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[TALK] Feature

- SHOP
- TALK
- EAT
- SRQ EVENTS
- EVENT PHOTOS
- ABOUT US
- ADVERTISERS
- PARTNERS
- SUBSCRIBE
- SRQ STORE
- CONTACT

## Realty Check: Saving Green

Between organic foods and hybrid cars, the reputation of earth-friendly products is one that comes at a pretty penny, but by building your home “green,” saving the environment may not be the only green you’ll save. According to Matt Ross, President of Eco-\$mart, a local company devoted to helping people live and work in buildings that are healthy, efficient, and cost-effective, the difference in price between building green and conventional construction ranges from a savings of 1% to an additional cost of 8%. While the sticker price may charge you more up front, the decision to build green, increasing a structure’s efficiency while decreasing harmful impacts on the environment, can reduce your monthly operational and utility bills by 70%, a savings that often recoups the initial extra costs in two to three years. “Building green makes great economic sense, and you don’t have to be a tree hugger to appreciate that,” says Ross.

In the past 18 months the market for green building, a.k.a “high performance” or “sustainable,” has grown rapidly as a result of energy and resource awareness, the need for better hurricane protection, avoiding the use of overseas products, and rising energy prices, but one of the most appealing elements is the increase in resale values, says Ross.

A study conducted in the early '90s by the Appraisal Journal cites a \$20.73 increase in resale value for every \$1 in annual energy cost savings. In other words, the average 2,000-square-foot home with utility costs of \$200 a month and energy savings of 70% will experience an additional resale value of on average almost \$35,000.

Another incentive to high performance housing starts this year

and ends in 2007 as part of the Bush Energy Bill. When you purchase solar installations, as a residential owner you can get a federal tax credit of up to \$2,000. Even commercial entities get a break with a 30% return on up-front costs. If that's not enough, if you build or renovate your home making it 50% more efficient than standard codes, you can earn yourself another \$2,000 tax break, or \$1.80 per square foot for commercial properties. That's a potential reimbursement of \$4,000 or more, allowing you to recover your initial investment even quicker. "People are excited about buying a Toyota Prius, which only lasts about 10 years, but you can build a green home that'll last 100 years, saves money, is good for the environment, and is an overall much better investment," says Dr. Harvey Kaltsas, developer of Kanaya Condos, providing healthy, energy-efficient residential units to Sarasota.

Last year, even Sarasota County decided to start promoting eco-friendly construction, offering a rebate program on building permits. Not only saving on money, the county also offers a fast track route for green applications. The average time it takes to get a regular building permit is six to eight weeks, but an expedited green application may take only two to three weeks, an even more valuable offer than the cash back, says Drew Smith, President of Two Trails, Inc., which offers local services in green construction and marketing.

So how do you know what constitutes green and who says so? According to Smith, you shouldn't technically claim a building is green without third-party certification. Intended to encourage the mainstream homebuilding industry to adopt sustainable practices, programs such as the Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) use a point system to measure areas such as energy and water efficiency, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, sustainability, and more. "The FGBC certification program is great because its standards specifically address the issues of Florida's climate being hot, humid, and prone to storms," says Smith.

There's also a national program from The U.S. Green Building Council called the LEED Rating System. It too is based upon a point system, which is broken down into four different levels with "platinum" being the most sustainable. Sarasota Architect

Michael R. Carlson of Carlson Studio Architecture recently received the honor in the “gold” category for the Sarasota County’s Twin Lakes Office Complex. After four years of renovating the former professional baseball dormitory, the facility earned 41 points, making it the highest LEED-scored building in the state to date.

Whatever your motivation may be, if you’re interested in a high performance home, you’re in luck, because Sarasota just so happens to be “one of the best places in the country to access green products,” says Ross. Sarasota is also a great place to find new-construction green homes: Lakewood Ranch is the largest development in the state to receive the green development certificate from the FGBC. But if you’re just looking to “green up” your existing home, then any of the following five products are a great start.

### Cool Your A/C Bill

Living in Florida, air-conditioning bills in the summer—or year-round for that matter—can be pretty hefty, but with Freus, the world’s most energy-efficient air-conditioning unit, you can save 50–60 percent on those bills. Unlike conventional air-cooled systems, Freus is water-cooled, using half the pressures at a low condensing temperature. It is also designed for low maintenance and a longer lifetime with a fiberglass cabinet and no expensive electronics on board to corrode, short, or get surged. Even though a Freus costs \$1,000–\$2,000 more than the average a/c unit, at \$5,000 installed you’ll have a system that’s twice as efficient.

### Bulb Exchange

Incandescent light bulbs give off a lot more heat than you think. By going out today and replacing your bulbs with electronic ballast fluorescents, you will only use 20% of the energy and heat of your original incandescent lamps. They cost a few dollars more at \$3–\$5 apiece, but with a 10,000-hour life expectancy, you can save about 10 times the cost of an incandescent bulb over the lifetime of a fluorescent.

## Solar Savings

By switching to a solar water heating system, you will reduce the same amount of pollution as removing one car from the highways, and if that doesn't convince you, then yes, it also saves you money. It costs about \$3,500 installed up front, but don't forget the federal tax incentives as well as the fact that it will reduce your water heating bill by 70–90 percent. That's equivalent to 20 percent of your entire electric bill. It comes with a 10-year manufacturer's warranty, and the best part of it all is that you don't lose hot water during power outages, a feature that all Floridians can appreciate.

## High Performance Panes

Windows bring light, warmth, and beauty into your home, but they can also be a major source of heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer. Offset these unwanted disposals with energy-efficient windows designed with technologies to prevent leaks and other sources of energy loss. They also dually serve as hurricane protection with their impact-resistant panes made of acrylic. They are comparable to conventional windows at \$200–\$300 installed apiece, but that price significantly rises for double panes.

## Flooring

While green flooring won't save you money as the other products do, it is still consistently one of the most popular items on the market, says Ross. No matter what your preference, there's a look for every style, from bamboo, which takes 35 fewer years to mature than hardwood, to palmwood floors made of coconut palm lumber, otherwise discarded. You can also find recycled rubber flooring and recycled plastic carpet in hundreds of color options. Locally, many stores even have their own separate section devoted to green flooring. At \$8–\$15 a square foot, prices are similar to that of regular hardwood flooring.

## Resources

Sustainable Sarasota: [www.SustainableSarasota.com](http://www.SustainableSarasota.com)  
A Sarasota County Government program promoting sustainability in the local community and throughout the world.

The Sarasota Green Connection:  
[www.SarasotaGreenConnection.com](http://www.SarasotaGreenConnection.com)  
The mission of Sarasota Green Connection, Inc. is to mainstream green in the greater Sarasota area by connecting people to environmentally preferable goods and services.

Eco-\$mart: [www.EcoSmartInc.com](http://www.EcoSmartInc.com)  
Eco-\$mart, Inc. provides a number of services to facilitate sustainable living, acting as a distribution source for approved construction materials and offering free consultations to homeowners, building owners, architects, developers, and contractors. Eco-\$mart, Inc. can also connect you to professional designers in the area.

Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development:  
[www.i4sd.org](http://www.i4sd.org)  
Facilitates change for a sustainable future in Sarasota by partnering with others to create a practice of sustainable community development and a network supporting communities thus engaged.

Florida Green Building Coalition:  
[www.FloridaGreenBuilding.org](http://www.FloridaGreenBuilding.org)  
FGBC is a nonprofit Florida corporation dedicated to improving the built environment and “to provide a statewide Green Building program with environmental and economic benefits.” Go to the site to learn more about “Rethinking Sustainable Construction 2006,” a conference being held in Sarasota September 19–26, 2006, when people from around the world will gather to explore the cutting-edge green market.

