



**RENOVATION:** GOING GREEN

# ECO- CHANGES THAT PAY OFF

Environmentally-friendly systems aren't usually a priority for landlords, but here are five green changes that can actually attract tenants and save money. By **Sharon Newey**

**APOLOGIES IF THE** assumption is wrong, but as a landlord planning improvements to your property, eco-friendly solutions are probably one of the last priorities on your list. At the top of the list are changes that will provide value for money, and effectiveness of spend. You want to know how much the improvements are going to increase rental income, and how much they are going to lift the value of your asset.

But there is growing awareness of homes that use 'green' technologies to save on energy usage, and that are friendly to their inhabitants. You may be using 'green' products anyway without knowing it; for example, if you use Resene paint, it has low VOCs - those are nasties that affect air quality.

In some sectors of the market, your tenants are going to love you for taking that extra effort to use eco-friendly improvements, and may be prepared to

pay a premium in rent. Here are five environmentally sound improvements that you can start with:

## **ADDING DECENT INSULATION**

Adding insulation is fairly easy and there are Government incentives to do so. The 'Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart' programme was extended last year with more subsidies available to property owners no matter what their income levels. One of the side-effects of the Heat Smart programme is that tenants are now more aware of the benefits of insulation. In most parts of New Zealand, aside perhaps from Northland, tenants are now asking about insulation, and in many cases expecting it.

Insulation makes homes easier to heat and keep warm during winter and also helps keep a house cool in summer. If you can retrofit insulation into the walls, all the better, and often it's easy to fit underfloor



Families often love a vegetable garden

**TENANTS ARE NOW MORE AWARE OF THE BENEFITS OF INSULATION**



**FIVE RIGHT HOUSE ENERGY SAVERS FOR YOUR RENTAL**

- Change the incandescent lightbulbs for energy-efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs. They last up to eight times longer, plus, swap just four of the bulbs in the house and you'll save up to \$75 a year in power.
- If you're wanting to spend some money on insulation but not overhaul the whole house, start with the roof – 25% of heat loss occurs through the ceiling and it's the easiest area to insulate.
- Skylights can make a small dark room suddenly seem larger and more livable. The right light can transform your rental into a more welcoming home that has more tenant appeal.
- Installing a hot water cylinder wrap is easy and takes less than five minutes and is one of the most effective energy efficient measures you can take. Adding a cylinder wrap to an older cylinder can save you 1kwh/day in energy or about \$66 per year. Gas hot water cylinders lose about three and a half times as much heat as a well insulated electric cylinder.
- Look for an 'Energy Star' sticker when replacing new appliances – it shows you at a glance which models are most efficient.

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insulation, too. Part of insulating a house is keeping draughts out so check all of the doors and windows for gaps and install foam gap sealer. Wrapping the hot water cylinder and lagging the pipes is another easy but very effective way of saving power.

**EFFICIENT HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING SOURCES**

A firm selling point when showing prospective tenants through a property will be an effective heating system or air-conditioning system. Heat pumps are a very energy-efficient form of heating, taking low-grade heat from the outside then filtering it and warming it to pump to the inside. These units can also act as coolers. Heat pumps are becoming standard in some rental markets, and one South Island property manager told me that a property without a heat pump will rent for at least \$20 a week less than its better-equipped neighbour.

Heat/energy recovery ventilation systems remove stale and/or moist indoor air and replace it with fresh outdoor air that has been warmed (although this is a secondary function) and filtered. Forced air ventilation systems transfer the warm air from the roof space, and blow it inside. There are many of these various units on the market so shop around.

**HAVING SPACE FOR A VEGE PATCH**

Growing our own vegetables, fruit and herbs is now hugely popular but is often difficult for tenants to achieve.

They can buy large planters and do it that way, but a simple raised timber-edged garden is much better. It's easier to plant out and easier to keep moist. You can buy kits of these from hardware stores; they're fairly simple for a competent DIYer to put together – you or your tenant.

Leave a bit of space beside it for your tenants to install a compost bin or worm farm, then they can happily get rid of food scraps and make fertiliser for the garden.

While you're at it, how about a small water tank attached to the guttering, or one part of the guttering to harvest rainwater. This can be used on to water the garden and wash the cars.

Families and older people are most keen on these features, and they can add value for tenants when the purse strings are tight.



**USING LOW ALLERGEN/ IRRITANT MATERIALS**

It's fairly easy these days to choose renovation products that are low allergen and low irritant. Many product manufacturers have already answered the demand for healthier alternatives.

An example of this is the paint sector where companies such as Resene were early innovators of waterborne paints to replace solvent borne versions, which in turn reduces the levels of VOCs in paint (VOCs are volatile organic compounds which contribute to poorer indoor air quality). Resene has many paints approved under the Environmental Choice programme and now has many low-odour paints, which means its paint is more pleasant to apply as well as more pleasant to live with.

Families with young children love to hear about low allergen materials, particularly if they have crawling babies or kids with asthma or eczema. This can provide a point of difference in a family home and be the icing on the cake for a quality tenant.

**INSTALLING LOW-FLOW SHOWER HEADS**

Retrofitting a low-flow shower head is easy, and will save a lot of water over time. So depending on how your water rates bill split is set up, you could be saving money for both you and your tenants.

And while you are focusing on plumbing, check for any sneaky leaks that may be letting moisture get where it shouldn't be – lying under the house or into the walls. Because all of the insulation and fancy heating in the world won't be effective if the moisture levels in the house are too high. ■