

Going green can make life safe and healthy

Committing to an environmentally aware lifestyle does not, contrary to popular belief, mean investing in a wealth of fashionably expensive green products.

Household staples, such as sugar, vinegar and kitchen herbs, are all effective tools that can help make homes more eco-friendly.

While switching off the lights, turning off taps and choosing an air-conditioning-free lifestyle wherever possible are all positive steps towards an environmentally friendly life, it is possible to take things a great deal further.

Making a home significantly eco-friendly can be given a boost by simple steps ranging from banning specific household cleaners to using safe pest controls.

Hong Kong has particular environmental characteristics, which means that its inhabitants should take a specific approach towards a greener lifestyle, said Catherine Touzard, the author of *Going Green in Hong Kong*.

Minuses included limited space, rented homes that frequently had environmentally unfriendly light fittings or high-energy consuming equipment and a tendency to live with closed windows and the air conditioning switched on, Touzard said.

But "a green lifestyle definitely offers fantastic advantages".

Safety is a significant plus, as greener products available on the market, including detergents, paint, furniture and bedding, make much less impact on the ecosystem.

"They are not harmful to the very first person in contact with them - which is the user," Touzard said.

The harsh chemicals used in most conventional cleaners, meanwhile, can be easily transmitted.

Hongkongers wanting to use greener household products are advised to check for key words such as "hazardous", "corrosive", "irritant" or "inflammable" since such products, for example, are not required to carry full component labels.

Greening your home can also be about greening your plate.

"Choosing organic food is the safest way to make sure you don't store persistent chemicals, hormones and hidden antibiotics in your body," Touzard said.

"It does help save the land and ecosystems from major damage caused by conventional oil-based agriculture. Your health will also come first in the beneficiary list."

Making eating and drinking in your home more eco-friendly is easy and cheap.

Toxic-free cooking is based on using inert materials, such as glass, ceramics, Bakelite or stainless steel, instead of materials that may release dioxins or transmit unsafe metals.

"Choose ceramic or glass to keep water refrigerated, as plastic bottles release dioxins



Organic food benefits your health and helps save the land and ecosystem.



Practical examples show your children you care for Hong Kong

CATHERINE TOUZARD
AUTHOR OF *GOING GREEN IN HONG KONG*

when subjected to large temperature fluctuations, [such as when they are] being frozen or left in a sunny place," Touzard said.

"Avoid plastic wraps - made from polythene, they often contain chemicals called plasticisers, like phthalates and Bisphenol A, that are toxic and leach into food."

Safe pest control, on the other hand, is based on the understanding that the potential harm caused by pests is often outweighed by the toxicity of the chemicals found in pesticides.

Environmentally friendly pest management aims to deter pests from entering the home in the first place by sealing all cracks, fitting screens on doors and windows, keeping food and garbage away and fixing leaking pipes.

Fluorocarbon sprays can be replaced with home-made ant, fly and cockroach traps based

on blends of sugar solution, masking tape and herbs.

"You can also wipe insect-repelling essential oil, such as tea tree, peppermint or citronella, around the house - or even try vinegar," Touzard said.

Would-be eco-inhabitants are advised to limit themselves to using rechargeable products such as batteries or reusable items such as laundry balls, which save space and money.

"This especially makes sense in Hong Kong," she said.

On the energy side, reducing the bills includes protection against heat gain - by putting up blinds, curtains or protective ultraviolet films, or even investing in double glazing and insulation of ceilings or walls that absorb the most heat.

Fans, meanwhile, are not only effective against the heat but also use one tenth the energy of an air conditioner, therefore slashing energy costs.

"People in Hong Kong used to know how to maintain their thermal comfort before air conditioning started to be part of the home," she said.

"Their homes avoided the direct sun from the south and west."

Twenty-first-century Hongkongers can follow their ancestors' example by taking cold showers before bed time, using hard mattresses and pillows to eradicate the heat generated by soft bedding, and keeping their skin moist to enhance the cooling effect of fans.

Taking steps to genuinely green your home can also have a knock-on effect.

"Practical examples show your children, neighbours and friends what you care for Hong Kong and what is applicable here," Touzard said.