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Green Your Cottage Life

Now that the rain is out of the way for the summer (we hope!), perhaps cottage life can begin for all those who migrate to a waterside dwelling in their free time. But as you head to the cottage don't leave your 'green sense' at home. Environmental sensitivity is just as important at the cottage as it is at home, and in many cases even more so if you are on a body of water; draw water from a well; and use a septic system.

There are many changes you can make at your cottage to ensure that you tread lighter on the earth, and they don't need to be expensive or labour-intensive. Cottage Life magazine (www.cottagelife.com) provides 10 easy ways to go green in one weekend.

1. Buy greener soaps and cleaners

EcoLogo-certified products are best. Check out www.terrachoice-certified.com to see if your favorite brands are certified. Soaps and cleaners should be free of phosphates, petroleum solvents, chlorine, dyes and perfumes, and should be biodegradable. Additionally, be wary of overly sudsy soaps (full of surfactants), and antibacterial soaps. Antibacterial soaps and cleaners will kill both good and bad bacteria, so once they leave your cottage and filter through your septic system they can halt the breakdown of waste in your holding tank.

2. Don't soap up in the lake

Even if you've bought green or biodegradable soaps, you still should not bathe in the lake. Even these products can take a long time to break down, impacting fish and other aquatic life in the meantime.

3. Lower your wattage

Decrease your energy usage by swapping incandescent light bulbs for fluorescent bulbs. They use only a quarter of the power, and last ten times longer.

4. Put away the lawn mower

Forget the manicured lawn at the cottage - mowing close to the shoreline encourages soil erosion; and using pesticides and fertilizers near a lake ensures they will end up in it through water runoff. Why not put the mower in storage, kick back and let it grow? If this doesn't appeal to you, try replanting the area with native plants to minimize runoff and erosion, or keep the grass at least 20 cm long, ending a minimum of 30 meters from shore.

5. Temperature control

Curtains are a great way to aid heat efficiency. In hot weather, keep curtains closed during the day to keep the hot sun out; and do the opposite in cool weather to maximize the sun's warmth. And it kind of goes without saying - opt for ceiling or standing fans instead of using an air conditioner.

6. Switch to a low-flow showerhead

A good quality low-flow showerhead reduces water flow by 50 percent while maintaining good water pressure. They are easy to install and can be purchased for as low as \$20.

7. Don't be afraid to use your dishwasher

Trying to save water by hand-washing the dishes? With new efficient dishwashers, or by using the 'air dry' setting, it's actually better to scrape your dishes and let the washer take care of the rest. However, for small loads or if your dishwasher is ancient, you should likely hand-wash them.

8. Unplug electronics

Many electronics, like computers, stereos, and TVs will use electricity even when shut off. To lessen your energy load unplug them or use a power bar so you can turn it off when they're not in use.

9. Paint with "low-VOC" or "VOC-free"

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are toxic chemicals found in standard paints and can continue to be released into the air from a few weeks to months after that last coat of paint has dried. Choose an eco-friendly alternative—the results will benefit both the air quality and your health.

10. Keep up with boat engine maintenance

Old engines can have smog-forming emissions that are big polluters. But if purchasing a new efficient, environmentally-friendly engine is outside your budget, here's what you should do: check and replace spark plugs (carbon damages them), and change the fuel filter or add detergent to the fuel, which will flush out any carbon buildup. Keeping an old engine efficient will make your boat greener until you can purchase a more environmentally friendly model.

Now, let summer begin!

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