

ALLGREEN

Spring 2008 | \$3.95

magazine

YALE: AN IVY LEAGUE SCHOOL GROWS GREEN



At home
with green

Nova Scotia:
from crisis to kudos

The power of solar

[CONNECTICUT EDITION]



PHOTO BY PHILIP FRIEDMAN

More than half the Angie's List poll respondents said they would oversee their own projects. Topping the list of projects were the ubiquitous kitchens and baths, followed closely by landscaping and yard work, painting inside and out, and decks and porches.

Designer and carpenter Leslie Segrete of WE tv's "The Ugliest House on the Block," says with 2008 rapidly becoming the year of the renovation, consumers interested in making their houses more eco-friendly will find more and better resources than ever, with a near guarantee they'll see that value back at sale time.

AllGreen: When someone decides to make a DIY project "green," what is the first thing he or she should consider?

Segrete: Everything depends on one's definition of "green." The general definition of green is associated with being eco-friendly, but you can do that in lots of ways. Is it harvesting rain water? Do I want to put in top-of-the-line appliances and really focus on energy efficiency? Is it more [about] paints and stains, finishes and adhesives that are non-toxic, with no-VOCs, no solvents, and no odors? First, decide what your definition of "green" is, then go from there. Then you can research the products and the steps in the process.

What would you consider a "baby step" for DIYers who are not very eco-savvy? Are there obvious things they can tick off the list that are tried-and-tested?

Paint is the easiest choice. Painting is great because it only requires a basic skill level, masking with tape and laying down drop cloths. If you are looking for a simple do-it-yourself project with eco-impact, zero solvents and no carcinogenic ingredients, paint is it.

They are so many green styles of paint. My favorite is a company called Mythic Paint (www.mythicpaint.com), which offers more than 1,200 colors.

With other "eco" paints, often the paint is non-toxic, but the color mixes are not. And they may not offer more than 30 or so colors. Mythic Paints are completely non-toxic and they are ultra-low odor. So if your pet licks it or your child eats it, you don't have to worry. You can paint all day and be in the home; there is no issue with off-gassing. And the interesting thing is, Mythic is pitting its paints against major manufacturers and finding that its paints are up to 30 times stronger. This is in part because the environmentally conservative companies are setting their own standards. There are not a lot of green guidelines out there at the moment.

Residential

Get Eco-renovating While the Market Slumbers

THERE'S A PROJECT FOR EVERYONE'S GREEN IDEALS, SAYS WE tv DESIGNER LESLIE SEGRETE

By Elizabeth G. Howard

Homeowners will spend an average of 2.9 percent of their home's value on repairs and renovations this year—more than \$11,000, according to a recent Angie's List poll. And according to the National Association of Home Builders, despite the slumped real estate market, remodeling activity has increased in the end of the 2007 and is expected to continue into 2008. The main reason: opportunity to increase home value while waiting for the market to strengthen.

While that is evolving, the products keep developing and getting better.

Let's talk about curb appeal. The first thing that springs to my mind is "nice lawn." How do you reconcile the issue of grass and landscaping for homeowners who want to be more eco-friendly?

You don't have to subscribe to the conventional idea of what a home must look like. Why not have succulents and cactus or stone to create an entire front yard? Or something with pathway lights? Malibu Solar lights have advanced so much from those dim blue airport lights of the past. You can get photovoltaic, independent lights that are fantastic, casting an even, gold glow, and the prices are \$10 to \$60 a fixture.

A big, green lawn isn't always a natural environment. If you live in the Southwest or any area where it is really hot in the summer, a green lawn won't happen naturally. If you are dealing with 100-plus degree days and if you *must* have a green lawn for your home, there are imitation turf lawns made from recycled rubber that look very real.

ALLGREEN TIP: When you mail packages, use the smallest box possible. Avoid using bubble wrap or Styrofoam peanuts. Instead, use old newspapers or dried macaroni.

With grass, choose a type that works well in your area. If your lawn is completely overrun, you may, unfortunately, need to blast it with Roundup and re-seed or re-sod and start from scratch. But with grass, remember you have to water and you have to maintain the moisture level.

With landscaping, you really have to go with plants that are local to your part of the country. Plants that are non-native tend to be less hardy, require more water and can quickly become invasive species that kill or take over native plants and/or confuse wildlife. If you put in a lot of things without considering the soil, climate and water situation, you are just wasting plants and your money.

Head to your local nursery to find out what will do well, based on your sun exposure, the amount of moisture and the watering limitations you might have in your area. Then decide. If you make it work in the parameters of your area, it will thrive. Remember: stone work, boulders and container gardening add a

punch of visual color and can be an eco-friendly way to design a yard.

If you have a lot of overgrowth—if you have an area of your yard that has just gotten out of hand—you'll find it is worth the expense to bring in a professional landscaper. Even if it is just once, she can go over the area with you, tell you what is what, how to trim and maintain what you have, and what is no good and has to go. This is especially good for new homeowners, because it is all a learning process.

Everyone seems to have imprinted

in them the "McMansion" idea of what an ideal home is. But there is so much more beauty in a home that reflects the individuals who live there: it really says something about who you are.

Water conservation and run-off is becoming a very big issue. What do you believe is the best way to address that when it comes to the exterior of the home?

If you live where you get regular rainfall part of the year, there are ways to collect rain and channel it to underground

Plan of inspiration...

EnviroMODE countertop

ECO-FRIENDLY,

EnviroSLAB countertop

DURABLE

EnviroPLANK flooring

AND BEAUTIFUL.

www.enviroglasproducts.com

ENVIROGLAS

Made with 100% reclaimed glass and porcelain.

5% GHS Rebate

GREEN HOME SOLUTIONS

167 Main Street, Norwalk, CT 06851

(203) 846-6060 alwaysbuildgreen.com



This former "Ugliest House on the Block" in Oakland Park, Fla., got a hurricane-friendly makeover, including a LEED certified, cultured stone veneer wainscoting from Owens Corning and Energy Star windows. Landscaping packed with water-retention liquid crystals reduces watering.

holding areas. A landscaper can do that for you if you don't feel like doing such backbreaking work.

For planting, there are polymer water-retention crystals you can get at a nursery for your plants. You dig a hole, drop a crystal in, put the plant in and pour in the dirt. The crystals become a paste that holds the water for 30 days. It maintains and extends the amount of water you have around the planting area.

When installing new pathways or a driveway, I prefer to use slate, brick pavers and clay. I never butt them tightly together, so in that way, water can naturally run down through and work its way back through the soil and bedrock, getting filtered as it moves.

What is important with any pathway or driveway project is the surface preparation. You have to dig eight to

10 inches down on the entire area, level and square it, then set the block pattern. Then you can fill it with about six inches of "Number 9," assorted stone, which you can get at any home improvement store. You rent a mechanical tamper to tamp it down, creating a uniform surface. When it is compressed, put a layer of sand down and tamp it again, until it is smoothly compressed and uniform. Then you will get very limited movement when you lay the stone or pavers. Brush sand on top of the pavers or stone to finish. The rain will run through and return to the groundwater without a lot of shifting and movement.

If you don't take time with the prep work in the beginning, you'll have a mess, with stones breaking and uneven surfaces. It is backbreaking work but it makes a drastic difference using natural

material; it makes everything gel so well with the surroundings, and that is what really makes a home work.

[Some people use asphalt but the downside is that it is] not only a toxic and petroleum-based substance, but you have to do a resurface coating every two years or have it re-poured by a professional, because it cracks and the color fades. With natural surfaces, the only maintenance you will have to do is using a power washer and oxygenating cleanser to freshen it up, and replacing a piece here and there.

Also, there are "steppable" plants that are made to be walked or driven on. Some, like lavender, are fragrant and release a scent when you step on them. They are made to be durable and to stand up [to wear and tear.] So if you have an area where the natural stone breaks or isn't working, you can just pull it out and put a plant there.

On a scale from one to 10, how challenging would you say it is for the average person to tackle a DIY project in an eco-friendly way at this moment?

It depends on the person and the amount of effort they are willing to put into it. If you are just driving down to your nearest home improvement box store, I would say it is a 4 or 5. That's because "green" is the hot ticket word right now. Companies are slapping "eco" tags and labels on items that are not actually green. There isn't a great deal of consistency and oversight in the labeling. If you are not really researching it, you could end up with something that isn't as environmentally friendly as it appears.

It's important for you to do the research, but to also determine just how green you want to be in your project, and then follow that guideline. Even with the costs, you do really reap real benefits. If you want to spend the time online, you can make your project a 10. Or if you want to hop into the gas-guzzling truck and head down to the box store for supplies, there are options for you too! 🌱

For more advice from Leslie Segrete, watch WE tv's "The Ugliest House on the Block," or catch her syndicated radio program "The Money Pit" (www.moneypit.com).

Elizabeth G. Howard is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *AllGreen Magazine*, *Stem-ma Magazine*, *Review Magazine*, the *Kansas City Star*, *CT Green Scene*, and others. You can find her online at Letters from a Small State and at her eco-humor blog, "Honk if You Compost" at AllGreen.com.