



## consumer mailbag

Terry Gibb

There are many articles on making houses more ecologically efficient. What about us apartment people?

M.S.,  
Farmington

You don't have to be a homeowner to live ecologically — you can do it in a downtown efficiency apartment if that's where you live. Apartment dwellers already have some built-in advantages.

What an apartment lacks in productive capacity — land or fuel — it makes up for in economies of scale-energy conservation through shared walls, a "critical mass" of recyclable trash and savings in transportation energy.

The following suggestions are feasible no matter what type of apartment you live in:

Remember, the ideal apartment is as conservation-minded as possible with all resources — not just those you pay for.

**WINDOWS SHOULD** be weatherstripped and doublepaned. If storm windows are not available, stretch sheets of polyethylene plastic on a wooden frame or simply tape them to the inside of the windows to create a dead air space.

Buy or make thermal shades that are held securely one inch from the window by wooden runners.

On sunny, cold days, keep all shades and curtains open on east, south and west windows.

A southern exposure window is ideal for an inexpensive "window box solar collector" that sits in your window and uses a solar panel to pump warm air into your room whenever the sun shines on it.

During summer months, keep window shades pulled down in all east, south, and west windows on sunny days to reduce the temperature up to 12 degrees F. in that room.

**ANOTHER COOLING** ideal is a large exhaust fan — at least 18 inches in diameter. Put the fan in the top part of a southern exposure window (or the kitchen, whichever gets hotter). If possible, blow the air out, sucking cooler air in from other windows.

Running a fan all night uses the same amount of electricity as two hours' worth of air conditioning.

A gas stove pilot light used up 40 percent of the gas you consume. Buy a flint flame starter and turn off the pilot. Then when you want to cook, strike the flint as you turn on the burner.

Apartment dwellers can be more frugal in their water use through shorter showers, shallower baths, double-basin sink washing, and waiting for a full load before running the dishwasher or washing machine.

**RENTERS GENERALLY** are convenience people. Start buying products in returnable and/or reusable containers. Avoid over-packaging. Use cloth napkins, towels and diapers.

In addition to reducing the amount of material wasted, an apartment dweller is in an ideally sized unit for monthly recycling of newspapers, glass and aluminum. Save a corner of a closet for recyclables. Or get permission to use a corner of the basement for all the tenants' use and make some money from the recyclables.

Cut down on garbage by buying longer-lasting light bulbs and rechargeable batteries.

**PESTICIDES ARE** used inside in 90 percent of all American homes, where people spend most of their time and do most of their breathing and eating. Instead of spraying for bugs, first try to prevent them. Caulk all cracks, reduce uncovered trash and unwashed dishes. Watch areas of likely infestation. Next, use sticky traps or relatively safe chemicals like boric acid powder. Never use "no-pest strips." They give off a continuous stream of nerve poison.

Install a "solar" clothes dryer in your apartment: a clothesline! It will reduce energy use and increase the humidity in too-dry apartments.

I'm recently married and need information on getting the most value for our dollar. Can you explain food labels?

R.M.,  
Royal Oak

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has established labeling requirements to help consumers find out more about the products they're buying. Food manufacturers and their advertisers are inventive when it comes to following the federal regulations and still giving consumers a false impression.

All food labels are required to provide the following information: the name of the product, the net contents or net weight. (The net weight on canned foods include the liquid in which it is packed), the name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor.

After these three, any additional information is optional or required based on other factors.

On most foods, the ingredient must be listed on the label. The ingredient present in the largest amount, by weight must be listed first, followed in descending order of weight by the other ingredients. Any additives must be listed, but colors and flavors do not need to be listed by name. The only foods not requiring an ingredient list are so-called "standardized foods." These standardized foods such as (mayonnaise, catsup, ice cream) contain mandatory ingredients and are not required by law to list their ingredients on the label.

**ANY FOOD** that has had nutrients added to it or has made a nutritional claim must have the nutritional content listed on the label.

Nutritional labeling tells how many calories, how much protein, carbohydrates and fat are in one serving. A serving size is the amount the average adult male engaged in light activity would consume. Nutrition labeling also gives the percentage of the U.S. recommended daily allowance (RDAs)

of protein and seven important vitamin and minerals per serving. All RDAs are listed by percentage.

FDA regulation requires the word "imitation" must be on any food that is not as nutritious as the product which it resembles and for which it is a substitute.

Some foods may look from the label as though they are one thing and actually be something different. To prevent deception and confusion, the FDA required such foods must have a "common or usual" name which accurately describes the product to the consumer.

FOR EXAMPLE, a beverage that looks like orange juice but actually contains little or no orange juice must use a name like "orange juice or flavored drink." Usually beverage "drinks" are required to state on the label how much (in percentage) actual juice it contains if it claims to have fruit juice in it.

Some food products carry a grade on the label, such as "U.S. Grade A." Grades are set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and are based on the quality levels of a product — its taste, texture and appearance.

Many manufacturers date their products to help insure that the consumer gets food that is fresh and wholesome.

Four kinds of open dating are commonly used:

• Pack date — This is the day the food was manufactured, processed, or packed. The importance of this date to consumers depends on how quickly a certain food normally spoils. Canned goods carry a pack date as well as some packaged foods.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, 1025 Shelby, Detroit 48226.

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