

October 17, 2007

Let there be light, but let it be green

Hi all,

I wrote the other day that there are many possible aspects to greening your home, big steps and small. So figured I'd follow up and list some small ones in an area of particular interest of mine: lighting. Here's my top five:

1. Stop lighting your home with toasters. 'Cause that's what incandescent bulbs basically are. You know how the wires inside a toaster turn red when it's on? Well, those red wires are pretty much the same things as the filaments inside a "regular" bulb. They make more heat than light.

2. "Don't go into the light." Or at least not as much of it. Where you can't switch to compact fluorescent bulbs, use dimmers. Dimming an incandescent bulb saves electricity (and money) and also extends the life of the bulb. And for DIY'ers, it's easy to install a dimmer in place of a switch.

3. If a light's on and no one's around to see it... Even the best of us forget to turn lights off, so why not make it mindless by installing a motion or occupancy sensor? Great for outdoor lights, too.

4. One size does not fit all. Don't try to light a room with a single light source. Not only will the lighting be boring, but you'll end up needing a brighter light and wasting a lot of it. A little ambient light in a room is a good thing, but put the bright lighting only where you need it with reading lights or directed lights.

5. Follow the sun. Don't forget daylighting. It makes us feel good, and it's free. If you're building a new house or addition, think about the orientation to the sun. You want to maximize winter light and minimize direct summer light. If you're renovating a dark interior space, see if you can add skylights or "solar tubes": pipes from the roof that carry light down to a ceiling below.

When I give talks on lighting, I sometimes title them, "Let there be light, but let it be green." It's another example of how we can be environmentally minded without sacrificing design.

David Bergman
Columnist, Going Green Blog