

cash back to go green

Ease your eco guilt and earn a range of rebates from the government when you install a rainwater tank, solar hot water, insulation or greywater system

WORDS LEE SUCKLING

You don't have to be an eco warrior to reap the benefits of living green. Using less water and energy is one of the simplest, quickest and most cost-effective ways to help the environment and save on bills. Better still, the Australian Government offers a range of monetary rebates (up to \$1000) for people who install renewable energy systems at home, so there's never been a better time to make your home a greener place. It's a complicated and ever-changing world, but we've done the hard work for you and compiled the available state and federal rebates. Here's how to save (and save and save)...



Rainwater tanks

Rainwater tanks are a great way to supply water to your home and garden – and save you money. Tanks that hold between 2000 and 3999 litres will attract a \$400 rebate, and tanks larger than 4000 litres could see \$500 back in your pocket. The rebate is available for above- or below-ground tanks and bladder storage systems. A rainwater tank plumbed into the house for use in toilets and the laundry will help save money on water bills, too.

Greywater tanks

By installing a greywater treatment system, most of the water you and your family use can be treated and reused in your bathroom, laundry and garden. "Greywater can form up to 80 per cent of waste water in your home; for a family of four, that's 640 of the 800-odd litres used each day," says Peter Norton-Baker of Water Plus. A rebate of \$500 is offered to households that install permanent greywater systems. "To claim it, households must install an internal greywater reuse and treatment system, permanently plumbed directly into the waste water pipes, and it must comply with governmental disinfection standards," says Stuart Logan of Enviro Friendly Products. Untreated greywater cannot be stored as it can turn septic. While the rebate is low compared to the purchase and installation costs of a greywater system (upwards of \$5000), "it's still something," says Stuart. "The savings come in lifestyle. When you get a second grab at 80 per cent of the water you've already paid for, you're getting a great annual payoff and you're helping Australia's sustainability effort by not needing to draw upon the rivers twice."

Household items

There are even a few rebates available for regular household items. Some states offer smaller rebates of between \$50-\$200 on dual-flush toilets and water-saving showerheads with WELS 3-star or better ratings. Garden products, such as compost and water controllers and timers, can also return up to \$100 after purchase. Visit livinggreener.gov.au for more information. >

Where to start

Get assessed "A sustainability assessment involves an assessor visiting your home and inspecting a range of energy and water systems to determine where improvements could be made," says architect Natasha Palich of Sense Architecture. To order a free Home Sustainability Assessment, call 1800 895 076 or visit livinggreener.gov.au.

A reason to go green

Upfront costs can stop people from making changes to use less water and energy. As an incentive, the government has launched the household Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme, with rebates that will encourage us to make our homes more efficient. Depending on the renewable system you install, the government offers up to \$1000 cash back. "Essentially, rebates are in place to drive the uptake of new green technology and make it more accessible," says Chris Barnett of architect firm Third Skin.

Rebates help make sustainable living affordable now and in the future. "If these rebates are taken up, eventually it should reduce not just our carbon footprint, but the need for a lot of government-driven infrastructure, making dams, power stations and water facilities less needed," explains architect Karen Kennedy of Eco-style.



PHOTOGRAPHY (THIS PAGE, TOP) SIMON KENNY (BOTTOM) CRAIG WALL PHOTOGRAPHY (OPPOSITE) CATH MUSCAT

Solar hot water systems

Heating water is the single largest source of emissions in our homes, equating to around 25 per cent of energy use. "When you replace a conventional electric storage system, a rebate of \$1000 is available to install a passive solar hot water system, or \$600 for a heat pump," says Alistair Duncan of Eco Living Centre. A solar hot water system provides a home with up to 90 per cent of its hot water needs from a free and renewable energy source. Plus, you'll save between \$500-\$700 each year on your electricity bills and be eligible for more cash back with Renewable Energy Certificates – an electronic form of currency initiated by the federal government (see below). Solar hot water systems also have a quick payback in electrical bill savings, as they save one-third of the power used by conventional systems.



PHOTOGRAPHY (OPPOSITE PAGE) RICHARD POWERS

Solar electricity

A photovoltaic (PV) solar system can generate electricity for your home using the sun's light, via solar panels on the roof. While the size you require depends on your energy consumption and the amount of sun your home receives, the most popular is the 1.5kW system, which will service around 30 per cent of the average Sydney household's

energy use over the course of a year. Under the government's new Solar Credits Scheme, homeowners who install solar systems will receive Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) to reimburse the system's cost. Surplus power can be pumped into the main electricity grid to supply other homes, reducing your electricity bill as the excess energy is credited back to you by your state government; this is known as the **feed-in tariff**. Electricity from the solar panels will rarely meet your entire electricity needs, but it can significantly reduce your usage of mains power and your electricity bills.

According to solarchoice.net.au, a 1.5kW system for an average household in NSW on a summer day can have a total benefit of up to \$5.52/day, and a 3kW system \$10.02/day; this will vary depending on where you live in Australia and your state government's feed-in tariff, which often changes. Your electricity supplier may contribute extra, reducing your bill further. Check with your electricity supplier.

Renewable Energy Certificates are not a rebate but can help to offset the cost of renewable energy in the home. Visit rec-registry.gov.au to use the federal government's REC calculator.

Claiming your rebate

You have up to six months after purchasing your system to claim a rebate, subject to eligibility terms and conditions – unless your home is new. New homes aren't eligible for most rebates. Federal rebate applications can be found at environment.gov.au or by calling 1800 808 571, or visit livinggreener.gov.au/rebates-assistance for more information. Visit your state or territory's website for conditions and claim information on state rebates.

REBATES

Solar hot water system & heat pump

What it does: A solar hot water system collects heat through tubes on the roof to heat water. A heat pump absorbs sun-warmed air, compresses and transfers it to heat water.
Average cost: Solar system: \$3500-\$9000, heat pump: \$3000-\$6000. **Federal rebate:** \$1000/solar hot water system, \$600/heat pump*.
State rebates: **ACT:** n/a; **NSW:** \$300 for a new solar or heat pump hot water system; **Vic:** regional \$400-\$1600 and metropolitan \$300-\$1500 for solar hot water system; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** \$500; **NT:** n/a; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** n/a. **Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) credit*:**
Try: Apricus GL 250 solar hot water system, \$3562, Energy Matters, 1300 727 151.



Rainwater tank**

What it does: A rainwater tank harvests rain for domestic (non-drinking) uses, such as flushing toilets, washing cars and clothes, and watering gardens.
Average cost: Approximately \$3500 to \$4000 for a 3500-litre rainwater tank (excludes installation).
Federal rebate: up to \$500*. **State rebates:**
ACT: Up to \$1000; **NSW:** up to \$1500; **Vic:** up to \$1000; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** Up to \$1000; **NT:** Up to \$500; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** Up to \$500.
Try: Tankmasta 5000L Tall domestic water tank, \$925, Enviro Friendly Products, (02) 6282 6266, envirofriendly.com.



Greywater treatment system & greywater diversion device**

What it does: A greywater treatment system collects, treats and disinfects your greywater; a greywater diversion device diverts water from a plumbing fixture directly to your garden.
Average cost: Greywater treatment system, from \$5000-\$10,000; diversion device, \$500-\$3000 (both excluding installation).
Federal rebate: up to \$500*.
State rebates: **ACT:** Up to \$1000; **NSW:** up to \$1500; **Vic:** \$500; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** Up to \$1000; **NT:** Up to \$500; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** Up to \$500.
Try: Greywater Gardener 230 diversion device, \$1950, Waterwise Systems, 1300 133 354, waterwise.com.



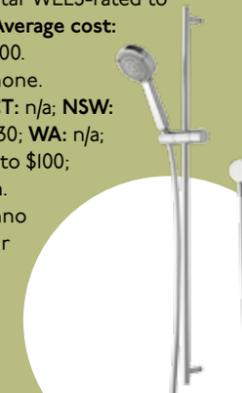
Solar electricity panels & PV system

What it does: Solar panels convert sunlight into clean electricity to power your home.
Average cost: Around \$11,000/1.5kW system fully installed. The \$6200 REC is processed by the supplier at purchase, meaning the out-of-pocket expense is \$5000.
Federal rebate: Around \$6200 worth of Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) credits per initial purchase of a 1.5kW system*.
State rebates: A 'feed-in tariff' towards your electricity bill that varies state to state (see 'Solar electricity, left').
Try: Sharp 1.5kW solar electricity system, \$4490 fully installed, Origin, 1300 791 468, originenergy.com.au.



Water-saving showerhead

What it does: Restricts the flow of water, but not pressure, through the showerhead, saving about 14,500 litres of water per household each year. Must be minimum 3-star WELS-rated to claim a rebate. **Average cost:** Around \$200-\$300.
Federal rebate: none.
State rebates: **ACT:** n/a; **NSW:** n/a; **Vic:** Up to \$30; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** \$30; **NT:** Up to \$100; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** n/a.
Try: Nikles Techno 95 Eco Rail 3-star WELS-rated showerhead, \$249, Reece, 1800 032 566, reece.com.au.



Insulation

What it does: Insulation reduces heat transfer through the roof, keeping your home warmer in winter and cooler in summer.
Average cost: For an average 110-120 square-metre house, it will cost around \$700 to \$800.
Federal rebate: Up to \$1000*.
State rebates: None.
Try: 'R3.5' ceiling batts, from \$624-\$728 for a 100-square-metre house, Bradford Insulation, 1300 850 305, bradfordinsulation.com.au.



Gas hot water system

What it does: Gas hot water systems provide a simple and economical way of heating water. The system must have a 5-star or higher energy rating to be eligible for the rebate.
Average cost: Varies depending on the size of the system. Expect to pay around \$1000.
Federal rebate: none.
State rebates: **ACT:** n/a; **NSW:** \$300; **Vic:** \$400; \$700/concession card holders, \$300/some apartment dwellers; **WA:** \$500/natural gas, \$700 for bottled LP gas; **SA:** n/a; **NT:** n/a; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** n/a.
Try: Bosch 26E 5.5-star gas hot water system, \$989, AGL, 131 766, www.agl.com.au/assist.



Washing machine

What it does: The washing machine is one of the biggest water guzzlers in the home. A water-efficient washer machine uses one-third the water of an older model.
Average cost: From \$1500 to \$2500.
Federal rebate: none.
State rebates: **ACT:** n/a; **NSW:** \$150 (min 5-star WELS rating); **Vic:** n/a; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** \$200 (min 4.5-star WELS rating); **NT:** \$150 (min 4-star WELS rating); **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** n/a.
Try: EWF1481 5-star WELS-rated washing machine, \$1529, Electrolux, 1300 363 640, electrolux.com.au.



Dual-flush toilet

What it does: Saves water by offering a half flush alongside a full flush, meaning you can save up to eight litres of water per flush. It must have a 4-star WELS rating or higher.
Average price: Around \$300.
Federal rebate: none.
State rebates: **ACT:** \$100; **NSW:** \$200; **Vic:** \$50; **WA:** n/a; **SA:** \$150; **NT:** Up to \$150, toilet retrofit up to \$200; **Tas:** n/a; **Qld:** n/a.
Try: Posh 'Dominique' WELS 4-star toilet, \$345.39, Reece, 1800 032 566, reece.com.au.



* Federal rebates are proposed to start from June 1, 2010. ** Rebate available on rainwater or greywater system.