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May 2010

MICHIGAN Country Lines



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MICHIGAN Country Lines



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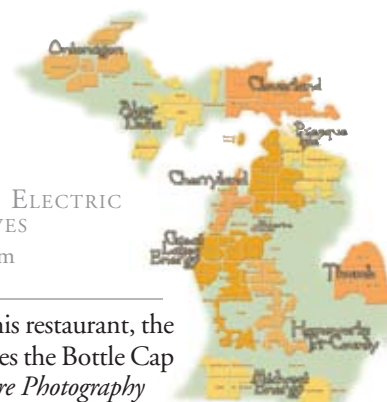
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MICHIGAN'S ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVES
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COVER *

Grayling entrepreneur Bill Gannon and his sister, Marianne McEvoy, at his restaurant, the Dawson & Stevens Classic '50s Diner & Soda Fountain, which also houses the Bottle Cap Museum (Coca-Cola® collection). She is the Museum curator. *Photo—Dre Photography*



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Robert Hance

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Midwest Energy Cooperative

A History Lesson

ce box. Reel-to-reel film. The milk man. These are terms that are part of a history lesson for today's youth, but part of living history for many members of rural electric cooperatives.

I had a conversation this week with a customer about his light bill. Many of our older customers still refer to the electric bill this way, and I chuckle at the inherent history lesson there. These are typically first or second generation electric users and, for many, lighting really did represent the majority of what comprised their bill.

Fast forward to 2010. My, how things have changed!

Today's "light bill" is a much different animal, as is today's electric consumption. Most of the students referenced above (and their parents and grandparents, for that matter) live in homes with multiple TVs, probably at least one of the big-screen varieties, and a myriad of other electric entertainment options such as X-Box, Wii or PlayStation. They have chargers plugged in around the house to keep their cell phones, iPods and laptops in business, as well as a desktop computer or two, complete with modems and printers. There's a refrigerator in the kitchen, and probably one in the basement or garage, as well as a stand-alone freezer. And let's not forget the incidentals like heating and cooling equipment, washers and dryers, and other kitchen appliances.

The light bill? While I chuckle at the reference, I also realize that it's part of the problem. Lighting remains a primary point of reference for our electric usage because it's something we use every day, and yet it's an incidental piece of our monthly bills. We've been taught to turn off lights when we leave the room in order to conserve electricity, or replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent light-bulbs to be more efficient. Many people complain that they have implemented these kinds of conservation efforts, but don't see the reduction in their bill that should naturally follow.

The problem is that we're still not connecting the dots between what we do and how that impacts the electric bill. We've become very comfortable with the conveniences that surround us, but we don't

connect those with our electric consumption and bill. But, I'll bet if you look closely at many of those conveniences you'll find a cord connecting to a wall outlet.

I recently talked with a gentleman who has traveled abroad, including spending time in Lebanon where they schedule the availability of electricity. He said candles are widely available

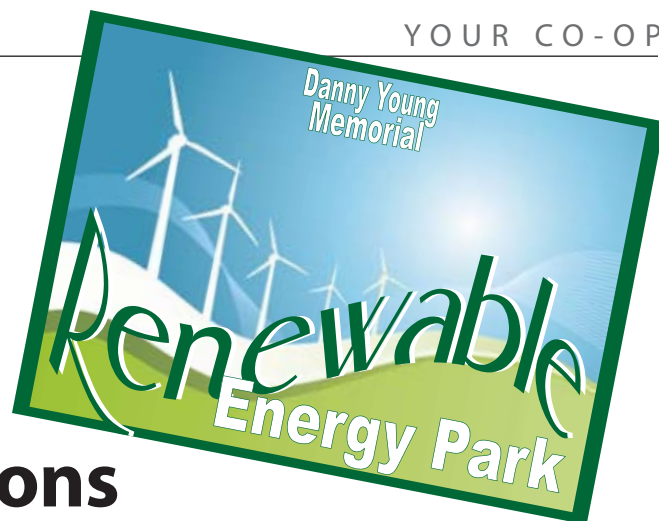
in hotel rooms and common areas to provide for basic lighting needs, and people just plan accordingly. *There are places in our world where electricity is still considered a luxury.*

We have it good here, friends. While we have to contend with occasional outages, planned or otherwise, our electricity is generally available 24/7, giving us immediate access to everything we need for comfort, entertainment and convenience. Unfortunately, our collective mindset seems to be that once our luxury is deemed a necessity its value is only apparent when it is not there. So, ironically, the more reliable the service, the less we appreciate the true value.

It's easy to blame the utility for what we consider outrageous costs for electricity, but it's time that we each recognize the role we play in our own monthly bill. I've said before that power supply prices will continue to increase, so controlling the bill ultimately rests with each user. So the next time you get the monthly "light bill," I want you to consider what you might give up if electricity was a luxury. Look beyond the total kilowatt consumption and focus on what those kilowatt hours provided to you. I want you to understand that you are not paying for electrons, but rather what those electrons do for you in terms of your comfort, entertainment and convenience. Learn to recognize the role you play in the total and decide for yourself if the cost is worth it.



Robert Hance
President/CEO



Renewable Energy: Make Informed Decisions

Questions come into the cooperative almost daily from consumers interested in incorporating renewable energy technology in their homes. They may have talked with a solar panel vendor at a home show or passed a wind turbine on a Sunday drive.

Midwest Energy Cooperative is uniquely positioned to help consumers think through all aspects of the decision to incorporate renewable technology before writing the big check. The Danny Young Memorial Renewable Energy Park, located in the back lot of the cooperative's Cassopolis office, was designed as a regional resource to provide information and education on renewable energy technologies, specifically as they relate to residential applications in this region. It features a 4 kilowatt (kW) solar panel display and a 2.4 kW wind turbine, each of which is connected to the electric grid and metered to provide real-time information and data on output and availability.

"There is a lot of information, and unfortunately misinformation, about renewable energy technology and a lot of people are falling prey to the hype without understanding the full picture in terms of financial investment and return on that investment," says Robert Hance, Midwest Energy Cooperative president/CEO. "We're very supportive of the concept of renewable energy, and just want people to go into the decision well-educated and informed."

"So much of the hype is leading people to believe that they will be able to generate all of their own electricity and sell back to the utility, but the reality is that in this region, typical residential applications simply won't provide that level of generation."

Midwest Energy Cooperative can show both current and historical generation output from its system, and provide interested consumers with an economic analysis that provides a cost-per-kilowatt hour based on investment and ongoing costs and generation. At TeamMidwest.com, viewers can access a live data center that shows current weather conditions and the resulting real-time generation report. Midwest members can also input their meter number to find out, based

on their usage and the generation at the Park, how long it would take to get a return on their financial investment for a wind and/or solar system.

"Renewable energy technology works; we're not disputing that and we're not saying it's a bad thing. We believe in doing what we can, both individually and as an industry, to help the environment. However, we also want our customers and other interested consumers to be able to make informed decisions about incorporation of this or any other electric technology," Hance added.

The Energy Park is open for tours. Interested individuals and groups can call 800-492-5989 or email PR@teammidwest.com for more information or to schedule a tour.

FACTS AND FIGURES

■ 4 kW Solar Panels

Installed cost: \$30,378

Installation date: Jan 29, 2008

Expense and Generation detail (Jan. 29, 2008 – March 31, 2010)

Total operating expenses: \$9,459

Total electric generation: 9,569 kWh

Cost per kWh generated: \$.99

Capacity factor: 12%

■ 2.4 kW Wind Turbine

Note: A 5 kW wind turbine was initially installed on Dec. 30, 2008, at a cost of \$35,154. That unit broke for undetermined reasons in October 2009 and was replaced with a 2.4 kW unit on Feb. 5, 2010. The investment and operating expenses reflected represent those associated with the 2.4 kW unit. The generation figures reflected represent the combined total from both units. There was no generation from Oct. 2009 through Feb. 5, 2010 as technicians attempted to determine the cause of and fix the problem with the 5 kW turbine.

Installed cost: \$20,000 (estimated)

Installation date: Dec. 30, 2008 (original); Feb. 5, 2010 (replacement)

Expense and Generation detail (Dec. 30, 2008 – March 31, 2010)

Total operating expenses: \$3,459

Total electric generation: 1,245 kWh

Cost per kWh generated: \$2.78

Capacity factor: 4.8%

Capacity factor: The ratio of actual net electrical energy generation to the maximum possible energy that could have been generated if a plant operated at its maximum capacity rating for the same time.

Midwest Energy Cooperative offices will be closed for Memorial Day on Monday, May 31.

Payments may be made at the drop box and will be posted on the next open business day.

**Have a happy and safe
Memorial Day weekend!**

Energy Star Program Defects Prompt Overhaul

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) audit has found the Energy Star® program to be primarily a self-certification program “vulnerable to fraud and abuse.”

The GAO, a non-partisan congressional watchdog agency that audits federal programs, finished the nine-month investigation in March. Energy Star, a voluntary, international standard for rating energy-efficient consumer products created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1992, covers over 60 categories.

As part of its study, commissioned by U.S. Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), ranking member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, GAO submitted fake products, such as a gas-powered alarm clock, and listed nonexistent companies for evaluation.

In response, EPA noted, “We take this report very seriously. We welcome all efforts, internal or external, to improve

the [Energy Star] program. That’s why we have started an enhanced testing program and have already taken enforcement actions against companies that violated the rules.”

A 2009 EPA review found 98 percent of products tested met or exceeded Energy Star requirements. Devices carrying the Energy Star logo, such as computers and electronics, kitchen and household appliances, residential lighting, and windows, deliver the same or better performance and use 20 percent to 30 percent less energy on average than comparable models.

“Energy Star uses a series of checks to ensure consumers are getting products that cut energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions,” explains a joint statement from the EPA and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), a partner with EPA on the Energy Star program. “One of the reasons the system has worked...is that manufacturers have a market incentive to

test competitors’ products and report violations, which supports the program’s own independent testing, verification and enforcement initiatives.”

The GAO review adds to other Energy Star concerns. *The New York Times* revealed last October that some manufacturers of household appliances were testing products for Energy Star-certification internally instead of using independent laboratories. In response, Energy Star ramped up oversight of product ratings and by the end of 2009 revoked the Energy Star label for some refrigerators while raising the bar for efficiency expected from TVs.

Starting this year, Energy Star is expanding third-party evaluations and implementing a two-step internal testing process to broaden the evaluation of Energy Star-qualified products.

“Consumers can continue to trust Energy Star to save energy and money and protect the environment,” say DOE and EPA.

Federal energy efficiency tax credits for appliances and home heating and air-conditioning systems typically require qualifying products to be Energy Star-rated. As always, research a product before making a purchase.



© iStockphoto.com/Damian Gadal

CFL Clean-up & Fridges

Thank you for the bit about how to clean up after CFL bulbs [April 2010]. I remember playing with mercury from a broken thermostat when I was a kid! That article is being taped up on my storage closet.

If you do a fridge article again, please mention that the law requires that old discarded refrigerators must have the doors removed, or be chained shut. That’s one good regulation; too many kids ‘hid’ in old refrigerators, couldn’t get out, and suffocated. I also appreciated the list of plastics dangerous when heated under ‘Our Kids.’ Another clip and post.

Beth Clemensen, via email

I’d like to suggest you include a gentle reminder to those calling for ‘old fridge pick-up’ that if the appliance is clean and still working it might be donated to a local Habitat for Humanity ReStore. We have many low-income families that need those used appliances. If you would like the contact information for ReStores where the pick-up program is being initiated, please let me know and I will locate it for you. Most ReStores also have trucks and staff to pick up donations which may also help decrease your costs while supporting both causes.

Thank you for this offer. It is concerning to see older appliances rotting away on some of the back roads we travel on our Sunday rides.

*Bonnie Robbins, Exec. Dir.
Antrim County Habitat for
Humanity*

Mike Peters replies: I can appreciate your desire to find a home

MYSTERY PHOTO

Everyone who identifies the correct location of the photo below by **June 10** will be entered in a drawing for a **\$50 coupon redeemable for electricity from your electric cooperative.**

Call in your entry to *Country Lines* at 517-351-6322, ext. 306, email jhansen@countrylines.com, or mail it to *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, 48864. Include your name, address, phone number and co-op. The winner will be announced in the July 2010 issue.

The **March** contest winner is **Robert LeFevre** of Garden City, who correctly identified the pier in Pentwater.



March photo

Recycled Paper

Beginning with this issue, *Michigan Country Lines* is printed on recycled paper from FutureMark Paper, which taps the “urban forest” of waste paper thrown out in Chicago every day. Using recycled paper reduces the carbon emitted in paper production, the paper deposited in landfills, and water and air pollution. The energy to produce recycled paper is about one-half the amount required to make paper from pulp.

Do you
know
where
this is?



for the used appliances, but by law our appliance rebate programs require that the old appliances we pay a rebate on must be recycled and not put back into use. The intent of the rebate program is to get older, inefficient appliances off the grid and properly recycled, thereby reducing overall energy consumption. I can assure you that the appliances you see abandoned on the back roads are not ones that were picked up as part of our cooperatives' programs.

Two things should be included that are not: The person doing the clean-up should wear rubber gloves that are heavy enough to prevent contact with their skin and disposal must be made in a hazardous waste disposal site, not with your normal local trash disposal.

Bob Chumack, via email

Nice article on the clean-up of hazardous materials. Its the main reason I would go without light rather than use CFLs. You needed to mention gloves and masks as well, and you still couldn't eliminate the hazard! Want a perplexing experience? Ask people that have them what the clean-up procedure is for broken bulbs and see if you get the same answers that I did. Simply, they laugh!

I know that some have used vacuum cleaners, paper towels, broom and dust pan, or worse, bare hands. No matter what, the end result is landfill contamination. There always seems to be a "rush" to make a profit, when the issue is hot. Consequently, mercury gets into the public system in the "go green" format.

Make it safe or don't sell it!

Don Akers, Tustin

The EPA continues to recommend that you should seal the CFL pieces in two plastic bags and put it into the outside trash, or other protected outside location, for the next normal trash



Winners—A team of student linemen from the Utility Technology program at Alpena Community College took first place in March at the annual Linemen's Rodeo Competition hosted by Chandler-Gilbert Community College in Phoenix, AZ. Utility Tech students Tom Chojnacki, Tyler Castagne, and Lucas Tice won over 18 other teams consisting of 60 competitors. Attending the rodeo were (L-R) instructor Rick Arbic, Chojnacki, Castagne, Mark Vantine, Russ Skuse, Tice, Pat Savoie, Matt Wenn, Steve Westrick, Cody Teegardin, and instructor Tim Buse. Michigan's electric co-ops support the program.

collection. Never send fluorescent bulbs or any other mercury-containing products to an incinerator. EPA also says that, even though CFLs contain a small amount of mercury that could ultimately end up in the environment, that amount is significantly less than the amount of mercury avoided as a result of the energy savings.—ed.

Owls and d-CON

I, too, enjoy hearing and seeing beautiful barred owls in our wooded neighborhood. Don Ingle's entertaining article [April 2010; countrylines.com] about his noisy barred owl neighbors gave readers many facts about the species, and clearly conveyed his affection for all kinds of owls.

He writes, "These owls love dining on small rodents. It is nice to know the barred one is back, since we have gone way overboard on our d-CON® budget. A barred owl can consume a lot of mice and voles before they ever get a chance to snuggle in with us."

d-CON works by offering a food source that is actually a tantalizingly sweet bit of poison bait. Mice eat a bit from the pile of poison bait

and then go back to their shelter, continuing to make visits back to eat more d-CON for about three days. Before they become so poisoned that they finally die, the rodents continue to load up on tasty morsels of d-CON bait. In their weakened, poisoned, but still moving state, they are often captured and eaten by owls and other birds of prey.

According to Dody Wyman, director emeritus of the Raisin River Raptor Center in Ann Arbor, eating one mouse, fully loaded with d-CON, will kill a large owl or hawk. Admirers of birds of prey can help those species by not using poison bait for rodent control. It's a simple change of practice that will reap great rewards for wildlife.

Pam Bunch, Tecumseh

Don Ingle replies: Thank you for your comments — and for passing on your caution about using d-CON to control opportunistic rodents that move in with us

over winter. We have used this product according to the maker's instructions for use, and in limited amounts; however, your advice is well-taken. Plan B is clearly called for.

Metering Electric Use

I was wondering if there's a meter that I can buy to put on my new Marathon® hot water heater? We would like to see how much it's costing.

Bill & Dawn Ross

See pages 12-13 for options.—ed.

Carbon Tax

As for MECA's job, I think you should, as our representatives, stand between the oppressive government and your owners (customers) and fight with all your resources to prevent any further regulation that is an economic depressant and which is therefore destructive to America. Let's face it, this is just another giant tax increase on the American public.

Dave Mills, Interlochen

COMING UP: ▶ Favorite recipes: **APPETIZERS** by May 10 and **POULTRY** by June 10.

Mail to: Recipe Editor, Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, MI 48864, or email jhansen@countrylines.com

Your Electric Bill:

What Does It All Mean?

Monthly Service Charge

This is a fixed monthly amount that incorporates some of the costs associated with having electricity available at the flip of a switch, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Energy KWH Charge

This is the cost of generating and transmitting the power you used for that billing cycle based on the rates we establish with our power supplier. Midwest Energy Cooperative does not generate its own electricity; our power supplier negotiates deals on behalf of its member systems and establishes rates based on those contracts. While we incorporate the power supply costs on your bill, none of that money stays at the cooperative; it is all returned to the power supplier. The charge is assessed based on your monthly kilowatt-hour (kWh) usage as measured by your meter.

Distribution KWH Charge

This is the cost of providing and maintaining a distribution system that delivers electricity from the substation to homes and businesses. The charge is assessed based on your monthly kilowatt-hour usage, as measured by your meter.

Power Cost Adjustment

This represents the difference between what we budget for power supply and what we actually pay to our supplier. A number of factors can affect what we ultimately pay, including changes in fuel costs and the market prices of electricity. Like the Energy KWH Charge, all money generated in this line is returned to the power supplier.

Michigan Public Act 295 Mandates Electric Energy Optimization Surcharge

This is Michigan's mandated charge to provide funds for energy efficiency education, programs and services. The charge is based on your monthly kilowatt-hour usage as measured by your meter.

Tax

Uncle Sam's piece of the pie.

Midwest Energy Cooperative
269-445-1000 or 1-800-492-5889
E-mail: info@TeamMidwest.com
Website: www.TeamMidwest.com

District Service Centers
Office hours may vary by location. Please call ahead.
Drop boxes are available at each office location.
Payments left in the drop box will be posted on the next business day. View your account or make a payment online at www.TeamMidwest.com

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Cassopolis MI 49031-0127

Adrian Service Center
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Adrian, MI 49221

Paw Paw Service Center
59825 S. LeGrave Street
Paw Paw, MI 49079

White Cloud Service Center
3181 S. Evergreen
White Cloud, MI 49349

Account #: 2633002 Service Address: _____

Service	Rate	Beginning Reading	Ending Reading	Mult	Used	Totals				
		Date	Reading	Type	Date	Reading				
ELECTRIC	R88-R	02/18/2010	69240	R88	03/08/2010	69249	R88	1	1009 KWH	
MONTHLY SERVICE CHARGE										32.00
ENERGY KWH CHARGE										55.34
DISTRIBUTION KWH CHARGE										35.95
POWER COST ADJUSTMENT .023010										23.33
MICHIGAN PUBLIC ACT 295 MANDATES										
ELECTRIC ENERGY OPTIMIZATION (EO) SURCHARGE										1.31
TAX										4.79
SERVICE SUBTOTAL										123.49

MPSC estimates EO will create average residential savings of \$2.92 per month.

Current Due Date: 04/05/2010

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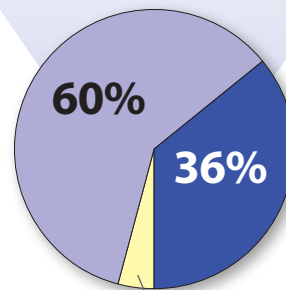
Account Number	2633002	Payment Enclosed
ELECTRIC	123.49	
Total	123.49	

Midwest Energy Cooperative
Corporate Headquarters
PO Box 127
Cassopolis MI 49031-0127

24040006730020001234900012349001470106

Based on the charges shown, here is how your bill breaks down:

Power Supply Costs (Energy kWh Charge and Power Cost Adjustment—money that is returned to the power supplier)



Midwest Energy Costs (Monthly Service Charge and Distribution kWh Charge—money that stays at the co-op)

Tax: 4%



Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America
OurEnergy.coop



Sometimes Washington Gets It Right

May 11, 2010, is the 75th anniversary of the Rural Electrification Administration ("REA," now renamed as the Rural Utility Service or "RUS") created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order in 1935. At that time, less than 10 percent of the nation's farms and rural homes had electricity. And those that did often paid significantly higher rates than people living in more populous areas.

Through the creation of the REA, individuals were able to come together to form electric cooperatives, borrow money from the federal government, and do for themselves what others would not: provide reliable and affordable electric service to rural America.

Today, 99 percent of rural America has been electrified. Some say that fact alone means that RUS has done its job and the loan program should be ended. But if those that advocate shutting down RUS would consider the facts, they would come to a different conclusion. At a time when government programs are seen

as a cost to the American people, the RUS program actually has a "negative subsidy rate," which means it increases revenue to the U.S. Treasury! In fact, last year the U.S. Treasury made about \$50 million in profit on loans to rural electric cooperatives.

And, although most of rural Michigan has electric service, most of our cooperatives still rely on RUS loan programs to finance the repair and replacement of their electric infrastructure.

Without RUS, many cooperatives would pay significantly more to borrow money to build and maintain the poles and wires needed to deliver electricity into some of the state's most isolated areas. And higher interest rates mean higher electric rates.

Some have argued that the RUS loan program should be ended because most



Michael Peters is president and CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. His email address is mpeters@countrylines.com.

of America has electricity. That would be like saying we should end funding for the interstate highway system because most of the country now has access to interstate highways. We all know, especially living in Michigan, those roads need constant maintenance and repair. Our electric systems are no different. With some of our infrastructure over 60 years old, cooperatives are constantly maintaining or replacing the lines, all at a significantly higher cost than when they were first built.

And, our electric cooperatives are doing more than just building lines. Cooperatives are leading the industry in developing clean energy solutions, such as renewable energy, clean-coal technologies, and energy efficiency programs.

Seventy-five years is a long time for any program to exist, but when something works as well as rural electrification, its future should be as bright as its past.

GREENER CHOICES

Spending wisely on improvements can help reduce energy bills. **Morgan Zenner**

These days, the word “green” is everywhere, but homeowners really need to know: What exactly does it mean to ‘go green’?

At one time, green products were anything manufactured with at least 30 percent recycled material, but now there are several other factors that determine sustainability. Currently, green products are ranked by their Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), which takes into consideration manufacturing practices, installation, energy use and eventual disposal.

Federal incentives and Michigan’s law mandating utilities to help customers reduce energy use have cast a bright light on home energy efficiency. By lowering energy use, homeowners preserve existing resources and practice sustainability.

With all of these factors, “going green” is not as clear cut as homeowners may have thought. Here are a few items to keep in mind before beginning your green investment.

Sustainable Surfaces

Surfaces in your home include flooring, and countertops in kitchens and bathrooms. VOCs, or volatile organic compounds, are a hot topic when it comes to green because compounds emitted as gases from certain solids or liquids include a variety of chemicals that can have adverse health effects.

But choosing the greener option doesn’t mean you have to throw out the other considerations—such as style, functionality, durability and, in the case of kitchens, food safety and heat resistance. Marble, slate, granite and stone are natural surface options that do not release VOCs.

For homeowners who prefer a modern, industrial style, concrete is becoming popular as a sustainable surface that can easily be reused, recycled or locally supplied. Another sleek option is stainless steel, which is known for high durability.

“If you’re considering concrete, be sure to check what kind of content is in it,” says Ben Thompson, owner of Thompson Remodeling Inc. in Grand Rapids, and a National Association of Home Builders’ Certified Green Professional (CGP).

Another option is terrazzo surfaces, which are a combination of glass or stone chips and binders. For the greenest option, choose terrazzo bound with cement that does not contain VOCs and chips that are sourced from recycled glass.

“My clients have increasingly been choosing a combination of these greener countertops,” says CGP Judy Mozen, of Handcrafted Homes Inc. in Roswell, GA. “Recently, a client used granite for the island and recycled glass for the perimeter countertops.”

Wood flooring remains one of the most desirable options in the U.S. today, but instead of installing exotic wood from the world’s greatest rainforests, purchase wood that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). An FSC certification ensures that the wood originated from a fast-growth tree, meaning the forest is sustainable.

Surprisingly, some manufacturers continue to sell wood such as particleboard or medium-density fiberboard (MDF) that

contains formaldehyde, a chemical known to cause cancer. “Check with your kitchen designer to ensure that your floors are free of these types of wood,” Mozen says.

Then there are the poster children for green flooring—cork and bamboo. Although these are great green options, there are some downsides to installing them.

Cork flooring is made from the bark of cork-oak trees, from which the cork is stripped off the trunk and branches about every decade. The bark grows back, and its removal does not disturb the growth of the tree. However, it may not be the best material to install where moisture is present, as cork will deteriorate over time if it comes into contact with water.

Bamboo is a natural material that is harvested every three to seven years. The downside is that most bamboo is not harvested locally, and the amount of energy it takes to transport bamboo from China may offset its sustainability.

Still, Thompson adds, bamboo and cork are the most appealing options for most of his clients because of the look and price.

If there is a surface that fits your home perfectly, think about putting a little research into various brands and their green consid-

Right: This National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) 2009 award winner virtually eliminated the toxins from the home, complete with low-VOC, oil-free paint, formaldehyde-free materials and urea-free cabinetry in the kitchen.





Left: This National Association NARI 2009 award winner by Wilkinson Design & Construction, in Harwich, MA, used closed-cell insulation and triple-glazed windows, both of which are eligible for energy-efficient tax credits. The homeowners were happy to re-use the toilet from the previous bath, a great way to reduce costs and extend a product's life cycle.

erations. That way, you don't have to compromise style or sustainability.

And don't forget, VOCs are found in a number of other common household products. It is a good idea to check the VOC content level in all products or materials that enter the home.

Insulation

One of the most effective energy upgrades a homeowner can make is insulation. Homes require a large amount of energy to generate heat and air conditioning.

The first place to increase insulation is in the attic. Up until the mid-1990s, builders under-insulated the attic to reduce building costs. But most of today's contractors know that ignoring the attic can lead to costly energy consumption.

The other major insulation problem area is the basement, especially if it is unfinished. By insulating the basement ceiling and above the crawl space, or insulating the basement walls, you can save a large amount of money on your heating bills.

"Here in Michigan, our standard insulation is spray-foam insulation because it insulates and air seals at the same time," Thompson says. "It is slightly higher in cost and it requires professional installation."

Windows and Doors

Air leakage commonly occurs in obvious places, such as window and door openings. Leaks show up in older windows that may have loosened up over the years, and in new windows that were not properly installed. Energy-efficient windows have low-e glass

with special coatings to reflect infrared light and keep heat inside during the winter. They also have multiple panes of glass with argon or krypton gases in between each pane and warm edge spacers to keep window panes apart.

"When it comes to windows, keep this in mind: Southern climates should look at the Solar Heat Gain Coefficient (SHGC)—the lower the SHGC, the less solar heat is transmitted. Northern climates should look at the U factor [which measures how well a product prevents heat from escaping]—the lower the U factor, the better," Mozen says.

Energy-efficient doors have weather stripping around the edges to seal leaks. Weather-stripping supplies and installation techniques can range from simple to technical, so it is important to read the package instructions first. Doors made from fiberglass or steel with polyurethane foam cores are some of the best-quality materials in today's market.

One of the myths of air sealing is that it is possible to seal a home too tightly, to the point that it collects moisture. "You can never seal a house too tightly, only under-ventilate it," Thompson says. He says the key to air sealing is to control how a building breathes by installing a mechanical ventilation system, which transfers heat from outgoing air to fresh incoming air.

Roofing

Most people consider a roof over their heads and food on the table to be the most important concerns in life, but what happens when the roof over your head is costing you major money?

Your main option for a green roof is one that's made from recycled content or from recycling existing roof structures that are being replaced. There are many asphalt roofing collection facilities nationwide that welcome old roofing materials.

Rubber and plastics from other industries, like the automotive industry, have been reformulated into a rubber slate roofing material, which has the Energy Star approval rating.

Roofs have evolved over the years from traditional asphalt roofing to what industry professionals now call cool roofing. Cool roofing options are popular in warmer geographic areas, where sunlight is prevalent.

One type of cool roofing is named reflective roofing because the roof is covered in some form of metal to reflect the sun's rays and decrease heat transferred into buildings. This is especially useful in hot to moderate climates where homeowners have high cooling costs. Some people in moderate climate areas install reflective roofs to avoid having to install an air conditioner altogether.

"We have clients, for the first time, who are considering lighter color and reflective roofs after they found out that a light-color roof can give up to 70 percent reflectance, and a dark roof only up to 18 percent," Mozen says. "Light-color roofs last longer and reduce heat buildup—a very important factor for homes in the South." As another option, you can install a reflective metal radiant barrier beneath your roof to transfer rays off the home.

For those who battle with cooler climates during certain times of the year, roof insulation may be more beneficial. Depending on the type of roof, or how pitched it is, attic insulation is all you need. The most common way to insulate your roof is by blowing cellulose or closed-cell foam into the roof cavities.

For flat roofs, adding insulation may be a larger task that requires a professional to lift the roof. Some contractors add pitch to flat roofs during this process to allow for more insulation.

A green investment is not about vanity; it's about saving money, improving a home's performance and conserving natural resources.

Morgan Zenner is a marketing and communications coordinator with the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). To locate a local remodeling professional, visit remodeltoday.com or call 800-611-NARI. For tips on remodeling using green techniques and materials, visit greenremodeling.org.



Tracking Energy Use at Home

Being more energy efficient at home starts with an awareness of how electricity is being used. A number of new gadgets can help.

Electric utilities now have more than \$3 billion at hand for deploying smart grid technologies, thanks to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Most of the technologies and equipment purchased by utilities will be invisible to the consumer. However, the in-home display, a key component of tomorrow's smart grid, may wind up on your kitchen counter or hallway wall.

In-home displays are devices that inform homeowners of the amount of electricity their homes are using in almost real time. The devices are connected—either directly or wirelessly—to your electric meter. In-home displays are being developed to provide a variety of information related

to your energy use, including how many kilowatt hours you have consumed and how much you are currently spending on electricity.

Placing these devices inside the home could give homeowners the information needed to save energy. For the first time, you could see in real time how much it actually costs to run the air conditioning or holiday lights. With in-home displays, you will be less likely to find any surprises when you open the monthly bill.

Research conducted by the Cooperative Research Network (CRN) shows that most consumers who have an in-home display use less energy than those without one. Research also shows, however, that most homeowners stop paying attention to the

devices after a few months. As with many electronic devices, they become part of the background noise of everyday life. Yet, it appears that seeing the devices for just a



Black & Decker's sending unit simply straps onto the outside of the meter and sends a signal to a countertop display.

couple of months has a long-term effect on a consumer's electricity use behavior. Even after they stop paying attention to the devices, most homeowners still use 1 to 3 percent less energy than before.

Types of In-home Displays

In-home displays come in two types. One is supplied by the local utility and connects directly to your utility meter. The second can be purchased directly by the consumer and attached either to the meter, somewhere inside the home, or to the breaker box. "Utility-grade" displays are not yet available to customers in most parts of the country, but off-the-shelf products have been available for a year or more.

A small but growing number of utilities are conducting test pilots of in-home displays in order to better understand their effectiveness. To participate in a pilot, most homeowners must fit certain demographic characteristics. Even though preliminary research shows that homeowners who have an in-home display use less energy, little is understood about who responds best to the devices or precisely how these consumers are cutting back on their energy use. These questions must be explored prior to a utility deploying in-home displays on a large scale.

Several third-party manufacturers offer in-home displays, which will report electricity use for the entire home or one specific outlet. Consumers will need to program their electric rate into the device and make sure the device is installed correctly for it to work accurately. The devices will give homeowners an idea of how much energy they are consuming and how much is saved when, for example, they install energy-efficient lighting or turn down the thermostat.

A whole-house display, such as the one sold by Black & Decker, simply straps onto the outside of the meter and sends a signal to a countertop display. You will need to pick a model that works with your type of meter. Other devices, such as the Energy Detective, connect to the breaker panel, and should be installed by a licensed electrician. You can expect to pay \$75 to \$150 for an in-home display like these.

Some devices allow you to connect only one appliance or power strip to the display. These devices are less expensive and can demonstrate how much energy many of the devices in a home are using. They can also show that many appliances continue



The receiving unit for The Energy Detective (TED). The sending unit connects to the breaker panel, and should be installed by a licensed electrician.

to use energy even when they are turned off. These units cost \$35 to \$90.

Where to Get It

In-home displays are available through several websites and some retail stores. Features and cost can vary greatly, so if you purchase one, you should verify that it will work with your meter or whether it will require professional installation.

A growing number of local governments

are providing in-home displays through local libraries or other government offices for short-term use by consumers.

The following companies offer energy management devices and control systems: Agilewaves, 650-839-0170, agilewaves.com; Black & Decker, 800-544-6986, blackanddecker.com/energy/; Control4, 888-400-4070, control4.com; Energy Inc., 800-959-5833, theenergydetective.com; and Onset, 800-564-4377, onsetcomp.com.

The Future

The question of whether in-home displays catch on and become permanent fixtures in the American home is still open. Over the coming months, several utilities will begin pilot studies that will help determine the feasibility of this product. However, for anyone who wants to take a proactive approach to understanding electric consumption (and who is willing to monitor the display regularly), the in-home display may be worth exploring. Indeed, you could use the knowledge that an in-house display provides to change the way you use electricity in your home and save some money.

Brian Sloboda is a program manager specializing in energy efficiency for the Cooperative Research Network, a service of NRECA.

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Grayling's Real Thing

Pop-in to the '50s Diner and Bottle Cap Museum, where Coke memorabilia reigns. **Al Parker**

Tucked along East Michigan Avenue, just off Grayling's main drag, is a classic '50s-style diner that houses a 10,000-piece museum that pays homage to the world's largest beverage company, Coca-Cola®.

The Dawson & Stevens Classic '50s Diner and Soda Fountain is home to the Bottle Cap Museum, northern Michigan's largest privately-owned collection of all things Coke, from century-old bottles, carriers, trays, playing cards, bottle caps, ads, baseball cards, coins, and dolls to an original Coca-Cola delivery truck that came across Lake Michigan from Minnesota.

On display are barrels, vintage posters, cans, holiday decorations, coolers, beanie babies, and even a framed series of 1960s bottle caps featuring National Football League players. The impressive collection is housed in dozens of glass cases that line the museum walls.

"Unfortunately, we're only able to have

about half of it on display at any one time," says Marianne McEvoy, the Museum curator. "We rotate items in and out of storage."

The Back Story

The original business was founded by Earl Dawson in 1938 as a retail store that included a bustling soda fountain. A fire destroyed the business in 1957, but it re-opened a year later under the direction of Devere Dawson and his wife Pauline, who ran it for five decades before it was bought by Russell and Jane Stevens in 1994.

The Stevenses transformed it into a restaurant and operated it for 10 years before selling it to Bill Gannon, the founder and owner of Gannon Broadcasting and other Grayling businesses.

"We ran it for a year, then closed for 18 months to make renovations," he recalls. "We expanded the seating to 110 seats. The most important thing we wanted to do was upgrade the building, but we didn't want

to destroy the feeling of the original soda fountain atmosphere."

An avid collector, Gannon later bought The Bottle Cap Museum (a sprawling 7,000-piece Coke collection) from Bill Hicks, who had operated the museum in the tiny village of Sparr for a decade.

Collecting vintage Coke items has been a popular pastime almost since the refreshing beverage was first sold in May 1886 by John Stith Pemberton, a pharmacist in Atlanta, GA.

The growing International Coca-Cola Collectors Club boasts a membership of 5,000 Coke-heads representing 28 countries.

Over the years, Gannon has added over 3,000 more Coke items to the inventory, and he displays it proudly. Gannon and McEvoy are siblings, and he says the Museum came together mostly because of her efforts.

"We're one of the few museums with no admission fee," says McEvoy, who lives in Traverse City and commutes to Grayling a few





Photo-Bottle Cap Museum

Workers bustle around the authentic soda fountain, preparing hand-dipped ice cream, shakes, sodas and sundaes for visitors. The Dawson & Stevens Classic '50s Diner & Soda Fountain, in Grayling, is open Sunday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Friday-Saturday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. For information, call 989-348-2111 or visit bottlecapmuseum.com.

times a week to work on the collection. “Bill wants to keep it that way. He wants to make sure it’s accessible to the community.”

What’s Cookin’?

But the amazing Coke collection is not the only thing that draws visitors from as far away as Japan, Kenya, New Zealand and Russia. Under the direction of manager Laura Serum, Dawson & Stevens serves up some serious diner food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The lunch bunch can choose from 20 different sandwiches named after pop songs and personalities from the '50s and '60s. Dinners are named after popular '50s and '60s dances, such as “The Stroll,” (fried butterfly shrimp) “The Sock Hop,” (beef and shrimp), and “The Hustle,” (ham steak platter).

The authentic vintage soda fountain is ringed by shiny chrome stools where guests

enjoy hand-dipped ice cream, shakes, malts, sodas and 12 specialty sundaes.

Between the vast Coke collection and tasty diner cuisine, Dawson & Stevens draws major crowds, according to McEvoy. “We have a large number of bus tours, senior citizen

groups, birthday parties, and school classes that visit,” she says. “All we ask is that they call ahead for a reservation so we can best accommodate them.”

Another Restaurant

Just a few doors down, the Bear’s Den Pizzeria is another restaurant Gannon owns. He named it in honor of Fred Bear, a Grayling resident who turned his passion for archery into the Bear Archery company, whose revolutionary bow designs made him an industry leader. Bear was recognized in *Life* magazine and traveled the world on hunting trips, but McEvoy explains that it was his work for wildlife management and the sport of bow hunting that made his face familiar to most every hunter.

“Bill wanted to keep the Fred Bear name and memory in the forefront of Grayling’s history,” McEvoy adds. “He also wanted the younger generation to know about the great, kind, world-renowned man that Fred Bear was and all that he accomplished from this small town of Grayling.”

Al Parker is a freelance writer living in Traverse City and Nevada.

Opposite: Vintage items lining the Diner’s Museum walls are part of northern Michigan’s largest privately-owned collection of all things Coke.

Right: Kitchen Manager Laura Serum whips up an old-fashioned malt.



Life Is Grand

We represent one-third of the population, and our numbers are growing by 1.7 million each year. We're fit, wired and connected, and we're confident we can do a better job than we did when we were younger.

Call us Nana, Mimi, Oma, Boppa, Grampy or Pops. We are America's 70 million grandparents, and—according to a 2009 Grandparents.com survey—we're having the time of our lives. I'm proud to be numbered among the 72 percent of that happy bunch who describe grandparenting as just, well, *grand*.

If we could change one thing, we'd have more time. With 60 percent of us still working full- or part-time, we struggle to carve out enough hours to spend with our grandkids. And for many of us, that won't change anytime soon. It seems the average age of grandparents in America today is 48. Oh my.

Nevertheless, we're a determined bunch. Seventy percent of us see our grandchildren at least once a week, and 81 percent include grandchildren in part or all of our summer vacations. Nearly three-quarters of us care for our grandchildren on a regular basis, with a growing number taking over primary care for them.

With all this togetherness, no wonder conflict arises from time to time. Generational divides and personal styles have always caused disagreements over areas such as food, sleep, discipline and more. Smart grandparents navigate these differences carefully and with a generous dose of respect, which isn't always easy. We've learned a lot from our past mistakes, and we're confident we could do it all better the second time around.

One area that shouldn't have to cause conflict is safety. While I sometimes wonder if today's parents go overboard in protecting their children from harm, it's hard to deny that increased attention to safety and accident prevention have saved the lives of many thousands of children. So, new grandparents, listen up: Here are a few changes affecting the way we care for kids today.

Car seats – Laws regarding vehicle restraints for children have changed dra-

matically. In Michigan today, a child restraint system is required for any child who is seven years and younger and less than 57

inches. Children three years and younger must be in the rear seat if one is available.

Infant sleep positions – The issue of whether an infant should sleep on her stomach or back has been raging for years. Current thinking is that "back is best" in preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Also, never lay a baby in a crib with heavy, fluffy pillows or blankets. A firm surface without any items that may fall or roll onto the baby is best.

Lead exposure – We know now that children exposed to lead can experience learning disabilities, behavioral problems, mental retardation, seizures, and even death. Grandparents can help by blocking access to peeling paint or chewable surfaces painted with lead-based paint. They can also regularly wash children's hands and toys, wet-mop floors and horizontal surfaces and prevent children from playing in bare soil. They can also check the Consumer Product Safety Commission recall list at cpsc.gov for products that contain lead.

Food rules – Children's immature immune systems need extra protection from

bacteria and pathogens adults might resist. And since we know more about how to prevent food allergies, it's important to keep up with new guidelines on when to introduce new foods (it's later than you might think).

Some things about grandparenting never change. Our adult kids still expect us to model good relationships and offer time and support. And stuff, of course. According to surveys, grandparents still know how to spoil the kids they love. With grandparents controlling 75 percent of the nation's wealth, we are spending \$52 billion every year on our grandchildren alone. Not to mention the ways we pitch in to support the day-to-day needs of our adult children for housing, education or health care.

Best of all, our generation is still offering up the best recession-proof gifts we've got. As one mom put it: "Our kids love that there are four adults who aren't their parents who just melt when they're around. They have a relationship with their grandparents that isn't based on child care or discipline. ... They have a love that is based on 100 percent acceptance."



Writer Linda Wacyk with her 10-month-old granddaughter, Annie.

Resources Some 6.2 million of all U.S. households today are multigenerational, up from 5 million in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey. In Michigan, more than 70,000 grandparents are responsible for the grandchildren who live with them. A number of organizations offer information, support, and even legal advice:

- Grandparents.com offers articles, activities, gift ideas, and more.
- iParenting.com's GrandparentsToday.com has informative articles and expert Q&A, as well as a variety of discussion boards perfect for grandparents.
- The Kinship Care Resource Center – A nonprofit through Michigan State University that provides a centralized location where Michigan relative caregivers for children and professionals can receive assistance. kinship.msu.edu/; 800-535-1218
- Generations United (GU) – Supports public policies that assist family caregivers of all types in caring for family members. gu.org
- American Association of Retired Persons – Provides resources and information for grandparents, including those who are raising grandchildren alone. aarp.org/families/grandparents



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Walloon Lake Inn's Grand Marnier Sabayon Sauce

- 4 egg yolks
- 1/3 c. sugar
- 3 T. Grand Marnier® or other orange-flavored liqueur
- 1 c. whipping cream

Beat egg yolks, sugar and Grand Marnier in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat for 12 minutes or until thickened to the consistency of a thin batter. Remove from heat; chill, covered, 2 hours or more. Beat whipping cream in a chilled bowl until stiff peaks form. Fold in chilled egg mixture. Serve over sliced strawberries or other fresh fruit.

Bonnie Bourn, Constantine

Famous Hot Dog Sauce

- 1 1/2 lb. ground bologna
- 1 1/2 c. catsup
- 3 c. tomato juice
- 1 T. chili powder
- 1/2 c. sugar
- 1 T. celery seed

Combine ingredients in a saucepan. Simmer 2 hours.

June Dougherty, Evart

Red Pepper Sauce

- 1 T. butter
- 1 lg. red pepper, chopped
- 1 T. chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, sliced
- 1 c. dry white wine
- 1/2 c. chicken stock
- 1 c. heavy cream

Melt butter over medium-low heat, in a

heavy-gauge, 2-quart saucepan. Add red pepper, onion and garlic; cook until tender, but not brown. Add wine and chicken stock; heat to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes. Add cream, cook until volume is reduced to half. Transfer mixture to food processor; purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper. Serve hot or cold with fish, vegetables or pasta.

Emmajean Bowerman, Lake Isabella

Butterscotch Sauce

- 1/2 c. butter
- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. whipping cream
- 1/2 t. vanilla

In a saucepan, cook butter and brown sugar until bubbly. Add whipping cream; cook until sauce sheets from the spoon. Remove from heat; add vanilla. Serve with ice cream, apple desserts, cheesecake, etc.

Nancy Schneider, Thompsonville

Creamy Spaghetti Sauce

- 4 c. cherry tomatoes
- 1 t. dried basil
- 1 t. Italian seasoning
- 1/2 t. kosher salt
- 1/4 t. pepper
- 1/2 c. olive oil
- 1 c. sour cream

Spread cherry tomatoes in a 9x13-inch

baking pan; drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle seasonings over tomatoes. Using your hands, mix everything together in the pan. Bake uncovered at 385° for 15-20 minutes. As soon as tomatoes start to crack or burst, remove from oven. Pour mixture into a food processor or blender; blend until smooth. Pour mixture into a pot and add sour cream. Heat over low heat, stirring well until mixture is creamy. Salt and pepper to taste. Use this sauce for chicken Parmesan or add a pound of browned ground beef to make spaghetti sauce.

Danielle Cochran, Grayling

Seafood Sauce

- 1 c. mayonnaise
- 2 T. anchovy paste
- 2 T. chili sauce
- 2 T. tarragon vinegar
- 1/4 c. tomato catsup
- lemon juice and pepper, as desired

Combine all ingredients; mixing well. Chill before serving.

Nancy Krzykwa, Alto

Sour Cream Cucumber Sauce

- 3 green onions
- 1 lg. cucumber
- 2 T. lemon juice
- 2 c. sour cream
- salt and pepper

Mince onions. Peel and chop cucumber. Mix onion and cucumber with lemon juice and fold into sour cream. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with poached salmon or any broiled or barbecued fish.

Nancy Tower, Alto

Jeweled Lemon Sauce

- 1/2 c. sugar
- 2 T. cornstarch
- 1 1/4 c. water
- 1/3 c. bottled lemon juice
- 2 T. butter
- 1/2 c. maraschino cherries, quartered

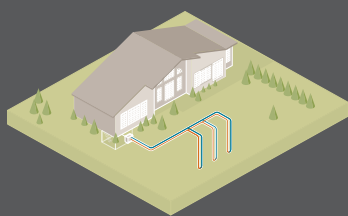
In a saucepan, combine sugar and cornstarch; gradually stir in water. Cook, stirring constantly, until thick and clear. Remove from heat and add lemon juice and butter. Stir in quartered cherries. Serve warm with cake, tarts, ice cream, etc.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

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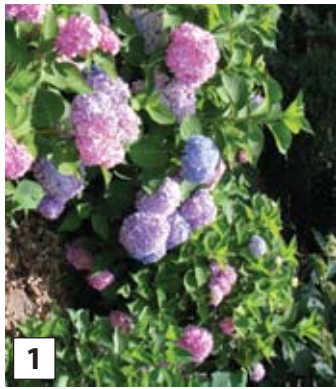
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Growing Luscious Hydrangeas in Michigan

I'm into low-maintenance gardening. If a plant can't make it with adequate food and water, it's out of my garden. But I do confess to having one exception...hydrangeas...in particular *Hydrangea macrophylla*, with their eye-grabbing, massive flower heads. This doesn't make much sense given my sandy, dry soil, but after years of experimenting I have a bountiful hydrangea bed.

There are basically two types: those that bloom on old wood, meaning that the buds set the previous growing season and must be able to survive over the winter, and those that bloom on new wood, meaning the buds are set on new growth in the current growing season and don't have to survive a Michigan winter.

In Michigan, the easiest hydrangeas to grow are those that bloom on new wood such as *Hydrangea arborescens* (Smoothleaf Hydrangea). This is a fast-growing shrub that reaches 3- to 5-feet tall and wide. White flowers appear in late June through September on new wood. These flowers are great for drying, and the plant can be cut to the ground in late fall or early spring. The best-loved of this species is "Annabelle," with spectacular white flowers. It grows very well in all Michigan hardiness zones from 3 through 6, and is not fussy about soil and only requires watering during dry periods. It can be grown in full sun to part shade.

The big news this spring is a new cultivar of "Annabelle," with pink blooms called "Invincibelle Spirit™" by Proven Winners™. "Invincibelle Spirit" is extremely hardy and easy to grow, it will bloom year after year without the special pampering required by other hydrangeas," comments Tim Woods of Spring Meadow Nurseries in Grand Haven. Woods is also the product development and marketing manager for Proven Winners.

Hydrangea paniculata (panicle hydrangea) is another great type for Michigan, since it also blooms on new wood and has growing conditions similar to *Hydrangea arborescens*. It is a fast-growing shrub that reaches 6 to 15 feet, depending on the variety. Its flowers appear on panicles 6 to 12 inches long.

Another great new variety is Proven Winners' "Pinky Winky" (USDA Zone 4), which has two-toned pink and white flower heads and blooms in mid-summer. "Tardiva," with white flowers and a tinge of pink, is another popular variety.

Then we come to the prima donnas of the hydrangea world, *Hydrangea macrophylla* (bigleaf hydrangea) with their large, luscious flowers. These blooming beauties demand much more from Michigan gardeners in order to be good performers. Hydrangea macrophylla's flowers are either mopheads or lace-caps. Plants grow 3 to 6 feet, and require adequate moisture and fertile soil. Up until about six years ago, these hydrangeas only bloomed on old wood, making it almost impossible to grow in Michigan if you were not in hardiness Zone 6. But a breakthrough came with the introduction of a variety called "Endless Summer™" (Zone 5), the first of this type to bloom on new and old wood. Since then, a number of new varieties have come out that bloom on both new and old wood, such as Proven Winners' "City Line™" and "Let's Dance™" series.

The key to success with these hydrangeas

is careful site selection—one that is protected from the western sun and winds, provides good winter protection, and has fertile, somewhat moist, well-drained soil. After placing "Endless Summer" plants in numerous spots without a lot of luck, I finally settled on a fertile stretch of soil near a garage that faces east and is close to a water source. It provides plenty of morning to midday sun while sheltering the plants from the harsh western sun. Contrary to popular belief, these hydrangeas don't require a lot of fertilizer. One application of a good all-round fertilizer to the surrounding soil in the spring will do the trick. Nor do they require moist conditions; let them dry out, but not wilt. I wait until spring to prune back any dead wood and only after I've removed the 12-16 inches of chopped leaf mulch that I applied in late October (or before the first hard frost). The key here is leaving the mulch on the plants until all chance of a spring frost has passed. In Zone 5 that is around May 15. If it looks like there's a chance of a late frost after I've removed the mulch in mid-May, I cover the plants with sheets. Follow these tips and you, too, can enjoy these eye-grabbing hydrangeas.

Rita C. Henehan is an author, freelance writer and photographer. Her book, "The Michigan Gardener's Companion: An Insider's Guide to Gardening in the Great Lakes State," is available in bookstores.

1. "Endless Summer" was the first mophead *Hydrangea macrophylla* that could be grown in Michigan's Zone 5. Their color is determined by soil pH. Low pH (acidic soil) creates blue flowers; high pH (alkaline soil) creates pink.
2. "Annabelle," with its huge white flowers, is very easy to grow in all of Michigan (Zones 3–6).
3. New this spring is "Invincibelle Spirit" (Zone 3–6), by Proven Winners. With pink blossoms, its flower heads are slightly smaller than its sister plant, "Annabelle."
4. "Pinky Winky" (Zone 4) has two-toned pink and white panicle-shaped blooms and is easy to grow in our state.

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Enjoy the Journey



Trains can provide your vacation transportation or be the focal point of your trip. **Chelsey Simpson**

In America's less populous regions, west of the Eastern seaboard, train travel occupies a place in many people's hearts—but not in their daily lives. Passenger trains are the stuff of folk songs, Western legends and bandit tales; cars and planes are the way we get around. When it comes to vacation planning, however, trains shouldn't be overlooked. They can be a cheaper, faster and less-stressful way to get from point A to point B, but most train enthusiasts will tell you it's the journey in between that really matters.

Why Trains? "I think every reason you would be going down the Interstate highway is a reason you would be riding Amtrak," says Marc Magliari, a media-relations manager for Amtrak. "In a lot of places and a lot of ways, we make more sense than driving." He notes that some people ride the trains because it's cheaper; but others are traveling upscale.

Amtrak, the nation's primary passenger-rail provider, operates 21,000 route miles in 46 states. For many riders, reaching one of Amtrak's 500 destinations is the main goal, while others are simply along for the ride and the scenery. When it comes to sightsee-

ing, there are also a number of non-Amtrak excursion trains operating across the country, such as the Pikes Peak Cog Railway and the Branson Scenic Railway.

Michael Gleason, owner and editor of TrainTraveling.com, offers a wealth of information about excursion trains and Amtrak. He also sees good reasons to take to the rails.

"Some people will go anywhere just to ride a train," he says. "Some people have never liked flying, and some feel flying is just getting worse and worse. There are destinations that you can get to faster on a train, by the time you wait at the airport, get your luggage and make your way into the city."

Planes allow you to cross the continent in a matter of hours, but if your trip isn't that far or you aren't in a hurry, taking a train could be a good alternative and a focal point for your next vacation. Here are some things to consider:

Time When you weigh the duration of a train journey against a comparable flight, make sure you consider how early you will have to arrive at the airport, as well as its location. While you don't want to invite the kind

of cinematic drama that comes with arriving at the last minute and running to catch your train, it also isn't necessary to arrive more than 30 minutes early for Amtrak service in most situations. And while airports are usually on the outskirts of cities, train stations are often in the heart of downtown.

Amtrak is an especially good alternative for flights with an in-air time of one hour or less, which means train travel might be a real time-saver if you plan to visit multiple cities within a region. For example, New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., are all served by frequent rail service, and trips between each city take only two to four hours.

Money Traveling round-trip on Amtrak doesn't always come out cheaper than driving or flying, and there are often far fewer scheduling options. The real bargain aspect of rail travel is that long-haul trips can serve as your transportation, entertainment and lodging all in one. For example, if you really want to see America, you could buy two tickets with a Superliner Roomette (sleeping car for two) on the Southwest Chief from Chicago to Los Angeles. If you booked several months out for a trip in mid-July, the one-way cost would be about \$550 for the 43-hour journey. If you drove the same route, you would have to figure in gas prices and hotel stays, the view might not be as scenic, and you would have to do the driving.

Sleeping cars are an especially good deal for couples and families, because Amtrak charges by the room for sleepers, not by the person. And speaking of families, traveling Amtrak with kids can be another dime saver:

Train S

Object of the game:
Move your game marker from one end of the train to the other by spotting things outside your car or train windows.

Rules:
Find something (like coins) to serve as game markers. At the count of three, players start trying to spot one of the objects listed in the first car. As soon as

Children through the age of 15 receive half-price fare.

If traveling light is not your style, you will be comforted to know that Amtrak allows as many as three checked and two carry-on bags on some of its routes, and three additional pieces can be checked for just \$10 each. Unusual items, like ski equipment and bicycles, can also be checked on many trains without an extra charge. Food and even alcohol are also allowed as carry-ons, so plan a picnic, bring a corkscrew and make the ride a party.

Intangibles Trains are an experience. Many Amtrak routes offer a real departure from the billboard-lined Interstate, charting a course instead through the backyards, small towns and wild spaces of America. For example, Amtrak's California Zephyr passes through two mountain ranges and the Painted Desert; the Adirondack and the Vermonter are prime leaf-peeper routes in the fall; and the Empire Builder passes through Glacier National Park.

Comfort is another plus of train travel.

"Our coach seating is comparable to most airlines' first class, and our business seating exceeds that," Magliari says.

Food and restroom breaks, and general leg-stretching, are also easier and more entertaining on a train than in an airplane or car.

While taking a stroll, don't be surprised if a fellow passenger strikes up a conversation. Magliari says the dining car is often a hotspot for community building.

"Everyone's favorite first question is, 'Where are you going?'" he says. "And their

second favorite question will be, 'Is this your first trip?'"

Tips When it comes to planning a trip, Amtrak.com and TrainTraveling.com are both great resources. Amtrak offers an interactive route atlas and a space to order free planning publications. The site helps new travelers visualize their experience with helpful information about stations and services, and offers a virtual tour of each sleeping-cabin option.

Information about deals and discounts is also available at Amtrak.com. Military personnel, veterans and AAA members are just a few of the groups eligible for discounts. Magliari says booking well in advance of your trip is a good way to snag the best fares.

TrainTraveling.com has information about Amtrak, excursion trains and regional commuter trains. You can browse routes by region or state, and each listing offers a short description and a link for more information.

If you're taking a longer trip, research public transportation options in your destination city or make plans to rent a car. Amtrak recommends Washington, D.C., New York City, Orlando, Seattle, Boston, Chicago, Portland and San Diego as the cities with the most attractions easily accessed by foot.

Or instead of one big destination, chart a path that includes several stops. Start in Chicago and stop in Memphis, TN, for some barbecue and Elvis; head on to and Jackson, MS, for culture and civil rights history; then stay a few days in New Orleans before heading back. Don't overlook the value of small towns, like Dodge City, KS, which has a lot of Wild West history, and Ardmore, OK, where you'll find a toy and action-figure museum that kids of all sizes will love.

Be aware, however, that there isn't regular service in many smaller communities, and you might have to get on or off the train at inconvenient times in some places. The westbound train into Dodge City, for example, arrives just before 6 a.m., and the eastbound train rolls in after midnight.

Magliari recommends first-time riders, especially those who will be traveling with children, take a day trip first before committing to a long or overnight journey. Amtrak is making improvements, however, that should help the miles fly by: Soon all of their trains will have electric outlets at every seat so laptops, DVD players and other entertainment devices can be used easily.

Traveling by rail certainly isn't for everyone. But that could also be said of traveling in general. Long train trips are full of quiet

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potting

you see one, call out its name and place your marker on the yellow car, then start looking for objects listed on the blue car. If two players see the same object, the first one who calls it out gets to move their piece while the second player keeps looking. You only have to spot one object in each car. The first player to reach the engine and see one of the items listed there wins.

moments when the soft hum and sway of the cars is the only thing of interest. But if you don't mind getting lost in scenery and you have a companion or two worth keeping, climb aboard, settle in, and enjoy the journey.

It's Spring – Turtles are Out & About

For winter-battered survivors looking for proof that we have climbed out of that long, cold Michigan season, this quote from the “Song of Solomon” points to a proof-positive sign.

“...The time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”

True, most would be hard put to describe what a turtle's voice sounds like, but seeing a turtle out and about again is worth a million vocal sound tracks because, if you are seeing turtles again, winter is history.

Our native woodland Indians had many colorful stories about wildlife and the turtle was often a subject. One story said a turtle's back provided the base for the first land formed in the midst of the Great Lakes. Mackinac Island takes its native name from a word in the Ottawa language meaning “Great Turtle.”

Turtles have been with us a long time—even before there was an “us.” Fossil remains date back about 225 million years to the late Triassic period. For millions of years turtles shared the planet with dinosaurs; but unlike dinosaurs, turtles survived the ecological and climatic changes that caused the extinction of dinosaurs and many other life forms.

Michigan has a variety of turtles. You will find them in a mix of habitats, from wetlands to uplands and sandy sites. Each habitat niche satisfies the special living, breeding, and feeding needs of each of the 10 Michigan turtles. If we change these habitats through development, chemical contamination, or wetland drainage, the future of many turtles will be jeopardized. In fact, a number of specific turtle species are listed by Michigan as rare or threatened by the loss of vital habitats.

As spring warms things up, water-based turtles do what many turtles like doing the best – basking. A common sight around ponds and slow-moving streams is a bunch of turtles that have climbed onto a log or partly submerged limb to soak up the sun.



The boy is holding a painted turtle. Inset photo is an Eastern box turtle.



From late May into early July, turtles begin to breed. The females will leave the water and seek a sunny spot with little or no vegetation and moist, but not saturated, sand or soil. There they dig shallow nest cavities with their hind feet and deposit their eggs, which may be round or oval with hard or flexible shells.

Each nest is then refilled by the female with excavated material, and the eggs are abandoned to fate. Many (probably most) turtle eggs are eaten by raccoons or other land predators within a few days of being laid.

The surviving eggs will hatch in two to three months. In most cases, the young head immediately for cover in shallow water (aquatic species) or leaf litter (box turtles). Young painted turtles have the ability to withstand partial freezing and often remain in the nest over winter, emerging in spring.

A look at a turtle's beak tells what it eats. Flesh-eating turtles have hook shaped beaks that easily slice and tear food apart. Turtles that eat vegetation or shellfish have flat, wide beaks useful for mashing food. A few species are largely carnivorous (musk, map, Blanding's, and soft-shell turtles). Most, however, eat both plants and animals.

Young sliders, painted, Eastern box, spotted, and wood turtles consume mostly insects and other small animals, but eat more plants and fruits as adults.

Predacious and opportunistic snapping turtles will occasionally capture fish and young waterfowl.

Box turtles, the only terrapin among Michigan turtles, are land-roaming creatures more at home in woods than ponds. Perhaps the greatest danger for roaming box turtles is in crossing a road during warm weather. These turtles are the frequent loser in this game of highway life and death.

If you slow and stop to let a box turtle cross the road and decide to pick one up to move it safely to the land side, make certain you take it to the side it was headed for. This critter is one stubborn traveler; put it off on the side it came from and it will stubbornly turn and head right back in its original direction – and back into danger from passing cars.

The box turtle's range is shrinking in many of the upper Great Lakes states. In Michigan it is listed as a species of “special concern,” – one step below threatened.

All Michigan turtles are protected from commercial taking, with the exception of snapping turtles, which may be taken under a DNR fishing license. It is said that, depending on what cut of the snapper you eat, it may taste like chicken, pork, steak or lobster. Blanding's, Eastern box, wood, and spotted turtles are completely protected.

When you again see turtles out and about, don't expect to hear them speak. Their message is visual and nonverbal—but it speaks of spring and warm weather once again, a message many of us are happy to get.

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What Members Collect



Jackie Timmerman collects donkeys, including live ones. She has an adopted and foster donkey from Turning Pointe Donkey Rescue, and one that was given to her.



Linda Hodges has over 100 milk glass bud vases she has collected from yard sales. She says its surprising how few are alike.



Along with old Michigan boat licenses pictured here, John Andree of De Tour Village collects boat safety inspection tags and recreational vessel stickers.



Janet Ricard of Baldwin has over 200 items in her Snoopy collection.

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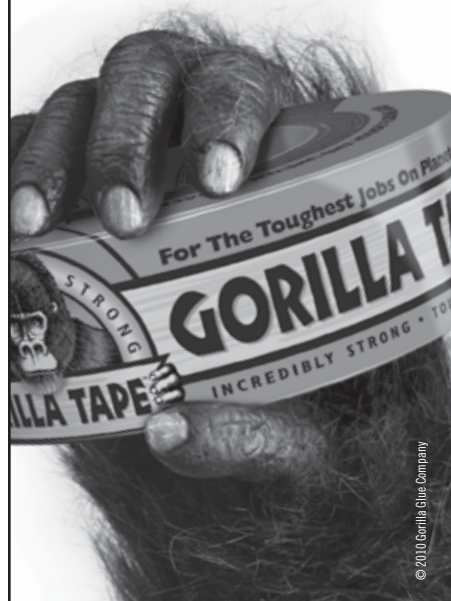
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STATE OF MICHIGAN

BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

NOTICE OF HEARING FOR THE CUSTOMERS OF MIDWEST ENERGY COOPERATIVE CASE NO. U-15667-R

- Midwest Energy Cooperative will reconcile its 2009 power supply cost recovery (PSCR) costs and revenues, and increase its revenues through its times interest earned ratio (TIER) ratemaking mechanism, if the Michigan Public Service Commission approves its request.
- The information below describes how a person may participate in this case.
- You may call or write Midwest Energy Cooperative, 901 East State Street, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031, (800) 492-5989 for a free copy of its application. Any person may review the application at the offices of Midwest Energy Cooperative.
- The first public hearing in this matter will be held:

DATE/TIME: May 25, 2010, at 9:00 a.m. This hearing will be a prehearing conference to set future hearing dates and decide other procedural matters.

BEFORE: Administrative Law Judge Daniel E. Nickerson, Jr.

LOCATION: Michigan Public Service Commission, 6545 Mercantile Way, Suite 7, Lansing, Michigan

PARTICIPATION: Any interested person may attend and participate. The hearing site is accessible, including handicapped parking. Persons needing any accommodation to participate should contact the Commission's Executive Secretary at (517) 241-6160 in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

The Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) will hold a public hearing to consider the April 14, 2010, application of Midwest Energy Cooperative (Midwest) to reconcile its 2009 PSCR plan. In 2009, Midwest experienced an overcollection in the amount of \$240,007, with a remaining overcollection from prior years of \$1,234,099. As a result of rolling in a projected \$786,256 overcollection in its 2010 PSCR Plan, in Case No. U-16036, the anticipated remaining net overcollection is \$687,850 and will be rolled-into Midwest's 2011 PSCR Plan, to be filed by September 30, 2010. Midwest is also seeking to increase revenues by \$1,636,295, or 2.68%, through its TIER Ratemaking Mechanism for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2009.

All documents filed in this case shall be submitted electronically through the Commission's E-Dockets website at: michigan.gov/mpscedockets. Requirements and instructions for filing can be found in the User Manual on the E-Dockets help page. Documents may also be submitted, in Word or PDF format, as an attachment to an email sent to mpscedockets@michigan.gov. If you require assistance prior to e-filing, contact Commission staff at (517) 241-6180 or by email at mpscedockets@michigan.gov.

Any person wishing to intervene and become a party to the case shall electronically file a petition to intervene with this Commission by May 18, 2010. (Interested persons may elect to file using the traditional paper format.) The proof of service shall indicate service upon Midwest's attorney, Joseph J. Baumann, at Dykema Gossett PLLC, Capitol View, 201 Townsend Street, Suite 900, Lansing, Michigan 48933.

Any person wishing to make a statement of position without becoming a party to the case, may participate by filing an appearance. To file an appearance, the individual must attend the hearing and advise the presiding administrative law judge of his or her wish to make a statement of position. All information submitted to the Commission in this matter will become public information: available on the Michigan Public Service Commission's website, and subject to disclosure.

Requests for adjournment must be made pursuant to the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure R 460.17315 and R 460.17335. Requests for further information on adjournment should be directed to (517) 241-6060.

A copy of the Midwest's request may be reviewed on the Commission's website at michigan.gov/mpscedockets, and at the office of Midwest Energy Cooperative, 901 E. State Street, Cassopolis, MI. For more information on how to participate in a case, you may contact the Commission at the above address or by telephone at (517) 241-6180.

Jurisdiction is pursuant to 1909 PA 106, as amended, MCL 460.551 et seq.; 1919 PA 419, as amended, MCL 460.51 et seq.; 1939 PA 3, as amended, MCL 460.1 et seq.; 1982 PA 304, as amended, MCL 460.6h et seq.; 1969 PA 306, as amended, MCL 24.201 et seq.; and the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, as amended, 1999 AC, R 460.17101 et seq.

Share your story and you might win a

Midwest Home Energy Makeover



"Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" is an ABC Sunday night TV sensation that takes a deserving family on an emotional journey from the demolition of an existing home through the building of a brand new one.

We're not ABC and we don't have Ty Pennington waiting in the wings, but Midwest Energy Cooperative invites members to nominate their home and family for our first Midwest Home Energy Makeover project. Our plan is to update the overall energy efficiency of an existing home, giving a deserving family an opportunity to enjoy increased

comfort in a more energy efficient environment. And while it may not have quite the emotional punch of the ABC version, we do believe that it will make a significant difference in the life of a Midwest Family.

Here's the plan. We are inviting nominations from our members for a home energy makeover. A team of Midwest employees and volunteers will review all nominations and select five, based on the application. Our team will conduct an on-site energy audit of the five finalists and select one as our winner. We will work with our family through the summer and early fall as we prepare for an

October workday blitz, during which volunteers and contractors will come together to implement the home makeover plan.

Do you have a good story to share as to why your home and family should receive a Midwest Home Energy Makeover? Share it! Please provide written answers to the following questions. Supporting documentation is not required, but we welcome photos, videos or anything else that helps tell your story.

Completed applications must be submitted by June 30, 2010, for full consideration. You may also submit your application online at TeamMidwest.com.

Midwest Home Energy Makeover Application

Name: _____ Midwest Account #: _____

Address/City/State/Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Do you own or rent? _____

How long have you lived at this residence? _____

In what year was the home built? _____

What is the square footage of your home? _____

What type of home heating system do you have?

What is the age of your home heating system? _____

What type of home cooling system do you have?

What is the age of your home cooling system? _____

Do you have duct work? _____

Is your water heater gas or electric? _____

What is the age of your water heater? _____

Does your home have a basement or crawl space? _____

What type of insulation is in your home?

Have you ever conducted a home energy audit? _____

► Please include an essay that details why your home or family is deserving of a home energy makeover.

Please return completed application* by June 30, 2010, to:

Midwest Home Energy Makeover
P.O. Box 127
Cassopolis, MI 49031

**Incomplete applications will not be considered.*

Waste Not

When my parents lived in Ironwood, they remodeled an abandoned two-story farmhouse in their retirement years, starting around the time of the mid-'70s energy crisis. They did it in stages, tearing down walls, adding insulation, replacing leaky windows with top-of-the-line double-paned marvels, fixing the plumbing, replacing the roof. They created a fortress against the rugged winters that blew in from Lake Superior.

They were Depression kids and, like many others of that era, they knew how to get by with less, and by not wasting what they had. They weren't cheap, just smart. If we were as smart, we'd have been doing the same thing years ago. But energy got cheap and it didn't cost us much to waste it. So we did.

Now we need rebates from government and utilities to do the right thing.

There's an interesting business model. What business tries to get you to buy less of their products? Do farmers offer incentives to drink less milk or orange juice? Does Shell give you a rebate if you buy a fuel-slinging car?

In Michigan, you're paying a little extra on your bill so your co-op can offer state-mandated energy optimization programs designed to help you use less electricity. That's a good thing; there are many benefits to using less.

But many people, like Frank and Virginia Buda, learned early on how to use less, and they've been doing it for years, without incentives or rebates. A healthy frugality is built into their DNA.

Saving energy can be as simple as the suggestion of Thumb Electric member Dorothy Simmons of Millington, who writes:

"Why not make cupcakes instead of a cake? Cupcakes take 15 to 20 minutes to bake and a cake takes 27 to 30 minutes in the oven. You can save about 10 minutes of electricity."

Or, take Chuck and Kathy Titus of Johannesburg. The Great Lakes Energy members explain their frugality in a letter to *Country Lines*:

"I have been a customer of yours for some 30 years now and have always tried to use as little of your product as I possibly can—not because it isn't a good, quality product, but simply because I take great pleasure in saving money in any way I can. And this applies to not only electricity, but every form of energy or resource I consume, including propane, firewood, water and food. In fact, my wife of 14 months continually maintains I should write an instruction book on the subject since she is amazed at how little of each we use and the lengths I will go to save them.

"I was therefore pleased to read in Brian Sloboda's 'Killing Energy Vampire' article [February 2010] that the average electric co-op member consumes roughly 13,900 kWh per year, finally giving me something to compare my own figures with to see how I am doing. So, I went back through last year's electric bills and discovered that in 2009 I consumed 2,750 kWh, or roughly 20 percent of the national average. Not bad, huh? This is a result of turning off anything that uses electricity whenever not in use, purchasing Energy Star appliances with only the highest ratings, using only fluorescent lamps or LEDs, (thanks for the free bulbs by the way) and making certain nothing uses electricity unnecessarily through the use of eight separate outlet strips that are on only when in use. I must confess I could trim this even more by cutting back on the use of my Christmas lights, but I cannot seem to get over my childhood needs of seeing the house lit up in November and December (and part of January, to be honest).

"Although initially my primary consideration was my pocketbook, I have long since become a conservationist of the highest order due to my continued belief that life as we know it today in this nation of ours may very well become contingent upon our changing our lifestyles to suit the energy available instead of the other way around. I have a favorite saying about eating that goes, 'I remember wishing that I could afford to eat the way I wanted to. And now that I can finally afford to eat the way I want to, I cannot afford to eat the

way I want to.' Meaning, of course, there are ramifications to eating too many of the things we truly enjoy just as there will be consequences of our consuming and wasting too much of our resources needlessly. My wife and I lead a very satisfying and pleasurable lifestyle here while at the same time using as little of the earth's resources as possible.

"It has even become a pleasurable experience to see just how little we can get by with and my wife is now participating and seemingly caught up in the movement. We cook on a range with electronic burner ignition and in the winter take a great deal of pleasure cooking on the wood stove we heat with. We also heat most of our dish water on the wood stove and shower with a tankless water heater. And although we do heat with firewood we keep the temperature at 68 in the day time and lower at night, wearing more clothing to keep comfortable. We have even been known to snuggle together under a blanket while watching a movie, probably because we still like each other only having been married a year.

"So, I guess my purpose in writing is to say, 'keep up the good work of providing dependable, affordable electricity, and letting people know using less is a real necessity today and in the future.'"

Unlike Virginia and Frank, Kathy and Chuck, and Dorothy, too many of us never learned that energy efficiency is an investment that pays back. Now we have to be incentivized with our own money. Shame on us.



Mike Buda is the founding editor of Country Lines and continues to work on the magazine, as well as other activities of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. His parents now live near Minneapolis. Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com.

Soy

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STIR-FRY PORK AND VEGETABLES

2 tablespoons soybean oil
½ cup vertically sliced onions
2 cups (about ½ lb) Chinese pea pods
1 cup sweet red bell pepper, cubed
6 oz cooked pork, cut in 2-inch strips
½ cup sliced mushrooms
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger root
½ teaspoon sugar
Pepper to taste



Heat oil in large non-stick skillet or wok over medium-high heat about 1 minute or until hot. Add onions and stir-fry about 2 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and stir-fry about 5 minutes or until vegetables are crisp-tender and pork is thoroughly heated.

Makes 4 servings.

Per serving: 206 calories, 15.6 grams protein, 11.4 grams fat (50% calories from fat), 10.3 grams carbohydrates, 41 mg cholesterol, 2.6 grams fiber, 545 mg sodium.

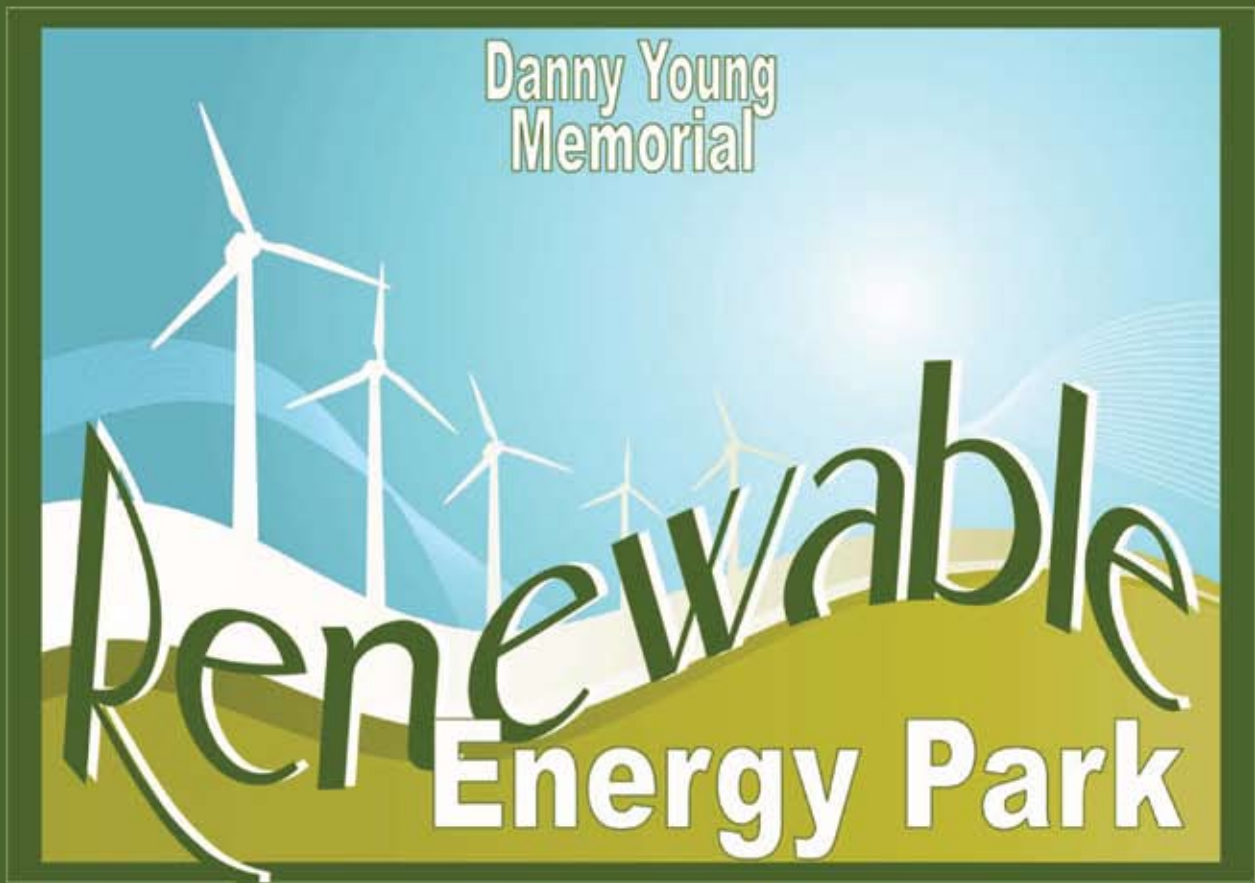
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