go to [www.goodshepvic.org.au/www/385/1001127/displayarticle/1002413.html](http://www.goodshepvic.org.au/www/385/1001127/displayarticle/1002413.html) or call 9418 3000. If you buy an appliance through NILS, you may be eligible for a \$100 rebate.

For more information, see <http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for-households/rebates-3740.html> or ring 1300 363 744.

## TAPS

Do you have flow restrictors or tap aerators in your taps?

No  In some taps  In all sink and basin taps



Flow restrictors

These are nifty gadgets which cost less than \$10 each and you can install yourself. A flow restrictor is a little plastic disk which fits in the joint in your tap, and a tap aerator is a small cylinder with mesh on the end, which fits on the end of your tap. They come in varying flow rates – check the packet – and reduce flow down from typically 15-18 litres per minute to 9 litres per minute or less. This is enough for most household uses. Both devices are available from hardware stores, environment shops

and online. It's fairly unlikely that installing either of these without permission will cause problems, but the law is unclear (see the section on [the law](#)). However if you damage the tap (e.g. by scratching it), you may have to pay for it. Wrapping a cloth around the tap before grabbing it with a shifting wrench helps prevent scratches.

## IF IT'S REPLACED, YOUR LANDLORD HAS TO MAKE IT WATER EFFICIENT

If your landlord needs to replace a water "fixture" (that's anything fixed, like a pipe, a tap or a hot water service), they are obliged to replace it with one which has an A rating from Standards Australia. If they don't, the water and sewage charges become the landlords responsibility until they do. For more information see the Tenants Union of Victoria's **Utility Charges** fact sheet, available online at <http://www.tuv.org.au/advice/resources.aspx>, or contact the Tenants Union on 9416 2577.

Do you have any taps which are dripping?

Lots  One  None

A dripping tap can waste 24,000 litres of water in a year.<sup>4</sup> Your landlord or real estate agent is obliged to get dripping taps fixed. Find out if you need to contact them verbally or in writing and if they don't respond to your request to get taps fixed, contact the [Tenants Union](#) for advice. If you have used a formal Notice to Landlord form, they are required to have the repair done within 14 days. You can also try fixing the tap yourself – usually, all that's wrong is a washer that needs replacing, and these are easy to fix and cost virtually nothing. However the law is unclear on whether doing it yourself is legal or not, and if you damage the property (e.g. by scratching the tap), you might end up having to pay for it.

**A.** The water meter



**B.** Taking the little disc off the top of the tap



**C.** Pulling off the bit which turns



**D.** Removing the cover



**E.** Unscrewing the tap body



**F.** The metal tap body. The beige and greeny/blue bit at the bottom is the washer.



## How to fix a dripping tap: replacing washers

- > Buy a new washer from your local hardware store. Most taps use 12mm washers, but if you're unsure of what size you'll need, follow the steps below to remove your worn washer, and take it with you to the hardware store.
- > Find your water meter. It's usually near your front fence, and usually looks like picture **A**.
- > Turn off the tap at the meter, and then go inside and check that the water is definitely off (a trickle will come out of the taps, but then it should stop).
- > Take the top off your tap. Usually you just need to unscrew the little disc at the top with hot or cold written on it (or pull it off and unscrewing the nut under it). Then pull the bit which turns off. If there's a cover over the bottom of the tap, you'll need to take this off too. Wrap a cloth around it first so you don't scratch it, and undo it with a shifting spanner.
- > You should now be able to see the top of the tap body. Unscrew it with a shifting spanner and pull it out.
- > The washer is the small rubber and plastic bit (or sometimes rubber and metal bit) at the bottom of the tap body. Replace it and reassemble the tap, making sure you don't over-tighten anything.
- > Turn the tap off.
- > Turn the water back on at the meter.
- > If your tap is still leaking, you will need to contact your landlord and have them call a plumber. For a video tutorial on changing a washer, see <http://www.savewater.com.au/how-to-save-water/in-the-home/video-tutorials>.

## COOKING

Can the door seals on your oven hold a sheet of paper?

- No  Kind of  Yes

Try putting a piece of paper between the oven and the oven door. If it stays there, your oven door seals are working well. If it slides down, and your door hinge is working fine, you may need to replace the seals. Your landlord is obliged to “ensure that the rented premises are maintained in good repair”. This means that if they own the oven, you can ask them to repair oven seals. If they then don’t do this, contact the [Tenants Union](#) for advice.

### OTHER TIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE COOKING

- If you put lids on your saucepans on the stove, you can cook as fast with less heat
- Every time you open the oven door, heat escapes
- The microwave is more energy efficient than the oven, a kettle is more efficient than a pan on the stove, and the toaster is more efficient than the grill.
- Try to avoid letting things cool and then having to reheat them, like water in the kettle
- If you only want a cup of tea, don’t fill the whole kettle.
- Instead of running dirty dishes under hot water, try just scraping them, or plunging them into a basin of water.
- Clean your veggies in a small tub of water, instead of under a running tap.
- Catch running water whilst waiting for it to warm up. Use it to water plants, rinse dishes or wash fruit and vegetables.

## FOOD

Do you compost your food scraps?

- No
- They rot in a pile in the backyard
- I’ve got a cranking compost

The majority of household garbage is food and garden waste<sup>5</sup>, and composting it instead stops our landfills filling up quite as fast and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. If you don’t have a garden but do have a small amount of outdoor space, like a balcony, try a worm farm. If you have no outdoor space at all, you can use a bokashi bucket ([www.bokashi.com.au](http://www.bokashi.com.au), (02) 9591 1699). This shouldn’t smell, but you will still need to dispose of the bucket’s contents when it’s full, preferably by finding someone who can use it in their garden. You can make your own worm farm or compost bins, or buy one through your local council, usually at a heavily discounted price. Information on how to compost usually comes with compost bins or worm farms that you buy, and is also available in many local libraries. For online information, try <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/downtoearth/composting.htm> (for compost bins) and <http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s1620935.htm> (for worm farms).

How often do you eat meat every night?

- Every night  Every week  Occasionally or never

Food is the biggest single contributor to Victoria’s ecological footprint, making up 28 per cent of it, and the most resource-intensive foods are meat and dairy products.<sup>6</sup> You can save greenhouse gases and water by eating less meat, and especially less beef. Try kangaroo instead, or a good tomato and basil pasta, or a stir-fry. There are lots of recipe ideas on the internet and in the recipe books in your local library. Cows drink and burp throughout their lifetime before being

turned into beef, which means that your average serve of meat can be responsible for five kilograms of greenhouse gases, while a kilo of beef can be responsible for 17,000 litres of water.<sup>7</sup>

## SAVE WATER: CHANGE WHAT YOU EAT

Carrying buckets of water from your shower to your garden to save water is a great thing to do, but it's worth remembering that in large Australian cities, only about 10 per cent of our water use comes through the taps in our houses. The other 90 per cent or so is indirect water use via the food we eat.<sup>8</sup> This water is from the irrigation that goes onto our crops and pastures. The amount of water used depends on how the food is grown and where, but animals tend to need a lot more water over their lifetime than plants. As a rough indication, a kilo of lamb is responsible for about 7000 litres of water, while a kilo of chicken uses closer to 3000 litres, eggs use less than 2000 litres and green beans use roughly 500 litres.<sup>9</sup> Eating less meat will reduce the amount of water you use more than a bucket in the shower will, and you can also reduce your impact by wasting less food (see below). To find out more about use of water for irrigation and their alternatives, find out about Environment Victoria's Healthy Rivers campaign (see [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au) or call 9341 8100).

## \$5.9 BILLION WORTH OF FOOD IN THE BIN

In 2004, Australian households threw out \$5.9 billion worth of food – more than 13 times the amount they donated to overseas aid agencies.<sup>10</sup> Food has a huge ecological impact and one of the easiest ways to decrease it is to make sure less food gets wasted. Try to cook only as much as you need, and eat your leftovers for lunch, freeze them for another meal or use them in your next meal. The website <http://www.foodwise.com.au/> is full of suggestions on how to cook the right amount, and what to do with leftovers (e.g. turn roast veggies into roast veggie soup!).

## SUSTAINABLE SEA FOOD

Many types of seafood are harvested unsustainably, particularly sharks, rays, deep sea fish and species which are long-lived. The Australian Marine Conservation Society ([www.amcs.org.au](http://www.amcs.org.au), 1800 066 299) suggests you avoid the following fish:

- BLUE WAREHOU – also known as trevally, sea bream, snotty trevally
- COMMERCIAL SCALLOP – also known as Tasmanian scallop, southern scallop
- EASTERN GEMFISH – also known as hake, king couta, kingfish
- ORANGE ROUGHY – also known as deep sea perch, sea perch
- REDFISH – also known as nannygai, red snapper
- SHARK – also known as flake
- SILVER TREVALLY – also known as silver bream, white trevally
- SOUTHERN BLUE-FIN TUNA – also known as tuna
- OREOS – also known as deep sea dory, dory
- BARRAMUNDI farmed in sea cages

Better options include: Australian salmon, blue swimmer crab, bream, calamari, octopus, flathead, King George whiting, leather jacket, mullet, mulloway (if it's caught wild, avoid it if it's farmed in sea cages), trevally (but avoid silver trevally), western rock lobster, whiting, abalone from aquaculture, crayfish from aquaculture, and oysters (but avoid Pacific oysters, as these are introduced and have become a pest). The Australian Marine Conservation Society sell guides to sustainable sea food, including pocket-sized guides.

## Do you try to eat food which is organic, local and seasonal?

- Never  Sometimes  As much as possible

The food we eat can take a heavy toll on the environment, because we dump chemical pesticides and fertilisers on it while we're growing it (chemicals that leach into our rivers), fly it in from the other side of the world, and truck it across the country, and throw out lots of it if it doesn't need supermarket specifications on size and shape. You can reduce your ecological footprint by trying to buy more organic food, and buying food that's in season and has been grown close to you. Organic can be more expensive, but you can make it cheaper, and tastier, by buying from markets instead of supermarkets. Food which is in season tends to be cheaper – the reason your tomatoes cost so much in winter is that they don't grow in Victoria at that time of year and have to be trucked in from somewhere warmer. Local food can be more expensive, because it's often grown by smaller scale producers, but you can make it cheaper by buying in bulk, and by buying wholefoods instead of processed and packaged foods. The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel website lists which fruits and vegetables are in season, and recipes to cook with them: [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/bhc\\_recipes?opendocument#inseason](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/bhc_recipes?opendocument#inseason). You can also get this information from gardening books and some recipe books in libraries.

## Do you grow your own food?

- No  A bit of it  Lots of it

If you're feeling keen, one of the most sustainable ways of getting food is to grow your own. If you haven't got a backyard, you could always grow a few veggies on the balcony or some herbs on the window sill.

In practice, most landlords won't mind if you plant a veggie patch, as long as you don't rip up lawn to do it. However according to the law, you are not allowed to make "alterations" to a rental property (including the garden) without your landlord's permission, and must leave it as you found it.



For some tips on growing food, try the more information section on [page 35](#) or your local library.

## OTHER TIPS FOR ETHICAL EATING

Depending on what your priorities are, you might want to take on the following approaches to making your dinner more ethical:

- Avoid food with genetically modified ingredients.

Greenpeace has put together the TrueFood Guide, listing products with GM ingredients. It's available online at <http://www.truefood.org.au/truefoodguide/> or from Greenpeace on (02) 9261 4588.

- Buy free range eggs and meats, for happier chickens, cows, sheep and pigs.
- Buy fair trade.



® When you buy a coffee in your local café, only a tiny amount makes it back to the grower – sometimes as little as three cents per coffee.<sup>11</sup> To make sure the people growing your food are treated fairly, buy certified fair trade products. Look out for this logo, or go to [www.fairtrade.com.au](http://www.fairtrade.com.au) for a list of where you can find which products.

## PACKAGING AND RECYCLING

Do you recycle your plastics, batteries, corks, computers, mobile phones, etc.?

- No  Paper and cans only  Religiously!

Recycling means reusing precious resources instead of sending them to landfill and you can recycle more than just paper and cans. The website [www.recyclingnearyou.org.au](http://www.recyclingnearyou.org.au) is a great resource for finding out where to recycle everything from fridges to polystyrene to reading glasses, as well as what your

local council collects, no matter where you are in Australia. If you don't have internet access, you can also get the information over the phone on 1300 733 712.

Do you buy products made from recycled and materials?

- Don't think about it  Sometimes  As much as possible

For recycling to work well, we need to buy products made from recycled materials. Check the packet, and remember "recyclable" paper isn't half as good as recycled paper.

Do you buy products with minimal packaging?

- Don't think about it  Sometimes  As much as possible

Excess packaging means more landfill and more greenhouse gases. Go for the minimally packaged options, things which can be re-filled, and buy in bulk. There are health food stores and food co-operatives dotted around the state (see <http://www.foe.org.au/sustainable-food/links/food-co-ops-in-australia/>) which get you to bring your own container and fill it from their bulk supply. Fresh food and whole foods also tend to have less packaging (and be better for you). And when you do end up with packaging, try to only get packaging which can be recycled.

Do you take your own bag when you go shopping?

- Never  When I remember  Always

Try leaving them where you'll remember to take them, or stick a reminder on your car/bike/fridge. And if you're only buying a few things, try just carrying them.



## OTHER TIPS FOR REDUCING WASTE

- Avoid printing things you don't need and use both sides of a sheet of paper
- Buy reusable products instead of disposable ones, e.g. reusable glasses instead of plastic, hankies instead of tissues
- Share, hire or borrow items you don't use much, like tools, lawn mowers and tents
- If you have a baby, consider reusable nappies or a nappy laundry service
- Buy less stuff you don't need (the first and most important part of reduce-reuse-recycle)
- Buy products that last, and get them repaired instead of sending them to landfill when they break. Find out where your local shoe/watch/TV repairer is!

## CLEANING WITHOUT CHEMICALS

The chemicals we use for cleaning are often bad for our health and bad for the environment. Here are some techniques which can give just as good a clean (and cost you less along the way):

**GENERAL PURPOSE CLEANER:** Try a natural vegetable liquid soap and water (or any old soap, really). For the trouble spots, mix in some bicarb soda to form a paste (though be careful, bicarb can scratch). This mixture is great for toilets, bathrooms, kitchens, floors, and more. Bicarb soda is available in the baking section of supermarkets.

**BAKED ON GRIME:** Cover grime with water or a really wet cloth and leave for 10 minutes (clean somewhere else while you wait!). Most of the time, most of the grime can just be wiped away.

**OVEN:** Oven cleaners are one of the most toxic chemicals you bring into your home. Bridget Gardiner, who is a bit of a green cleaning guru, suggests making a thick paste out of bicarb soda and water and painting it onto the inside of the oven and the wire racks. Then turn the oven on and leave it on low for 15 minutes, or until the paste is dry. With a scourer, scrub off the dry paste, and most of the grime should come with it. If your oven's really dirty repeat the process. And, if you leave a thin layer of the bicarb on the inside of the oven, it will be much easier to clean next time.

# ● Living room

## HEATING AND COOLING

Nearly half of the energy we use in our homes is for heating and cooling them<sup>12</sup>, so this is an area where you can make a big difference.

### WHAT TYPE OF HEATER SHOULD I GET?

Built in gas heaters are one of the best ways of heating houses. However if your property doesn't come with adequate installed heating, you will probably find yourself having to buy your own portable electric heaters. Most electric heater types use similar amounts of energy to each other and are expensive to run. If you have a large open space or a draughty space, it's going to be hard to heat the room, so the better bet is to just heat yourself. You can do this by getting an electric bar heater or an electric radiant panel heater and sitting near it. If you have a smaller, insulated space, try a little electric heater which blows air, or an oil column heater. Look for heaters with thermostats and fans. Because electric heaters are expensive to run, it may end up being cheaper to buy a more expensive, more efficient model. For more information on portable heaters, see [http://www.energysave.energyaustralia.com.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/1030/EnergyAustraliaHeating.pdf](http://www.energysave.energyaustralia.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1030/EnergyAustraliaHeating.pdf) or call Sustainability Victoria (1300 363 744).

### What temperature is your thermostat at?

- Fridge-like in summer, tropical in winter
- cool in summer, warm in winter

**(If your heater/cooler doesn't have a thermostat, try using a thermometer)**

Making your home a fridge in summer, or toasty in winter, uses a lot of energy. Try only heating your home to 19 degrees in winter – every two degrees higher will

use up to 17,800 black balloons of greenhouse gas and increase your energy bill by as much as \$151 per year.<sup>13</sup> Try only cooling it to 26 degrees in summer – every two degrees lower will use up to 1400 balloons of greenhouse gas.<sup>14</sup> This temperature range is comfortable, and if you're still feeling chilly you can throw on a jumper, without increasing your greenhouse gas emissions at all.

### WHAT'S A BLACK BALLOON?

In a few places in this booklet you will find information on how many "black balloons" of greenhouse gases you'll use or save through different actions. A black balloon is approximately 50 grams of greenhouse gas. It's a concept which was developed by the Victorian Government to help people understand emissions visually.

### Are your windows shaded?

- No ● A bit ● Yes

Up to 30 per cent of the heat houses gain in summer is through windows which are badly protected or positioned.<sup>15</sup> Cheap ways of shading your windows include putting up shade cloth or external blinds and planting plants which are deciduous or can be cut back in winter (to let the light back in when it's needed). The law on making changes to rental properties is unclear. If you make any of these changes (including planting large plants) without permission, you're not particularly likely to have any problems, but you still could. See the section on sustainable renting and the law, on [page 4](#).

# ● Living room

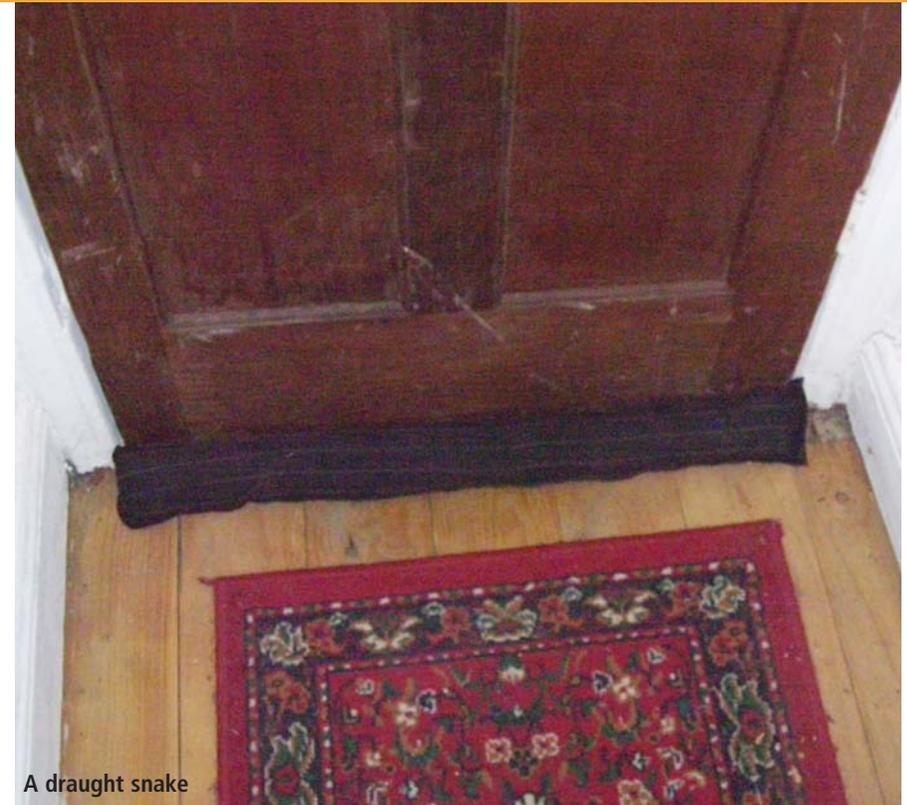
## HEATING AND COOLING FOR FREE

Well designed homes can stay at the right temperature without using heaters or coolers, just through positioning, being built from the right materials, and a bit of strategic action by the occupants. If your home isn't well designed, you can still do the action bit: in summer, leave your curtains closed in the day to block out the heat, and then open windows and doors and try to get a breeze through when the temperature drops outside. In winter, open curtains on any north facing windows in the day to let the heat in, and shut all of your curtains at night to keep it in.

**Do draughts get in under your doors, around the edges of your windows or through other gaps?**

Yes, lots    A bit    No

In your average Victorian home, if you added up all the cracks and gaps, it would be the equivalent of having a 1 metre by 1.5 metre window open all the time.<sup>16</sup> You can block gaps by buying weather seals from your local hardware store (strips of foam which stick to your doorway or window frame, and cost less than \$10 a packet). You can also buy weather seals in the form of strips which are nailed to the bottom of your door. It's worth asking permission to install both of these, as there's a reasonable chance your landlord will be supportive, and if you don't get permission, your landlord or real estate agent could consider them to be an "alteration" to the property. Leaving them for future tenants is also the best option, as the strips for the bottom of the door will leave nail holes when you remove them, and while the foamy weather strips should come off without much trouble, if they don't you will need nail polish remover, which could damage paintwork. See the section on [the law](#) for more information. The cheapest alternative, which you definitely don't need to get permission for, is draught snakes. These cost less than \$5, and are also easy to make yourself.



A draught snake

**Do you have an unused, unblocked chimney?**

Yes    No

Heat escapes up chimneys. If the chimney is no longer being used, fit board or cardboard in the opening, or even better, stuff an old doona or blanket up where the hole narrows. If the chimney is still being used, you could talk to your landlord about investing in a damper, which you can open when you have a fire going, and close when you don't.

# ● Living room

## DOUBLE GLAZING ON THE CHEAP

Double glazed windows (windows with two panes of glass with a gap in between them) lose significantly less heat than other windows, but double glazing's not an option for most renters. A cheap, temporary and just as effective alternative is Clear Comfort window insulation ([www.clearcomfort.com.au](http://www.clearcomfort.com.au), phone (02) 6161 3570). This is a tough, clear membrane that you can attach to your window frame yourself, using special double sided tape and then heating it with a hair dryer till it's taut like a pane of glass. For renters, there is the option of buying temporary tape, which lasts six months to a year. You can then remove the membrane, and it should only leave a yellow dust on the window frame, which can be dusted off. The law is unclear on if you can install something like this, which you then remove, without your landlord's permission (see the section on changes to [rental properties and the law](#)). It is probably best to get permission, as it could be hard to remove the membrane before the six months to a year is up. Another option, which shouldn't cause any damage, is to simply tape bubble wrap to the glass.

## How many of your windows have curtains?

● None ● Some ● All



Up to 40 per cent of the heat escaping from your home in winter is from uncovered windows.<sup>17</sup> If you can't afford new curtains, consider buying them second hand, for example from garage sales or op-shops, or websites and newspapers listing second hand items for sale. Or make them yourself! If you're feeling

nervous about sewing, you can buy curtain clips from fabric and homewares shops for about \$10 a packet. They clip to the top of the curtain, instead of being sewn on, so all you need to do is find a piece of material the right size and hem it. If you're feeling a bit more adventurous but your skills aren't up to speed, find out if your local neighbourhood house runs a sewing course. Curtains need to be thick and/or lined to be effective at keeping the cold in or the heat out, and should completely cover the window and extend a long way below the bottom of the window frame.

## How many of your curtains have pelmets?

● None ● Some ● All

[A pelmet is a box on the wall that covers the curtain rod]



Pelmets help stop the heat in the room slipping out through the window. If you don't have them, and can't convince your landlord to install some, a cheap alternative is to stick a draught snake, heavy blanket or towel on top of your curtain rod.

## Do you use an air conditioner in summer?

● Always ● Sometimes ● Only when I really need it

Fans are the cheapest way of cooling your home, and are cheap to buy. Try using a fan first, and only turning on the air conditioner if it gets too hot for the fan. Using a fan instead of an air conditioner could save you up to \$49 or 8,200 black balloons a year.<sup>18</sup> Make sure your air conditioner is shaded from the sun, and that the air can flow around it. Try to regularly clean the filters and to keep it well maintained.

# ● Living room

## HOW TO STOP HEAT ESCAPING THROUGH YOUR SKYLIGHT

Skylights are good for letting light in, but tend to also let heat out. This can be fixed with double glazed roof glazing or a ceiling diffuser (which blocks the shaft at the ceiling and diffuses the light). If getting your landlord to install either of these is too hard, the cheap alternative is to stick bubble wrap to the inside of the skylight (and remove it when you move out).

### Do you have insulation?

None  Some  Full insulation

Stick your head in the manhole in your ceiling to find out. Insulation can reduce energy for heating and cooling by as much as 45 per cent.<sup>19</sup> As a renter, you could theoretically place insulation in your roof, and take it with you when you leave (as long as it's not fixed to anything, as you need your landlord's permission to install a "fixture"). However this is expensive and hard work, and insulation is usually big and bulky and hard to move. The alternative is to persuade your landlord to install it. Rebates are available to landlords, and even to renters, for installing insulation. See the rebates section on [page 29](#) for more on this.

## TOP TIPS FOR RUNNING A HEATER OR COOLER WELL

- Close doors so you're only heating or cooling the space you're in, instead of the whole house. If you don't have doors, for example between the living room and the hallway, and getting your landlord to install them isn't an option, consider hanging a thick curtain or blanket over the doorway (if you can do this without damaging the doorway). You'll feel the difference.
- Don't leave your heater/cooler running overnight or while you're out. If you're really worried about those cold mornings, you could get one with a timer.

- If you stand on a chair and put your hand in the air in a heated room, you'll find that the air near the ceiling is a lot warmer than the air lower down. To get some of that warm air down to where you are, try running your ceiling fan slowly in reverse (if you have one), or running the fan on the heater at full speed (if it has one).
- If you have central heating, try shutting the vents to the rooms you're not using. It's also worth putting deflectors on vents near windows, so the heat goes into the centre of the room and not out the window.

### Do you have permanently open vents?

Yes  No

These were designed for the days of gas lighting and unflued heating and these days they should be blocked to stop draughts. Use a piece of wood or cardboard with a hook to attach it to the vent, or use stickytape or blue tack, if you can do this without damaging the paintwork.

## HOW TO STOP HEAT ESCAPING THROUGH YOUR CEILING EXHAUST FAN

These let heat escape when they're not in use. You can buy a special device which allows exhaust out, but blocks the gap when it's not in use. It's called the DraftStoppa, and it just sits over the top of the fan, inside the roof cavity, which means that you can install it yourself, and take it with you when you move house (assuming you can get into your roof cavity). They cost about \$35, and are available from environment shops, some hardware stores and online. For more information, see [www.draftstoppa.com.au](http://www.draftstoppa.com.au) or call 1800 121 611.

# ● Living room

## TVs, DVD players, stereos and other electrical appliances.

As we buy bigger TVs, more computers and modems and more home entertainment systems, our electricity use for appliances is going up and up – it's projected to grow more than any other area of household energy use by 2020, and to consume almost as much energy as heating our homes.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, these items quickly become outdated, so it's not unusual for a computer to end up in landfill only a couple of years after it's bought, contributing to the growing problem of e-waste.

### WHERE DO TVS GO WHEN THEY DIE?

The answer is usually to landfill, where they take up valuable space and the toxic chemicals they contain risk leaching out into the environment. Environment Victoria is calling for a TV take back scheme, where manufacturers take responsibility for recovering the TVs they produce, and making sure that the valuable resources in them (including precious metals!) are recycled, instead of being wasted in tips. For more information on the Environment Victoria Smart Production and Consumption Campaign, see [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au) or call 9341 8100.

## Do you turn off your TV, DVD players, etc. at the wall?

- Never ● Some of them, sometimes ● All of them, always

Lots of appliances use "standby energy" when they're not being used – particularly ones which you can operate by remote control, and ones which have clocks on them or small lights which stay lit up. This makes a difference – sometimes the standby energy is as much as the appliances use when they're turned on, and switching them off can save up to 10 per cent of your energy bill or 7,700 "black balloons" of greenhouse gas.<sup>21</sup> If you have some items you need to leave on (like modems) and others which can go off, the answer can be a powerboard with separate switches for each socket.

## MINIMISING THE IMPACT OF YOUR COMPUTER

- Put your computer to sleep when you won't be using it for short periods of time. You can change its settings so this happens automatically.
- Screensavers don't save energy. Turn off your screen if you won't be using it for a short period of time and don't want to put it to sleep.
- When you won't be using your computer for longer periods, shut it down and turn it off at the wall.
- If you're getting rid of a computer, make sure it is recycled. Go to [www.recyclingnearyou.org.au](http://www.recyclingnearyou.org.au) or call them on 1300 733 712, to find the nearest recycling point to you.
- Recycle your printer toner cartridges. You can drop them off at participating Australia Post, Officeworks, Harvey Norman, Tandy, Dick Smith Electronics and Powerhouse outlets.

## LIGHTING

### Do you use low energy light globes?

- None ● Some ● For all lights

Low energy light globes use only 20 per cent of the energy of an equivalent ordinary globe, which means they cost only 20 per cent of the cost of an ordinary globe on your electricity bill.<sup>22</sup> They also last eight times as long, which means that even though they are more expensive to buy, they easily pay for themselves.<sup>23</sup> You don't need your landlord's permission to change light globes (unless you're also changing the socket the globe goes into).

# ● Living room

## **HALOGEN DOWNLIGHTS: LOW VOLTAGE, HIGH ENERGY**

Halogen downlights are low voltage, but they still use about as much electricity as an ordinary incandescent globe. The problem is there tends to be so many of them – sometimes 12 downlights will light up a room which might otherwise have had two ordinary globes. There are a range of low energy alternatives, but many are designed for 240 volt light fittings, instead of the 12 volt fittings which most downlights use. The exception is IRC halogen lights which will reduce energy use by up to 30 per cent. They cost about \$12 each. If this is beyond your price range, you could try using lamps instead of your downlights.

Downlights also allow heat to escape out through your roof. You can buy special covers which fit over the top of the downlight, but these cost about \$15 per light and require access to your roof cavity.

### **Also:**

- Turn off lights when you're not in the room (even fluorescents and low energy lights).
- Use natural light where ever possible (e.g. open curtains in the morning instead of turning on the light).
- Try using timers to control any outdoor and security lighting. Also ensure that outdoor lights are switched off during the day.



# Bathroom

## SHOWER

### How long are your showers?

- Long  About 6 minutes  4 minutes or less

Showers are a major user of water – they comprise roughly 30 per cent of the water we use inside our houses and nearly 50 per cent of the hot water we use.<sup>24</sup> This means they're also major energy users – in Victorian homes, heating water is the biggest energy user after heating rooms.<sup>25</sup> If you cut your shower time by four minutes, you'll save about 36 litres of water with a low flow shower head, or about 60 litres of water with an ordinary showerhead, every time you shower. If your hot water service is electric, this will also save up to 5 kg of greenhouse gases, every time you shower. You can buy shower timers for less than \$5.

### Do you have a water saving showerhead?

- No  Yes



A water saving showerhead

Water saving showerheads use half as much water, but still feel like a satisfying shower. The law is unclear on if you need your landlord's permission to change your showerhead. If you do it without permission, it's reasonably likely that this won't cause any problems, but you need to be aware that you are taking a risk (see the section on [the law](#)). If you decide to change your showerhead yourself, make sure you wrap

a cloth around the shower fittings before grabbing them with a shifting wrench, so you don't scratch them and risk having to pay for the damage.

Many local councils and water companies have showerhead exchange programs, where you can bring your old one in and swap it for a water saving one for free. If you can't find a free exchange near you and you can't afford to buy a new showerhead yourself, you could always put in a flow restrictor instead, which costs

less than \$10. See the information on flow restrictors on [page 8](#). Water saving showerheads usually come with instructions on how to install them yourself and there is also a video on how to do it at <http://www.savewater.com.au/how-to-save-water/in-the-home/video-tutorials>.

If you have an instantaneous hot water system (a small box on the wall instead of a large tank), check with the manufacturer or supplier before installing a water saving showerhead, as some models are incompatible. You might be able to solve this problem by getting a showerhead designed to operate at lower pressures. These are also worth checking out if you have a low pressure water system (e.g. a gravity-fed one, if you're in a regional area and not on mains water).

### Do you have flow restrictors or tap aerators in your taps?

- None  Some  On all sink and basin taps

See the section on this on [page 8](#).

## RIVERS RUNNING DRY

We take huge amounts of water out of our rivers, to feed the dams which feed our cities and to irrigate our farms. We often don't leave enough water to sustain river eco-systems. Only 21 per cent of Victoria's rivers are in good or excellent condition.<sup>26</sup> While Victorians have embraced water conservation (Melbournians used 34 per cent less water each in 2007 than in the 1990s<sup>27</sup>), cities and towns across the state are on water restrictions, because there is still not enough water in our dams. Environment Victoria's Healthy Rivers Campaign has been proposing ways to look after our rivers while still having enough water for our cities. To find out more, go to [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au) or call 9341 8100.

# Bathroom

## Do you use chemical shower cleaning products?

Yes  Sometimes  Never

Lots of cleaning products damage both the environment and health. To clean your shower, try using an old kitchen plastic scourer (not metal) and a mix of natural vegetable liquid soap and water (or any old soap, really). Vinegar and bicarb soda also both work well (both are in your supermarket). Use a window squeegee at the end of each shower to wipe down the glass, so you won't need to clean the glass as often.

## Do you turn off the tap when brushing your teeth?

No  Yes

A running tap uses 15-18 litres of water every minute.<sup>28</sup> You can save all that water just by running the tap only when you are rinsing the toothbrush or your mouth.

## TOILET

### Do you use a deodoriser in the toilet room?

Yes  No

Chemicals in deodorisers can be damaging to your health, so lighting a match, or opening the window, can be a better way of getting rid of unpleasant smells.

## HOW TO TURN A FULL FLUSH TOILET INTO A HALF FLUSH TOILET

If you don't have a half flush toilet, the simplest way to stop so much drinking water being flushed down the drain is to stick a plastic bottle full of water or a brick in the cistern. This effectively makes your cistern smaller, and in lots of old toilets you can put in several bottles and still get a good flush. Another alternative is gadgets which stop the toilet flushing as soon as you take your finger off the button, so you can control how much water you use. They're cheap, just sit inside your cistern, and are available from environment shops, hardware shops and online.

## Is your toilet cistern leaking?

Yes  No

### [Put some food dye in the cistern to find out]

If water isn't gushing out, it's still worth putting some food dye in the cistern to see if it's trickling out (if the dye appears in the toilet bowl, it is). For gushing water, the problem is usually that the float arm needs to be adjusted so it sits lower in the cistern. On older cisterns with metal arms with a ball on the end, this can be done just by bending it. On newer cisterns with plastic arms, there is a screw on the top of the arm which you can turn to adjust the height. For trickling water, the problem is usually a washer that needs replacing.

The law is unclear on if you're allowed to do these kinds of repairs yourself, so it's safer to ask your landlord to get repaired the toilet. They are obliged to do this and if they don't respond to your requests on this, you should contact the [Tenants Union](#) for advice.

# ● Bedroom

Do you use an electric blanket?

Always  Sometimes  Never

Using a hot water bottle instead will reduce your energy use. If you'd rather stick to your electric blanket, try to turn it off as soon as your bed has heated up.

Do you leave your phone charger plugged in after your phone's charged?

Always  Sometimes  Never

The transformers on phone chargers use energy, even when your phone isn't charging. You can reduce your greenhouse gas emissions by unplugging your charger when it's not in use, or switching it off at the wall.

# ● Laundry

Do you wash your clothes in hot water?

Always  Sometimes  Never

Washing in hot water uses more energy, and can increase your bills by as much as \$70 a year compared to washing in cold water<sup>29</sup>. Cold water cleans just as well.

Do you use a dryer to dry your clothes?

Always  Sometimes  Hardly ever

The clothes line uses no greenhouse gases (and neither does a clothes horse inside when it's raining). If you do use a dryer, thoroughly spin drying the clothes in the washing machine first will reduce its energy use and it's worth cleaning the lint filter regularly.

Also:

- Try to only use the washing machine or dryer when you have a full load
- If you're buying a new washing machine, try buying one that has a high efficiency rating for water and energy use. If you're on a low income, you might be eligible to have one bought for you or to get a no-interest loan for one. See [page 8](#) for more information. However, it is often more environmentally sound to keep an old machine going, instead of sending it to landfill and buying a newer, more efficient one (see [page 7](#) for more on this).
- If you use the grey water from your washing machine on the garden, make sure you use a detergent which is garden-friendly. There is some information on detergent packets, while an independent analysis of laundry detergents has been carried out by [www.lanfaxlabs.com.au](http://www.lanfaxlabs.com.au).



## Do you have unused lawn?

- Lots  A bit  None

Lawns use a lot of water. If you don't use your lawn, you might want to talk to your landlord about alternatives, like turning it into a veggie patch or planting native grasses or other native plants.

## Do you have a 'no junk mail' sign on your letter box?

- No  Yes

Unless you really enjoy junk mail, save some paper and energy by getting rid of it. If you already have a 'no junk mail' sign and keep getting it anyway, you can call the Distributions and Standards Board to report it, on 1800 676 136.

### KEEPING A GARDEN ALIVE UNDER WATER RESTRICTIONS

Much of Victoria is under water restrictions which make keeping a garden alive a challenge. You can make it easier by:

- Mulching. This significantly reduces the amount of water your plants need, and makes it harder for weeds to grow. Up until June 30 2009 you can get a rebate to make it cheaper – see the [rebate section](#) for more information. Or make your own mulch from leaves, ripped up weeds, or whatever you have around.
- Building up your soil with compost – healthy soil retains more water.
- Planting drought tolerant plants (indigenous ones often are).
- Using grey water – see box.
- Collect your own rainwater – see box.

### THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF GREY WATER

Grey water (all non-toilet household water) is a good water source for the garden, BUT you have to be careful how you use it. The first thing you should do is get some detailed information, for example from the EPA ([www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au), 9695 2722) or Sustainable Gardening Australia ([http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info\\_greywater.html](http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info_greywater.html), 9850 8165, which also has some good information on cheap, temporary ways of collecting it). In the meantime, here are good tips on what not to do. Never:

- Use untreated grey water on vegetables which are going to be eaten raw
- Use waste water from the kitchen (including from dishwashers) – this is considered “black water” because the bacteria in it can be a health risk
- Let children or pets near untreated grey water
- Use grey water which could have faecal contaminations – which means no grey water from washing nappies.

It is a health risk and illegal to:

- Store grey water for more than 24 hours, or to store it in rainwater tanks
- Allow grey water to seep out of your property, for example into neighbouring properties or drains.



A rain barrel collecting water from the roof

## COLLECTING YOUR OWN RAINWATER

Renters can't install tanks without their landlord's permission, and they're very expensive (although there are rebates available – see the rebate section). The simplest way to collect your own rainwater is to just stick a bucket wherever lots of water falls (e.g. under a rust hole in the drain pipe). Another option is to get your

landlord's permission to install a downpipe diverter – a piece of plastic which replaces a small section of your downpipe and allows you to direct the water either down the downpipe, or off with a hose to where you want it to go. You could leave the diverter there when you move out, with the water going back down the downpipe. Diverters start at about \$15. You then need a container to collect your water in. You can sometimes get hold of second hand plastic barrels (try websites listing second hand items for sale), but find out if they've been used for dangerous chemicals first. You can also buy rain barrels and wheelie bins at big hardware stores, for around \$100 for 2-300 litres. And you can take them with you when you move out! Make sure you get one with a tap in the bottom (unless you want to bucket the water out the top). If your feeling DIY, there's lots of information on the internet, and a bit in libraries, on how to install your own tap and over flow, how to connect two barrels together and so on. For example

<http://home.comcast.net/~leavesdance/rainbarrels/construction.html>

Finally, make sure your tank/barrel is sealed against mosquitoes! If the lid doesn't seal tightly, try rigging up something with fly wire, or old synthetic lacy curtains and elastic. If you can see mosquito wrigglers in the water, chances are both you and your neighbours are getting itchy and frustrated.

## HOT WATER SYSTEM

What temperature is your hot water system set to? \_\_\_\_\_°

If you have a storage hot water system (one with a big tank), the tank temperature should be set at about 60 degrees (hot enough to kill bacteria, but not so hot that it uses too much energy). For an instantaneous system (a small box on the wall), the temperature should be set at 50 degrees or less.<sup>30</sup>

How much water comes out of the overflow pipe every day?

- More than 10 litres     Less than 10 litres

Leave a bucket under it all day to find out (then put the water on the garden!). If more than 10 litres is coming out, it might be worth calling your landlord and getting someone to have a look at it.

Do you turn off your hot water system, and the pilot light, when you're on holidays?

- Never     Sometimes     Always



If you're going away for more than a weekend and you have a storage hot water system (one with a big tank), it's worth turning it and its pilot light off while you're gone. There are usually instructions on the tank on how to do this, and on how to relight it. If you're not game to turn off the pilot light, you can just turn the dial on the tank down to 1 (or "vacation", if this is marked on the dial), and turn it back up when you return.

A hot water system dial, with "vacation" marked on it

# ● Outside

Photograph thanks to Gideon from Paris, France



## Are your hot water pipes insulated?

- No  A bit  Yes

Insulating pipes is cheap and easy (it involves gaffer tape!). You can buy the insulation from your local hardware store for usually less than \$10 and get some tips on installation while you're there. For storage hot water systems, you should insulate the first two metres of pipe, and for both storage and instantaneous systems you should insulate any long runs of pipe, and any pipe which is on the outside of the house. Doing this yourself would probably be considered an "alteration" to the property, although it's less likely to be considered one if you remove it when you leave (see the section on the law on [page 4](#)). If you asked your landlord's permission (and offered to pay the \$10!), with any luck they would say yes.



# ● Getting around

Cars are a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, as well as air pollution in general. Some tips for minimising your impact include:

## **Car pool**

If you can't find people you know going to the same place, check out one of the many car pooling websites which hook people up.

## **Ride your bike**

You can get cheap second hand ones through bike shops, websites and newspapers which list second hand items for sale, and notice boards at universities. For good bicycle routes (and how they connect to train lines) in metropolitan Melbourne and Bendigo, get yourself a TravelSmart map – see <http://www.travelsmart.vic.gov.au/web4/tsmart.nsf/075a1584bf3076e3ca25685c013c626/503c46b86b8ca526ca257052001c4c63?OpenDocument&Expand=5&> or ring the Information Victoria Bookshop (1300 366 356). Riding a bike also keeps you fit, without spending time or money on a gym.

## **Catch public transport**

See <http://www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/maps-stations-stops/> for public transport maps for Melbourne and regional centres, or call Metlink on 131 638. You can make Melbourne public transport cheaper by buying tickets in bulk – the 5 x Weekend Daily is a particularly good bargain, which gets you anywhere in zone 1 and 2 for \$2.90 for the day (available from stations with ticket windows, over the internet, and from shops which sell Metcards, like post offices and some newsagents).

## **Walk**

This has got to be the most enjoyable way of getting around. Try strolling to the local shops a couple of times a week for a few groceries, instead of driving to the supermarket for the mega-shop.



## **GETTING KIDS TO SCHOOL**

70 per cent of Victorian kids are driven to school, even though 80 per cent live within 3 kilometres of their school<sup>31</sup> and many aren't getting the exercise they need to stay a healthy weight. Getting kids to walk or ride is a good solution (see [above](#) for cycle routes). If you're not comfortable with them going on their own, you could get them to go with other kids in the neighbourhood, you could accompany them or you could take turns with other parents in accompanying them. Bikes and walking tend to be much more enjoyable than waiting in a queue of cars by the school gate.

## **Car share**

If you're in inner city Melbourne, there might be a car share car near you. These are parked in set locations and available for use by the hour. Their hourly rate can seem pricey, but compared to owning your own car (and paying for registration, repairs, petrol and insurance), they can save you both money and hassles. To find out more, search "car share" on the internet. Some local councils also have information on car share schemes in their area.

# ● Getting around

## Fly less

Plane travel is very damaging to the climate, and Australians are flying more and more every year (remember when hardly anybody flew to Sydney and everyone else went by land?). You can reduce your climate impact by only flying when you really need to and taking more of your holidays in Australia – after all, it's a pretty amazing continent.

## Drive more efficiently

Many of us have to use a car sometimes, particularly in rural areas. When you do drive, do it as efficiently as possible by:

- Avoiding revving your car
- Driving smoothly, with less accelerating and braking – this can save up to 30 per cent of your fuel consumption
- Avoiding high speeds
- Regularly servicing your car – a well tuned engine has lower emissions
- Keeping your tyres inflated to their recommended level – this is also safer
- Removing any items from your car that you don't need – the heavier the load the more petrol your car uses to cart you and your stuff around
- Minimising wind resistance – if you have roof racks or other attachments on your car, take them off when you don't need them
- Minimising air conditioner use (although if you're going faster than 80 km/hour, the air conditioner is more efficient than having the windows open, because of the drag they create)
- Switching the engine off instead of letting it idle if you're stopped for a while (e.g. when you're waiting for someone)

Finally, it's worth disposing of used oil properly, particularly when you know that one litre of oil is enough to contaminate one million litres of water.<sup>32</sup> Contact your local council to find out where you can get your old oil recycled.

## BUYING A CAR

Looking to buy a car? Buy the most fuel efficient and low emission car you can afford. For information on the efficiency of different new and old car models, see <http://www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au/>.

But remember, it can be more sustainable to keep an old car on the road than to send your car to landfill and to have the materials for a new one mined out of the ground. See the [page 7](#) for more information.

## MOVING HOUSE

If you're moving house, consider making the move more sustainable by:

- Avoiding new removal boxes which will then be thrown out. Hire boxes which will be reused, or get old boxes from a supermarket or a friend who's recently moved.
- If you're getting rid of stuff, try getting it to someone who'll appreciate it, via friends, op shops, garage sales, selling it, or listing it as free to good home (e.g. on websites like [www.ozrecycle.com](http://www.ozrecycle.com)). If you need to throw stuff out, try to recycle it, and if it's toxic (e.g. old paint tins, old batteries), make sure you dispose of it responsibly. [www.recyclingnearyou.org.au](http://www.recyclingnearyou.org.au) (phone 1300 733 712) lists where you can recycle all kinds of things, as well as how to dispose of many toxic items.
- Small trucks don't use that much more petrol than cars, which means that one load in a truck can be more efficient than many loads in a car.

# ● And one more thing or two

## Ethical superannuation

When your money goes into a superannuation fund, it can end up being invested in a new wind farm, or exacerbating climate change by being invested in yet another coal power station. Keeping environmental principles in mind when choosing your super fund can radically change your environmental impact, and ethical funds often earn as much or more money as other funds. Information on different superannuation funds is available from the Responsible Investment Association Australasia ([www.responsibleinvestment.org](http://www.responsibleinvestment.org) or (02) 9025 5711).

**Congratulations, you've made it to the end of the tour!**

## Making flats and apartments more sustainable

Most of the information in this booklet applies to flats and apartments too, but there are a few things specific to flats and apartments which are worth trying. However, they require getting your landlord's permission.

- Get external lighting changed to low energy globes. If your block has five outdoor lights, this could save \$140 a year and the new globes could last for more than two years.<sup>33</sup>
- Try to make sure lighting in and outside stairwells isn't on for longer than it needs to be. If it's on during daylight hours, see if you can get the timer adjusted. Other alternatives are getting movement sensors installed, or getting solar-powered lights for outside.
- If your block has a centralised cooling system, make sure that it is well shaded and well ventilated.
- Put up signs encouraging residents to use cold water when washing their clothes.
- Get clotheslines installed (if you don't already have them and you have the space).

With thanks to the Australian Government's **Measures for reducing energy use in flats and apartments** brochure, which provided the bulk of the information in this section.

## Approaching your landlord

For some changes to your home, particularly ones involving lots of money, you will need your landlord's permission. If you want to try to convince your landlord to invest money in making the property more sustainable, try talking to them about rebates and tax deductions (see below), and the greater good of sustainability. If you are renting through a real estate agent, check with them on how they would like you to contact the landlord. Often they will want any requests put in writing, which is often good advice even if you're renting directly from the landlord. If you do reach an agreement with your landlord, then it's definitely worth getting it in writing and signed, and holding onto your copy.

Before approaching your landlord or real estate agent, be warned! If the changes make the property more valuable or more attractive to future tenants, your landlord might take the opportunity to up your rent. However they can't increase your rent more than once every six months, and they must give you 60 days notice. If you think any rent increases are too high, you can get an inspector from Consumer Affairs Victoria to assess if the increase is reasonable, and you can use their report to appeal your landlord's decision. For more information, go to [www.tuv.org.au](http://www.tuv.org.au), or call the Tenants Union on 9416 2577.

## Rebates

The state and federal governments offer a whole series of rebates to reimburse some of the costs of making your home more sustainable, but most of these are targeted at owner occupiers. There are some rebates available for rental properties (listed below), but they tend to be for items which your landlord would need to install and pay for. If you think you might be able to persuade your landlord to do this, see the information below. There are also Victorian Government water rebates available to June 30, 2009, which you can access without talking to your landlord. These cover water saving showerheads, mulch, flow control valves, compost bins and more (as well as more expensive items, like tanks). Details are available at <http://ourwater.vic.gov.au/saving/home/rebates> or by calling 136 186.

# ● And one more thing or two

Also, renters buying efficient fridges and washing machines through the No Interest Loan Scheme (see page 8) may be eligible for a \$100 rebate for this.

Below is a rough guide to some of the rebates available to rental properties as of early 2009. **All** of them involve conditions, and it's important that you get the full information and check it carefully before going ahead.

For	Amount	From	Very rough indication of cost without rebate	More information
Solar hot water replacing electric storage hot water	\$1600	Federal Government	\$2000-\$5000	<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency">http://www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency</a> (02) 6274 1111
Solar hot water	\$900-\$2500	Victorian Government	\$2800-\$10,300	<a href="http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_households/rebates.html">http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_households/rebates.html</a> 1300 366 195
Insulation	\$1000	Federal Government	\$1000-\$2000	<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency">www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency</a> (02) 6274 1111
Gas hot water replacing peak (day-rate) electric water heater, or a water heater fueled by wood	\$300-\$700	Victorian Government	\$800-\$1400	<a href="http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_households/rebates.html">http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_households/rebates.html</a> 1300 366 195
Rainwater tanks	\$400-\$500	Federal Government	\$750+ for the tank, plus installation	<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/nrgi/index.html">http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/nrgi/index.html</a> (02) 6274 1111
Greywater treatment system	\$500	Federal Government	\$10,000	<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/nrgi/index.html">http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/nrgi/index.html</a> (02) 6274 1111

# ● And one more thing or two

The federal government also has a green loans scheme, which carries out free household sustainability assessments and gives out interest free loans for making the changes recommended in the assessment. Renters are eligible, as long as they are on the current lease. For more information, see <http://www.environment.gov.au/greenloans/> or call (02) 6274 1111.

## Tax deductions

If your landlord improves your property, for example to make it more energy efficient, they may be eligible for tax deductions. The cost of maintenance and repairs can be deducted from their taxable rental income. This includes:

- Repairs to hot water systems, heaters and air conditioners
- Repair of taps and pipes
- Repairing insulation (for example if it has settled or become damaged)

Deductions for capital works expenses and for the loss of value of assets can be claimed over a number of years. This usually includes

- Replacing a hot water system with a more efficient one
- Installing low flow taps and water saving shower heads
- Installing an energy efficient heater or air conditioner
- Installing insulation
- Installing blinds and awnings
- Erecting a pergola or something similar, which provides shade
- Installing internal doors, so you can close off the area you're in for heating and cooling
- Re-doing the wiring, including changing the lighting type and how it's controlled
- Buying appliances which are energy efficient.

This information should be treated as a rough guide only. As with rebates, there are many conditions and lots of fine print, so it's important that your landlord check the details thoroughly first. More information is available from the Australian Tax Office's **Rental Properties 2008** publication, available on the web at <http://www.ato.gov.au/individuals/content.asp?doc=/content/00133187.htm&pc=001/002/002/011/001&mnu=&mf=&st=&cy=1>, or by contacting the tax office on 13 28 61.

With thanks to the Australian Government's **Tax Deductions for Energy Efficient Improvements in Rental Properties** brochure, which was used as background information in putting this section together.

# ● What to look for

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN FINDING A PLACE TO RENT

Most of us when we're looking for a place to rent aren't in a position to be too fussy about the finer details of the place's environmental performance. Still, the points below are worth keeping in mind when looking for a rental property, because they can make a big difference both to your environmental impact and your hip pocket. Take this check list with you next time you're on the hunt for a rental, use one column of check boxes for each property you look at, and see which one comes out on top.

Column 1 is for the property at:

---

Column 2 is for the property at:

---

Column 3 is for the property at:

---

### Location and transport

- Is it close to where you spend your time (work, uni, friends, family, local shops)?
- Is it close to public transport?
- Is there space to store bicycles?

(See [page 27](#) for more information on transport.)

### Heating and cooling

- Is it brick (or even better, double brick), or insulated? You can always ask the real estate agent if it's insulated, or ask to have a look in the roof.
- Will it be relatively draught free?
- Is there a gas heater? (These are much cheaper to run than electric portable heaters.)
- Are there thick curtains (not blinds) with pelmets?
- Can you heat/cool just the room you're using?
- Do the living areas have north facing windows?
- Are the west facing windows smaller, to minimise afternoon sun?
- Are the windows shaded from the summer sun?
- Do the windows open wide, to let out the heat at the end of hot days?

(See [page 15](#) for more information on heating and cooling.)

### Hot water system

- Does it have a gas (or even better, a solar) hot water system?
- Does it have an instantaneous hot water system? (These look like small boxes, instead of large tanks.) Storage hot water systems are only needed for large households.

(See [page 25](#) for more information on hot water systems.)



# ● So what now?

First of all, congratulations. If you've taken on some of the suggestions in this booklet, chances are you're now far more sustainable than your average Australian.

But you might also be feeling a bit frustrated, especially if you've stopped and looked at what other bits of society are getting up to, or not, on the sustainability front. To ease that frustration, it's worth finding out how you can take sustainability further. Here are some suggestions:

## **Get informed**

Check out the more information section on page [35](#) for where you can find out more about everything from carbon offsets to Water Sensitive Urban Design.

## **Talk to others**

Talk to your friends, family, neighbours, anyone you can find. Talk to people in your workplace/school/university about making it more sustainable. Share information with people in your street about climate change, or different techniques for collecting rainwater. Car pool with them!

## **Get involved**

There are people all over the state taking action on environmental issues. Get involved in a group near you (see the [more information](#) section), or get involved in one of Environment Victoria's campaigns (see below). There are lots of ways you can help out environmental groups – everything from writing letters from home, to going to regular meetings to showing up just when there's a major event.

## **Donate money**

If you don't have time to spare, you can always help out with money instead. It doesn't have to be a lot – a \$20 donation makes a difference – and donating a small amount every month through your credit card or direct debit gives environmental organisations a reliable income that allows them to plan for the future. To donate to Environment Victoria, see below.

## **Don't lose hope!**

One of the biggest threats to sustainability is not greenhouse gases but that we

tend to think that the problem is too big and we are too small. The problem **is** big, but we can still make a difference. The world is changed by people, and it changes all the time.

## **ENVIRONMENT VICTORIA**

This booklet was put together by Environment Victoria, Victoria's peak environmental non-government organisation, with assistance from the Tenants Union of Victoria.

Environment Victoria mobilises people to safeguard our environment. We do our part by championing the environment and the people who care about it. We give a voice to the growing environmental challenges that face us and the emerging solutions that are showing the way to the future. And we educate and engage people in what they can do to help. This includes helping people who are not traditionally involved in environmental issues to live more sustainably, and working to secure a safe climate future, protect our rivers and wetlands and encourage people to produce and consume more sustainably.

Our environment needs us more than ever before. Together with hundreds of community groups and thousands of people just like you, we can succeed. To join us, donate or help with any of our campaigns, go to [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au) or call 9341 8100. You can also stay in touch by signing up to one of our email bulletins.

## **TENANTS UNION OF VICTORIA**

The Tenants Union of Victoria aims to inform and educate tenants about their rights, to improve the status and conditions of tenants and to represent and speak for the collective interests of tenants in law and policy making. The Tenants Union of Victoria provides advice, assistance and advocacy for tenants of private and public residential properties and residents of rooming houses and caravan parks in Victoria, Australia. We have an extensive collection of fact sheets, advice guides and handbooks at [www.tuv.org.au](http://www.tuv.org.au), including fact sheets in community languages. We also have an advice line, open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9am till 4pm, and on Wednesdays from 1pm till 8pm – call 9416 2577.

# ● Tell me more

## TELL ME MORE

Besides the links to more information in the body of the booklet, here are some more resources to help you find out more. If you have limited internet access, try tracking down the books in your local library, or a second hand bookshop.

### Household sustainability

#### Websites:

Federal Government's Technical Manual: [www.yourhome.gov.au](http://www.yourhome.gov.au)

State Government advice: [www.makeyourhomegreen.vic.gov.au](http://www.makeyourhomegreen.vic.gov.au)

State Government advice: [www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au](http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au)

Appliance energy ratings: <http://www.energyrating.gov.au/>

Sustainable products: <http://www.ecobuy.org.au>

Water saving products: [www.savewater.com.au](http://www.savewater.com.au)

Chemicals in the home: <http://www.safersolutions.org.au/>

#### Books:

**Your Home: Technical Manual**, by the Australian Government  
(Can be ordered for \$49.50 plus postage and handling – call 9639 1500)

**Green is Good: Smart ways to live well and help the planet**,  
by Rebecca Blackburn

**Water – Not down the drain: A guide to using rainwater and greywater at home**, by Stuart McQuire

**Making your home sustainable: A guide to retrofitting**, by Derek Wrigley

#### Magazines:

ReNew: Technology for a sustainable future  
(more relevant to home owners, but still contain lots of good information)

## COMPOST AND GROWING VEGGIES

#### Websites:

Sustainable Gardening Australia: [www.sgaonline.org.au](http://www.sgaonline.org.au)

Gardening Australia: [www.abc.net.au/gardening](http://www.abc.net.au/gardening)

Radio and TV shows:

The Gardening Show, 3CR Community Radio, 855 AM, 7.30 – 9.15am Sundays  
(broadcast in Melbourne and streamed and podcast over the internet)

Gardening Australia, ABC TV, 6:30pm Saturdays and 1:00pm Sundays on ABC1,  
4:30pm Mondays on ABC2

Dirty Deeds, Triple R Community Radio, 102.7 FM, 1:00pm Sundays (broadcast in Melbourne and streamed and podcast over the internet)

## CLIMATE CHANGE

#### Books:

**The Weather Makers: The History & Future Impact of Climate Change**,  
by Tim Flannery

**Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning**, by George Monbiot

**Greenhouse Solutions with Sustainable Energy**, by Mark Diesendorf

**Climate Code Red: The case for a sustainability emergency**,  
by David Spratt and Philip Sutton

**Scorcher – The Dirty Politics of Climate Change**, by Clive Hamilton

# ● Tell me more

## DVDs:

**An Inconvenient Truth**, starring Al Gore

## Reports:

**Turning it Around: Climate Solutions for Victoria**, by Environment Victoria (proposes how we could make deep cuts to our emissions, quickly), online at [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au)

**A Citizen's Guide to Climate Refugees**, by Friends of the Earth

## Websites:

Carbon offsetting: [www.carbonoffsetwatch.org.au](http://www.carbonoffsetwatch.org.au)

Emissions trading: [www.lowcarbonfuture.org.au/what-is-emissions-trading](http://www.lowcarbonfuture.org.au/what-is-emissions-trading)

## WASTE

### Websites:

[www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com) (includes a really engaging 20 minute movie summing up how and why we throw out so much)

### Reports:

**State of Waste Report: Victoria**, by the Total Environment Centre (online at [http://www.tec.org.au/images//final\\_state\\_of\\_waste\\_in\\_victoria.pdf](http://www.tec.org.au/images//final_state_of_waste_in_victoria.pdf))

## WATER ISSUES

### Websites:

Climate Change and Water in Australia: <http://www.cana.net.au/water/>

### Documents:

**Water Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines**, by the City of Melbourne. (WSUD is a different way of seeing water management, including seeing storm water as a resource instead of as waste.) Available online at <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/info.cfm?top=120&pg=2652>

## Podcasts:

**Parched: The politics of water**, featuring Maude Barlow (famous Canadian campaigner on globalisation and water issues), Paul Sinclair (of the Australian Conservation Foundation), Gwynne Dyer (a Canadian writer) and John Quiggin (of the University of Queensland). Recorded at the 2008 Melbourne Writers Festival and broadcast on Radio National.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/nationalinterest/stories/2009/2446612.htm>.

## RUNNING OUT OF OIL

### Books:

**The Transition Handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience**, by Rob Hopkins

## ENVIRONMENT ORGANISATIONS

A list of 30 different climate action groups across the state is at [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au). If you don't have much internet access, or there isn't one in your area and you want to start one, call the Environment Victoria Climate Campaign on 9341 8112. On this website you will also find a list of the more than 100 environment groups which are members of Environment Victoria.

There are also Sustainability Streets across Melbourne (and possibly some in rural Victoria), which bring together people at a neighbourhood level to tackle sustainability, particularly in their homes. To find out if there's one near you, contact your local council.

# Index

- air conditioning, 3, 15, 16, 17, 18, 28, 29
- alterations to properties, 4, 12, 16, 26
- apartments, 29
- appliances, 7, 8, 19, 31, 35
  - computers, 13, 19
  - mobile phones and chargers, 13, 23
  - turning off at powerpoint, 7
- bathroom, 3, 14, 21-22, 33
- bedroom, 23
- beef, 10
- bicycles, 27, 32
- black balloons, 15, 17, 19
- bokashi buckets, 10
- bubble wrap, 17, 18
- carbon offsetting, 36
- cars
  - buying, 28
  - car pooling, 27
  - car share schemes, 27
  - efficient driving, 28
- central heating, 18
- chemicals, 12, 35, 14, 19, 22, 25
  - toilet deodorisers, 22
- chimneys, 16
- cleaning, 14
  - showers, 22
- Clear Comfort, 17
- climate change, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36
- clothes dryers, 23
- clothes washing, 23, 29
- coal, 5, 29
- compost, 10, 24, 30, 35
- computers, 13, 19
- cooking, 10
- cooling, 3, 15 - 18, 28, 29, 31, 32
  - passive, 16
- curtains, 16, 17, 20, 32
- dish washing, 10, 24
- door seals, fridge, 6
- door seals, oven, 10
- double glazing, 3, 17, 18
- downlights, 20, 33
- downpipe diverters, 25
- DraftStoppa, 18
- draughts, 15, 16
  - draught snakes, 13, 17, 18, 32
  - exhaust fans, 15
- driving, 3, 27, 28
- dual flush toilets, 22, 33
- ecological footprint, 3, 10
- efficiency ratings, 6, 7, 8, 23, 35
- efficient driving, 28
- electric blankets, 23
- electricity generation, 3
- embodied water, 3, 10-11
- emissions trading, 36
- energy ratings, 7
- ethical investment, 29
- exhaust fans, 18
- fair trade, 13
- finding a place to rent, 32
- fixtures, 4
- flats, 29
- flow restrictors, 8
- food, 3, 10-13
  - bulk, 11
  - fair trade, 11
  - food co-ops, 11
  - free range, 11
  - genetically modified, 10
  - homegrown, 10
  - local, 10
  - meat, 10
  - organics, 10
  - seafood, 9
  - seasonal, 30
  - waste, 9
  - water in, 9
- free range, 13
- freezer, 6
- fridge, 6
  - door seals, 6
- gardens, 3, 10, 12, 23, 24, 33, 35
- genetically modified organisms, 13
- GreenPower, 5
- grey water, 23, 24, 30, 35
- growing vegetables, 12, 24
- halogen downlights, 20, 33
- heating, 3, 15-18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32
  - central, 15
  - electric, 12
  - passive, 16
  - portable heaters, 12
- homegrown food, 12, 24
- HomeWise, 8
- hot water systems, 3, 8, 21, 25-26, 30, 31, 32
- insulation,
  - hot water pipes, 26
  - wall and ceiling, 18, 30, 31
  - window, 17
- junk mail, 24
- kettles, 10
- kitchen, 6-14
- landlords, approaching, 29
- laundry, 3, 14, 23
- lawn, 12, 14, 24, 33
- laws on renting, 4, 38
- lighting, 19-20, 29, 31, 33
- living room, 15-20
- local food, 12
- low energy light globes, 19-20, 29, 33
- meat, 10
- microwaves, 10
- mobile phones, 13, 23
- No Interest Loan Scheme, 8
- Notice to Landlord form, 8
- organics, 12
- outside, 24-26
- ovens, 6
  - cleaning, 14
  - door seals, 10
- packaging, 13
- passive heating and cooling, 16
- pellets, 17, 32
- Phoenix Fridge Project, 6
- phone chargers, 23
- pilot lights, 25
- pipes, 8, 26, 31, 33
- plane travel, 28
- plants, 10, 11, 12, 15, 24
- public transport, 27
- rainwater, collecting, 3, 24, 25, 30, 34, 35
- rebates, 8, 18, 24, 25, 29-31
- recycling, 7, 13, 14, 19, 28
  - computers, 16
  - toner cartridges, 16
- renewable energy, 5
- rent increases, 29
- rental law, 4, 38
- repairs, 8, 14, 27, 31
  - oven, 10
  - taps, 8
  - toilet cisterns, 22
- Residential Tenancies Act, 4
- screensavers, 19
- seafood, 11
- seasonal food, 12
- shade cloth, 15
- showerheads, 4, 21, 30, 33
- showers, 3, 11, 21-22
- skylights, 18
- star ratings, 6, 7
- superannuation, 29
- tanks, 3, 24, 25, 30
- taps, 8, 10, 11, 22, 31, 33
  - dripping, 8
  - repairs, 8, 9
  - tap aerators, 8
- thermostat, 15
- toaster, 10
- toilets, 14, 22, 24, 33
- transport, 27-28, 32
- TVs, 14, 19
- veggie patches, 12, 24
- vents, 18
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, 3
- walking, 27
- washers, replacing, 8-9
- washing machines, 8, 23
- waste, 10, 14, 19, 36
  - food, 10, 11
  - junk mail, 24
  - TVs, 19
- water, 3, 10, 21, 35
  - collecting rainwater, 20, 25, 30, 33
  - grey water, 23, 24, 30, 35
  - rating labels, 7, 8
  - river health, 18
  - use by agriculture, 3, 9, 10-11
  - water issues, 11, 21, 31, 36
- water saving showerheads, 4, 21, 29, 31, 33
- weather seals, 16
- WELS labels, 7
- windows, 16, 18, 28, 32
  - curtains, 16, 17, 20, 32
  - double glazing, 17
  - shading, 15, 31, 32
- worm farms, 10

# ● Endnotes

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### **Disclaimer**

This booklet is intended as guide, and not legal advice on which sustainability measures you should take in your home. While we have done our best to give useful information, the law changes and is open to interpretation. Most of the actions in this booklet involve some level of risk, in terms of legal interpretation and even in terms of physical injury. Neither Environment Victoria nor the Tenants Union of Victoria take any responsibility for any damage or injury caused as a result of this booklet.