

GREEN HOME DESIGN IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR WELLBEING AND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AND WILL SAVE YOU MONEY YEAR AFTER YEAR.

Environmentally sustainable houses were once the domains of those pursuing an alternative lifestyle. But homes designed to use less water and energy, and which complement the natural environment have become increasingly common. Most state governments have now introduced environmental schemes that ensure ecologically sound design for all new homes. An environmentally sustainable house has



little impact on its natural surroundings by using ecologically sound building products, reducing the amount of waste, water and energy produced and providing a healthy atmosphere to live in. NSW state manager of Archicentre, David Lawrence, says having an Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) for you home is no longer a trend, but a necessity. "In Australia we are about 20 to 30 years behind places like Britain and Europe in embracing ESD principles," he says. "In Europe the extremes in weather, particularly cold weather, is much greater so they have been doing things like double glazing windows

for decades. Also the energy costs in Britain and Europe are much greater so it has forced them to find ways to use less energy. And their buildings, on average, are not as large as ours so therefore not as difficult to cool or heat. "However we have reached a stage in Australia where incorporating ESD principles in your home has gone beyond being just trendy. State governments are insisting on it through various schemes like BASIX in NSW." In 2004 the NSW government introduced the Building Sustainability Index, or BASIX, which made it mandatory for all new homes to achieve a minimum water and energy reduction index. Homeowners now



Some of the main guidelines for ESD in your home include:

- Installing a rainwater tank connected to the toilet and irrigation systems.
- Floor and ceiling insulation.
- Reducing the area of your outdoor lawn.
- Planting natives or drought-resistant plants such as succulents.
- Installing water-saving showerheads.
- Ensuring your windows have shading, particularly those in direct sunlight.
- Installing dual-flushing toilets.
- Using light-coloured tiles on your roof, or tiles that are designed to reflect the heat.

There is also a range of things you can do to help reduce the waste produced in your home, for example:

- Try to reduce the waste you bring into your home such as shopping bags and food packaging.
- Compost your organic waste such as fruit and vegetable scraps.
- Use the recycling scheme in your area as much as you can.
- Draught-proof your home, especially where cool or hot air could be escaping.
- Buy energy-efficient whitegoods with a high star rating.

have to reach a certain range on the index by incorporating principles that will help reduce water and energy use by around 40 per cent. The BASIX certificate issued must be submitted along with the Development Application to your council before you start the building process.

“This scheme, and others like it, will get building stock to a much better level,” says David. “And when you think that these houses will be around for the next 100 years or more, why not ensure they are made to use less water and energy? It is a way of pushing for a more mainstream environmental consciousness.”

Environmental experts, such as architect Stephen Petrie, argue that making your home more sustainable will not only benefit the environment but also your hip pocket.

“You will end up benefiting as the cost of the actual water tank, for example, will be offset by the savings in water,” he says. “The ongoing savings end up paying for the products you have bought over time. But it is a long term commitment if you want to see the benefits.”

The use of a solar hot water tank will reduce your electricity bill by a significant amount, according to Archicentre, while air conditioning company Coolmax claim that

installing their solar powered evaporative cooler can save up to \$250 a year, compared with an average wall-mounted system. It has also been estimated that an energy-saving dishwasher with a high star rating can save you up to \$55 a year.

Stephen was selected from more than 30 architects to lead Archicentre’s Mosman Green project in Sydney in 2004. The project aimed to transform a run down home in suburban Sydney into a modern, environmentally friendly property. The exercise set a benchmark for homeowners, demonstrating how they could have an environmentally sustainable home which is comfortable and