

Tips For Tenants

About 35% of Australians rent (rather than own) their home and this figure is rising in response to a number of external pressures, including housing affordability. Although tenants have limited options in terms of permanent fixtures, there are certainly options available for the environmentally savvy renter.

Before moving in

- Negotiate improvements before moving in.
- Look through your conditions report. It will discuss any necessary repairs to be undertaken by the landlord or agent, such as adequate oven seals, which are also environmentally beneficial.
- If appliances such as the hot water service are being replaced, negotiate for energy- and water-efficient fittings and appliances, low volatile organic compound paints or oiled timber floors.
- Negotiate cost-effective improvements such as roof insulation. The Australian Taxation Office provides deductions to landlords for energy-efficiency improvements, repairs and maintenance on rental properties. The property also has lower operating costs and this can improve its resale value.
- Negotiate to conduct improvements for a lower rent, or keep it at the same level for a minimum of three years in return for gradual energy- and water- efficiency improvements. Alternatively, offer to share a percentage cost of the improvements if you are renting for a minimum of three years (you can save in the long run if you stay at the property).

In your property

Note: improving or altering a dwelling requires the landlord's prior permission. Approach negotiations with a non-threatening, cooperative attitude, as you will have a higher chance of success.

- Undertake improvements that do not damage the property but which you can take with you at the end of your tenancy. These include water-efficient showerheads, energy-efficient light globes, door draught stoppers and movable blinds. You don't need permission to install these items, but if you are not sure then check with your property manager.
- Make sure your appliances are as energy efficient as possible. Bear in mind that it is often more environmentally friendly to keep your old appliances rather than replacing them with new ones, if they are still in working order.
- Set the cooling and heating thermostat to an eco-friendly level (18-20°C in winter and 24-26°C in summer).
- Invest in energy-efficient blackout curtains to keep the heat inside your home during the winter and to save on your heating bill.
- Seal all gaps around windows and light fixtures.
- Regularly clean your refrigerator (particularly the coils on the back) to keep it dust-free and working to its full potential.
- When buying paper products, ensure that they are recycled.
- Buy products that are made from sustainable, less-toxic ingredients.
- Place plants in your home to beautify it and improve the air quality.
- Unplug appliances when they are not in use.

The following is a link to 'The Victorian Smart Renters' Guide: Sustainable Living Tips for Renters'. I definitely recommend having a look, as it is very useful and easy to read:
<http://environmentvictoria.org.au/newsite/sites/default/files/useruploads/EV%20Renters%20Guide>