

## **Buying an existing home that's "green"**

With rising energy costs and growing awareness – and availability – of environmentally friendly products, it's no wonder that interest in purchasing green homes is rising. Green remodels on existing homes both save the environment and save homeowners money on monthly bills. As green home remodeling becomes more abundant, so does the demand to purchase these homes. This increased interest in existing green homes has created a need to educate buyers on what is really considered "green."

Over the past several years, many organizations such as Build It Green, (<http://www.builditgreen.org>), an independent nonprofit organization, have been created to offer a third-party unbiased evaluation. Because of the growing desire to purchase existing green homes, states Bruce Mast, development director at Build it Green, "the Real Estate Council has been setting the stage to incorporate GreenPoint Rated results into MLS listings in several areas." What is GreenPoint Rated? Mast explains that, "GreenPoint Rated provides an independent assessment of a home across five categories: community design, energy efficiency, indoor air quality/health, resource conservation, and water conservation."

Other organizations that have similar rating systems for homebuyers include the U.S. Green Building Council (<http://www.usgbc.org>), a non-profit community; and Green Globes (<http://www.greenglobes.com>), an assessment and rating system. The USGBC has created the REGREEN ([http://www.greenhomeguide.org/guide\\_for\\_green\\_renovation/index.html](http://www.greenhomeguide.org/guide_for_green_renovation/index.html)) program in partnership with the American Society of Interior Designers' Foundation. Working with LEEDs for Homes, a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification offers an unbiased green home inspection for possible buyers. In addition, Green Globes boasts a rating system that has an easy-to-use online questionnaire for a minimal cost. Once the questionnaire is completed, the user automatically receives a report. All three organizations have online tools to answer questions and guide interested parties through the certification process.

Part of this process includes understanding what different elements make a home green. The elements can range from simple re-landscaping to more complicated structure updates. But all share a common goal: to help preserve the planet and save on energy costs. The following are just a few examples of "greening" a home:

- Buying ENERGY STAR (<http://www.energystar.gov>) appliances is the most popular way to go green. These EPA- and Department of Energy- approved appliances use less energy than conventional appliances.
- Another easy way to green a home is by replacing standard light bulbs with energy-saving CFLs (Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs), ([http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr\\_cfls](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls)) which can be found at most supermarkets and drugstores.
- Using VOC (volatile organic compounds) (<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/voc.html>) also receives

green certification recognition. VOC paint is just one example of how this compound is used.

- Installing low-flush toilets, solar paneling, and low-emittance windows helps lower water and energy bills.
- Planting native vegetation and drought-resistant landscaping can save on water usage as well.

When thinking about purchasing a green home, a buyer might wonder if it's really worth all the effort and cost. Aside from saving the planet, green remodels on existing homes have proven to be cost-efficient. Veronica Cortes, a homeowner in Northern California recently did an entire green remodel on her 1957 ranch-style home. Currently she pays \$30 per month on average for her energy bill after installing solar paneling. In the winter months, her neighbors pay anywhere from \$276 to \$500. Cortes says all the heartaches of a remodel were worth it: "Our house nurtures us in ways that it never did before: ... the place is flexible and its spaces can accommodate different uses depending on our needs, [and] it's cheap to run."

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