



green savers

FIND OUT WHICH ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS ARE WORTH THE INVESTMENT

The Truth has set Tajuana Common free. After watching former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, she decided it was time for her family to start making some environmentally, and ultimately economically, friendly life changes.

Fast forward four years and she has gone green full throttle. Look no further than her home for proof of her environmental evolution. No light fixture is without one of those spiral-shaped CFL (compact fluorescent lamp) light bulbs. The programmable thermostat is adjusted to fit her family's schedule. Instead of plastic disposable

water bottles, she keeps a chilled pitcher of filtered tap water inside her energy-efficient refrigerator. Her dishwasher is an energy saver too.

"It's about starting with small steps and working your way up," says Common, who channeled her passion for all things environmental into a self-published book, *Ten-aciously Green: 10 Ways To Go Green in 41 Areas of Your Life*. "The main thing is that people, particularly we as African-Americans, need to start by just having a consciousness about what we consume and how much we consume."

If the mere thought of going green im-

mediately sends the sound of the cash register cha-chinging in your ears, stop worrying. Environmental experts insist that going green does not have to cost you tons of green. In fact, doing your part to save the planet often saves you money. For example, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, an Energy Star brand refrigerator uses 40 percent less energy than most regular refrigerators. A Smart Strip surge protector, which blocks the electrical current on appliances that are not in use, can potentially save you up to \$150 on your utility bill annually.

So, how do you know which green products are worth the investment? Here are some tips.

START SMALL—Little things, like replacing your light bulbs, installing a low-flow showerhead and adding a programmable thermostat, says Common, are energy-efficient options that typically cost less than \$30 apiece. "Your overall objective is to look for items that lower energy consumption and reduce harm to the environment," says Common.

DO YOUR RESEARCH—When unsure about whether a product touted as environmentally friendly is legit, seek more information about it from a trusted unbiased source, advises Lynnette Young, executive director of Sustainable Atlanta, an eco-friendly nonprofit. "The *Consumer Reports* magazine Web site has a growing green section. The EPA's Web site is also a great source." Young adds, "Always ask if there is an environmentally friendly alternative to whatever you're buying—whether it's paint or dishwashing detergent."

REPLACE AS YOU GO—"There's no need to get rid of a perfectly good washing machine or dishwasher immediately," adds Common. "Just replace those items with greener versions as you go. Always look for Energy Star brand appliances; they're endorsed by the EPA. They help you save money on your utility bills." According to the EPA, in 2007 alone, Energy Star products saved Americans enough power to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 27 million cars and saved \$16 billion on their utility bills. —Chandra R. Thomas