

# ‘Green built’ now a viable option

BY NAOMI MILLAN  
Special to the Record-Eagle

With some careful planning and product selection during the building or remodeling of a home, the principles of “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” can extend beyond sorting the trash to the very makeup of the structure, from the insulation to the light fixtures.

One of the ways that people are seeking to nurture the greening of America is through Green Building. According to Max Strickland of Burkholder Construction, Green Building as a movement began in Austin, Texas, more than 11 years ago.

Today there are 35 to 40 programs nationwide that are certified to deem residential buildings “green,” he said. Recently, the Green Built Grand Traverse Committee of the Home Builders Association of the Grand Traverse Area became one of them.

One of the reasons that Green Building has been so embraced by the general public is that it covers three areas of concern: environmental conservation, the use of energy, and indoor air

quality issues, said Strickland.

“A green home has 30 percent more savings in energy costs, is healthier to live in and has a lower cost for maintenance,” he said.

However, just as the color green comes in all shades, there are many ways to get your home to be more ecologically sound. To that end, the HBAGTA has recently published a builder’s manual of 487 possible points a building can score in areas such as “Resource Efficient Design” to be certified “Green Built.” A building must score at least 150 points and pass a final inspection.

“Green Built” certification seems to lend itself more easily to new construction or a large-scale remodel, but there is no reason the same principles cannot be adopted on the smaller scale.

Bill Queen, extended education program coordinator at Northwestern Michigan College, suggests that you should consider how you landscape your home. Queen has helped establish a series of Green Building courses at NMC.

“Green landscaping is

easy,” he said. “A big green lawn is not eco-friendly. You’re just pumping it full of nutrients that will flow off into the watershed.”

Strickland says to try to use native species that don’t use as much water.

Another way to be more ecologically conscious is to use products that are locally sourced. For Strickland, that means the product comes from less than 500 miles away.

Larry Kinney, owner of Harmony House Construction, also thinks about the product as a whole.

“Think about the energy cost of the total product,” he said. “What it takes to make it and ship it.”

During a remodel, Kinney said that instead of demolishing the structure, you can dismantle it and distribute reusable materials to various recycling points, such as Odom Reusable Building Material. In addition, you can try to reduce the space of the remodel.

“Look at the total environment,” Kinney said.

The marketplace is not insensitive to the growing interest in eco-friendly

products. While some of the more innovative or specialized products may not be on the shelves of your local store yet, there are still many easily accessible products available.

One quick and easy way to increase the energy-efficiency of your home is to install compact fluorescent light bulbs. According to the ENERGY STAR Web site, if every home in the country replaced just one light bulb with a CFL, the impact on pollution would be like taking a million cars off the road. These bulbs are easy to find, with at least eight stores in the Traverse City area carrying them.

Another simple way to use a greener product in your home is to use paint that has zero or low Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC).

“Paint touches so much of the air we breathe,” Strickland said.

VOCs are a source of indoor air pollution. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, some of the effects of VOCs can range from eye and respiratory tract irritation to central nervous system damage.

## Home tour features salvaged construction materials

On Saturday, April 17, SEEDS and Odom Reusable Building Materials will host a home tour which will feature houses that have used salvaged and recycled materials in their construction or renovation.

Participants will visit four homes and Odom Reusable Building Materials, a source for used construction materials.

The tour runs from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with a lunch break. Participants will meet at the TC Farmers’ Market parking lot. The tour is free and a boxed lunch is available for \$10 to early registrants. Register with Jeremy at 922-5907 or by e-mail: [jeremy@ecoseeds.org](mailto:jeremy@ecoseeds.org)

For more information, contact Sarna Salzman, SEEDS executive director by phone at 922-9178 or by e-mail at [sarna@ecoseeds.org](mailto:sarna@ecoseeds.org)

SEEDS is an ecologically oriented nonprofit organization based in Traverse City.

Ken Larson, manager of Spectrum Paint, said most paints now are low VOC. They carry Devoe Wonder Pure, which is odor free and VOC free. At Northwood Paint and Supply they carry Pure Performance from Pittsburgh Paints. Paul Wagner, a sales associate, says it’s low in VOC and is as durable as acrylic.

Green products are not always less costly than their conventional counterparts, but through durability and energy savings the costs make sense over time, Queen said.

“When people go to build green houses, they’re saving money in the long run. Even though there’s a little bit of layout up front, it actually pays off over time,” he said.

The Green Built Grand Traverse Builder’s Manual is available at the Home Builder’s Association, 946-2305.

Northwestern Michigan College’s Built Green classes will take place over three Thursdays starting May 6. For more information, call 995-1700.

**Naomi Millan is a local freelance writer.**

## Associations give the thumbs-up to reputable contractors

BY DAVID BRADLEY  
The Associated Press

Let’s say you’re all set to start a home-improvement project. Everything is in place.

Except your choice of contractor. Err at this juncture and your project could become so much kindling.

So, where do you turn to find real pros who are licensed and insured, haven’t been hauled to court, are free of consumer complaints and have untarnished reputations?

How about your local contractor association?

“One of our biggest problems is that homeowners don’t know about us,” said Lori Newell of the Santa Maria Valley, Calif., Contractors Association.

“Then, they only call us because something bad has happened or their money was taken or the work was poorly done.”

These associations go by varied titles such as builder exchanges or construction councils. Find these groups

in the yellow pages under the “Association” listing. Although formed as trade groups for local contractors, associations can function as a safety net for homeowners.

Newell said consumers can call to check a contractor’s license or insurance status, or be referred to one or more contractors.

A seldom used, but highly valued, free service, it allows homeowners to submit project plans for competitive bids. The Santa Maria association has a “plan room” where both commercial and residential project plans are posted. Interested contractors contact homeowners directly. Of nearly 50 plans up for bid, only six are residential.

Newell wishes that number would grow.

And, as a last resort, associations are on the receiving end of complaints about contractors.

“There is a typical cast of characters people complain about over and over,” said

Newell “These same five or six names aren’t members. Our members are the good guys.”

She agrees that senior citizens are often targeted by home-improvement scams; it’s all the more reason consumers should conduct background checks, says Newell.

Her office even provides complaint forms. Legal issues headed to court are referred to local attorneys.

Complaints to contractor associations may carry more weight than grievances filed with organizations such as the Better Business Bureau. Newell says while well meaning, the BBB has no authority to take direct action against an offending contractor. That, says Newell, is the role of local associations who work closely with state license boards.

To be a member, a contractor must be licensed, have proof of insurance, and be clean of complaints or pending legal action.



AP Photo/David Bradley

Contractors often rely on their local association as a source of work. Homeowners can call association offices for contractor referrals, and many associations allow homeowners to post project plans to attract competitive bids from association members.

## The right stuff for getting off to a good start this spring

Nurseries and seed catalogs generally offer equipment that can make growing from seed easier and more successful. Here are some favorites. Most are widely available:

- Seed-starting trays: Small plastic cells hold single seeds and keep roots from growing together. Many come with bottom trays for watering and clear plastic tops to encourage germination.
- Gro-Mat Seed Propagation Mat: Tomato, pepper and other vegetable and flower seeds need warm soil to germinate. Plug in this 21-by-15-inch rubber mat and set growing containers on the wire shelf above. Keeps soil

temperature 15 to 20 degrees above room temperature.

- Growing racks: Starter “greenhouses” with three or four shelves fit on a patio or deck. Four- to five-foot steel structure is wrapped in plastic. Fold for easy storage.
- Bio Dome Seed Starter: A seed starting system from Holland that includes a clear plastic top with adjustable vents, a 60-cell foam block and a spongelike rooting medium. From Park Seeds.
- Seed Sower: Sow seeds evenly and quickly with a seed sower featuring an adjustable outlet that controls the flow and places seeds where you want them. Transparent cover lets you see the seeds. From Burpee.

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