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Can't Afford to Live Off-Grid? Reduce Your Energy Consumption: 6 Ways

Reduce Your Non-Renewable Energy Use With Ease



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[Living off-grid](#) is a green dream for many of us. Liberation from the power grid, freedom from utility bills, and self-sufficient satisfaction that comes from generating all you need sure sounds great, but it isn't a slam dunk; turns out you gotta really want it. And, considering the setup of most conventional homes, it can require tens of thousands of dollars of investment: In solar panels, solar hot water equipment, geothermal or ground-source heating and cooling, and the list goes on. Happily, if going completely off the grid isn't in the cards for you just yet, you can still reduce your environmental impact in a big way by emulating the off-grid lifestyle. Here are six impactful things you can do.

Invest in energy efficiency

Successful off-grid life is all about energy efficiency. After all, one dollar worth of energy conservation can save three to five dollars in energy generation equipment costs, so the best investments you can make are in efficiency. Step one: Figuring out where all your energy use goes. By measuring your energy use, both by

individual appliance with something like a [Kill-a-Watt](#) and [in your entire house](#), you can figure out what needs upgrading, updating, or replacing.

Reduce your fossil fuel consumption

Once you have your consumption nailed down, reducing the amount of non-renewable dead dinosaurs you use for day-to-day activities comes next. While the phrase 'fossil fuel' tends to conjure images of cars burning gas first, when it comes to your home, electricity, natural gas, and other energy sources like heating oil or propane all can have a fossil fuel footprint. Electricity is probably the easiest of the bunch to cancel out -- more on that in a sec -- but fossil-free alternatives for gas aren't as widespread just yet. So instead of relying on utilities to do it, you can just do it yourself. [Build a passive solar water heater](#), learn to maximize [daylighting](#) and [passive solar heat](#), and you're well on your way to cutting back on the fossil fuels you need to use in your home.

Buy in to alternative energy

If you can't go off the grid, you can at least [buy green energy](#) that comes from the same renewable sources that you'd be using to power your off-grid abode. Many utilities (with more starting every day, it seems) offer green energy programs; for a small premium -- usually around 10 percent -- you can help them invest in solar, wind, and other alternatives to coal, and they send you some of that green energy back. And the best news: It's way cheaper than going off-grid, and has a huge green impact -- up to half of your carbon footprint can come from home energy use.

Replace grid energy with mechanical energy

Crank power, dynamos, and kinetic energy can do a lot of the work that you ordinarily rely on the grid for. Everything from [consumer electronics](#) to [blenders](#) don't need the grid to go, so unplug and put your muscle power to use.

Cook with minimal energy

The kitchen can be one of the more energy-intensive rooms in the house, so emulating off-grid life means cutting back on the energy you use to cook. This means doing things like [cooking pasta with less water](#), and without pre-heating or pre-boiling water. You can also eschew traditional cooking methods and appliances and turn to off-grid technologies, like [solar cooking](#) -- here's how to [make one of your own](#) from a car shade.

Take a baby step toward off-grid

Just because you can't completely cut the wire from the grid doesn't mean you can't get started with a smaller amount of home-generated electricity. An investment of [under \\$300 will get you started](#) with solar power; for a little more, you can [take one room in your house off-grid](#), and for a bit more than that -- say, \$600 -- you can [generate enough juice](#) to run a 20-inch tv for 20 hours, a portable stereo for 100 hours, a laptop computer for 40 hours, or a 12-watt compact-fluorescent light bulb for 80 hours. Every little bit helps.

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