

Sustainability starts at home

A balcony filled with native plants. Kitchen scraps are transformed into compost. Rainwater is collected for everyday use. Across urban homes, sustainability is increasingly being shaped by small habits rather than sweeping transformations

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As more people are sensitised to the importance of environmental conservation and sustainability, they are leaving no stone unturned to make their homes as eco-friendly and energy-efficient as possible.

The good news is that creating a greener home does not always require sweeping changes or a hefty budget. A few simple yet thoughtful measures can go a long way in making your home a little kinder to planet Earth. Here are some ideas to get you started.

gains, especially on west- and south-facing facades. These are relatively simple additions but have a direct impact on reducing cooling loads," explains Shalini Chandrashekar, co-founder and principal designer, Talexya.

Incorporating greenery in balconies and terraces to naturally cool down surroundings is a solution that has been used for centuries. Biophilia is important even if you do not have a balcony or terrace space. Snake plants, aloe palms, peace lily, etc., work well indoors and even in compact homes. Instead of decorative plants alone, include flowering native species that

areas can also go a long way in reducing environmental footprint. "Do you know? Rainwater harvesting and water recycling systems can significantly reduce dependence on fresh water, meeting as much as 50 per cent of a household's non-drinking water requirements. The water dripping from AC units can also be collected and used for cleaning, mopping, or watering non-edible plants.

MISTAKES AND MISCONCEPTIONS TO AVOID

One of the biggest misconceptions is that sustainability is only about



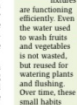
Rajula Nagarkar, a housewife, shares, "About a year ago, we began composting our kitchen waste. What was once discarded, from fruit peels and vegetable scraps to used tea leaves, is now converted into nutrient-rich compost for our plants. It is a simple change, but one that has noticeably reduced the amount of waste generated by our household."



Manjunath Pungi, a media professional, shares, "We have a small patch of open space in front of our house, which we have turned into a kitchen garden. We grow herbs, tomatoes, chillies and a few leafy vegetables there. While it does not meet all our needs, it helps reduce our dependence on vegetables and herbs bought from the market. Apart from lowering consumption, there is also a special joy in eating something you have grown yourself."



Shamal Raut, a private sector employee, mentions, "Water conservation is something we consciously practise at home. We make it a point to fix leaking taps and ensure that water fixtures are functioning efficiently. Even the water used to wash fruits and vegetables is not wasted, but reused for watering plants and flushing. Over time, these small habits have made a noticeable difference to our overall water consumption."



"Homeowners can significantly reduce their carbon footprint by maximising natural light and ventilation, replacing conventional lighting with LED fixtures, choosing durable and locally sourced materials, installing water-saving fixtures, and selecting appliances with higher energy-efficiency ratings," shares Uttamadiya, interior designer and CEO, U&I Interiors.

Equally important is reducing unnecessary consumption. For example, instead of relying heavily on air conditioning, there are numerous passive cooling techniques one can make use of. "Cross-ventilation, installing shaded windows, and using reflective or light-coloured paint will reduce the demand for cooling energy," says Aayush Patel, director, Atul Projects.

One can also use blinds and shading devices to keep out harsh sunlight. "Shading interventions, such as pergolas, deep overhangs, and external louvers, can significantly reduce heat

attract bees, butterflies and birds, helping support urban biodiversity.

If you have the space for it, then, "Creating transitional spaces such as verandahs or courtyards, and adding a waterbody can also work wonders. These strategies can significantly reduce heat gain and reliance on mechanical cooling. Material choices also play an important role. The use of locally available stone, lime-based finishes, or breathable materials can help stabilise indoor temperatures," informs Chandrashekar. "Locally sourced, regenerative materials like Hempcrete, stone, or even straw marquetry, naturally regulate temperature and last for decades," shares Rachna Agarwal, founder and design ideator, Studio I&AD.

Moreover, Patel adds, "Simple practices such as harvesting rainwater, segregating waste for recycling and composting, and opting for native plant species in gardens and landscaped

adding technology or buying expensive products. Reusing and recycling wherever possible can significantly reduce the usage of naturally occurring finite resources. "Another mistake is assuming that purchasing products labelled as 'green' automatically makes a home sustainable. The true measure lies in durability, maintenance requirements, sourcing practices, and lifecycle impact," advises Uttamadiya. Do not discard the current product to replace it with a sustainable one. True sustainability lies in prolonging the lifespan of the everyday items that are used. Reducing consumption can help reduce one's carbon footprint, too.

"Another mistake is focusing on short-term trends instead of creating spaces that will remain functional and relevant for years. A sustainable home ages well and does not need constant renovation," opines Rahul Bansal, partner, group DCA.

SMART SUSTAINABILITY HACKS FOR MODERN HOMES



Adopt a one-in, one-out rule

For every new item brought into the house, whether clothing, décor or kitchenware, donate, recycle, or repurpose one existing item. It curbs overconsumption without feeling restrictive.



Follow the 20-year rule

Before buying furniture, ask yourself, will I still use this in 20 years? Timeless designs reduce waste generated by frequent upgrades and trend-driven purchases.



Turn old jars into micro herb gardens

Glass pickle jars, jam bottles and food containers can be reused effectively to grow various small herbs such as mint, basil, and coriander on windowsills.



Start a repair corner

Keep a small toolkit, fabric glue, sewing kit and basic repair supplies. Repairing household items can significantly extend their lifespan and reduce the need of new items.



Freeze and reuse excess food

Food waste contributes significantly to household emissions. Designate a 'use-first' freezer box for leftover vegetables and herbs before they spoil.



Use solar-powered outdoor lighting

For outdoor spaces such as balconies, terraces and gardens, solar lights eliminate dependence on electricity consumption and require minimal maintenance.



Make your home bird-friendly

Install a water bowl, bird feeder or nesting box. Small interventions like these can support urban biodiversity, particularly during extreme summers.



A counterintuitive sustainability tip

Retaining existing fittings often has a lower environmental impact than newer 'eco-friendly' alternatives, as it avoids the carbon footprint associated with manufacturing and transport.