

# Good, Better, Best: Cutting Carbon From Home Appliances

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*This is the fourth in a series of five articles that help you find ways to reduce your carbon footprint. We consider the main carbon culprits in the average American's lifestyle.*

When Americans overcompensated for the shortages during World War II in a burst of [post-war spending](#), an appliance-filled kitchen became a worldwide aspirational symbol of American wealth and consumer culture. Appliances are still major purchases that use a lot of household electricity, and as a result, they are a significant source of Americans' carbon emissions.

Today, those appliances are considered necessities rather than luxury goods. And thanks to pandemic panic, Americans are [buying more appliances](#) than ever. If you are considering a new appliance, take a few steps to choose wisely for the planet and your family.

## Carbon Footprints

The amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere by a particular activity is known as its [carbon footprint](#). Carbon dioxide emissions are a leading cause of climate change. So carbon footprints can serve as a useful shorthand for environmental impact.

There are many [ways to calculate](#) your family's overall carbon footprint, which can be higher or lower depending on the number of people in your household, the size of your house, how much and how you travel, and myriad other decisions you make throughout the year. [On average](#), each American generates 18.55 tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year. This is 3.5 times the global average of 5.3 tons.

[Transportation](#) is the largest component of most household's carbon footprint, followed by the [stuff people buy](#). After that, people's homes contribute the most carbon to the atmosphere: 17 percent through [heating and cooling](#) and 15 percent produced by the energy used by everything else in the home.

[That 15 percent](#) powers our appliances and electronics, and it is an area where we have [lots of room](#) for improvement.

## Good

It's always good to start with the easiest changes. Most people have already made the switch from incandescent to compact fluorescent light bulbs. Switching to [LED light bulbs](#) is just as easy, but more effective.

How you use your appliances can make them more efficient. Turn off the lights – and

the TV – when you leave the room. [Unplug](#) electronics when you are not using them, too. [Vampire power](#), the energy an appliance uses when it's turned off, adds up. Do you really need the TV to be powered all day long? It's not like the clock was set to the right time anyway.

There are lots of ways to make your [refrigerator](#) more efficient, from how you fill it to where you place it. [Laundry hacks](#) include running full loads of laundry with cold water and even [using tennis balls](#) in the dryer. Turn down your water heater and install low-flow faucets to heat less water.

[Smart technologies](#) and some [small appliances](#) can help you make your home [less wasteful](#). But most of us have bought appliances we didn't really need. Save money and resources by resisting the urge to buy unnecessary appliances. Will that bread machine, seltzer maker, or electric toothbrush truly make your life easier? Or does it just increase your electricity consumption? Ask yourself these questions when the Best Buy salesperson pitches you on the latest technology.

## Better

Start your path to doing better by redefining your ideas about what is “necessary.” In [Europe](#) and [Asia](#), clothes dryers are considered superfluous. Find eco-friendly ways – like [canning](#) and [gardening](#) – to boost your food security without putting an extra freezer in your garage. But don't get carried away – a modern, energy-efficient [dishwasher](#) can use less water and even less energy from heating water than handwashing dishes.

Buy the most efficient models of whatever you do need. Instead of [coffee pods](#), use a regular coffee maker; instead of a regular coffee maker, consider a [French press](#). Don't forget the energy your electronics use, too. Laptops use less energy than desktop computers, and there are now [Energy Star](#) models of most tech devices. There are no truly sustainable electronics yet, but when shopping for [routers](#), [smartphones](#), and [stealth electronics](#), don't forget to consider efficiency and recyclability.

Although new appliances are more efficient than your old ones, manufacturing also generates a lot of carbon dioxides, so before you buy, make sure the [efficiencies justify the upgrade](#).

## Best

Even the best among us are unlikely to eschew technology altogether, but if you are willing to make some lifestyle adjustments, switch to low-tech home appliances like [foot-powered washing machines](#), [solar cookers](#), and hand-cranked kitchen tools.

[Solar water heating](#) systems are an investment but can slash your home energy use.

For the energy your home still uses, signing up for [green energy](#) and purchasing [carbon offsets](#) will reduce the impact of the electric power you pull from the grid. And if you're willing to make really big changes, you can achieve [net-zero](#) energy use at home by generating your own [solar power](#).

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