

Eco-friendly home decorating made easy—and cheap



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Take a look around at some of the products being sold by your favourite retailers today and you'll see that "going green" isn't just a catch phrase any more—it's a way of living.

But living green isn't just about driving a hybrid or eating organic. It's now expanded into how we decorate our homes. In fact, there are more environmentally friendly home-decorating products to choose from than ever before.

That's because until a few years ago, if you wanted to decorate green you had to spend the green—cash that is. Today, however, many mainstream big box retailers and home furnishing and decor stores have taken notice of the surge in green decorating. In response, they now offer affordable green home-decorating products that once were only available from pricey specialty stores.

However, even though it's more affordable, there are still plenty of questions about what types of green home-decorating products are out there and what actually makes them green. Below are a few tips aimed at helping you navigate through the sometimes-overwhelming world of green home decorating.

Paint
One of the first things people

do when they redecorate is paint. And one of the easiest ways to incorporate green decorating into your home's decor is by using a paint that doesn't contain harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that outgas harmful chemicals.

There are many affordable low- or no-VOC painting products on the market, including Dutch Boy's new Refresh paint. Not only is it a no-VOC paint that's been independently GreenGuard Certified, but its breakthrough Arm & Hammer odour-eliminating technology actually removes common odours from any room in your home.

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Furniture
Once you've painted and it's time to furnish, there are more

than a few green options available. FSC Certified wood products are optimal when purchasing green furniture. The FSC Certification means the wood in a product has been sustainably produced. Key FSC principles include the protection of forests, soil and indigenous species, restricted chemical use and limits on genetic engineering.

If you can't buy FSC Certified wood products, look for furniture that's made of reclaimed materials from factory scraps or other pieces of furniture. Other options include furniture constructed of bamboo or rattan, both of which are very environmentally friendly materials because they replenish rapidly.

Rugs
Rugs are a great way to insert personality and colour into a space without requiring the installation of wall-to-wall carpet. Unlike furniture, there isn't any eco-friendly certifications issued for rugs, so when purchasing a green rug the most important thing to do is check the tag. Look for rugs made from natural fibres such as organically grown cotton, bamboo, jute and sisal. Avoid those manufactured with synthetic fibres such as nylon, polyester, rayon or other petroleum by-products. That's because they are made using plastic, which isn't biodegradable. If they end up in a landfill, they may be

there for decades to come.

Curtains/blinds
When dressing your windows, opt for curtains and blinds that are made of non-toxic, environmentally sustainable, natural reeds, bamboos, grasses and other natural plant fibres. Once gathered, these materials are woven into patterns without the use of chemicals, dyes or other harsh processing found in traditional curtain material.

Again, the materials used in the manufacturing process should be marked on the packaging. If you're having trouble finding eco-friendly curtains, you might also want to consider custom drapes. You can purchase organic cotton fabric online or at a local retailer and then have your drapes made, or better yet make them yourself. From the largest to the smallest products, as green decorating continues to grow in popularity, so will your shopping options. As they do, just remember to be prepared and do your research before you leave your house and head out to the store. Choosing your eco-friendly home decorations should make you feel good about helping the environment, not stress you out.

For more information on Dutch Boy Refresh Paint, or to locate a Dutch Boy retailer, log on to www.dutchboy.com/refresh or call (800) 828-5669.

GOING GREEN: Decorating with more environmentally friendly products. COURTESY OF ARACONTENT

Bring on the broccoli

By **CONNIE PHILLIPS**
Epoch Times Staff

Broccoli seems to be one of those vegetables that people either love or hate.

Those who don't like broccoli say it smells up the house when cooked, feels like you're chewing cud when eaten raw, and is difficult to digest. Pro-broccoli fanatics, on the other hand, argue that it's a powerhouse of vitamins, minerals, and fibre while adding vibrant colour and texture to your plate.

If you tend to omit this veggie from your diet, consider giving it another chance. It's an excellent non-fat, low-calorie source of many vitamins and minerals, including vitamins A and C, folic acid, calcium, potassium, and magnesium. The dark green leaves are edible along with the familiar crown or cluster of flower buds, which are themselves highly nutritious.

A good opportunity to develop a new relationship with broccoli is to try growing it yourself. As one of the first things you can plant in your garden in early spring, broccoli matures in about two months and you can start harvesting it well before you are inundated by zucchini and tomatoes. After you pick the central head, the plant produces side shoots, so you can continue harvesting tender florets for several weeks.

Like other plants in the cabbage family, which includes Brussels sprouts, kale, and cauliflower, broccoli prefers cool temperatures. Although some varieties are heat tolerant, the plants will start to bolt, or go to seed, when hot summer temperatures prevail. When the buds, which form the characteristic tight green heads, start to produce pretty little yellow flowers, it has gone to seed.

In the northeast, mid-to-late August is the time to plant for a fall

harvest. You can transplant seedlings or sow seeds directly in the ground. Broccoli and other cabbage-family crops can stand a light frost, which is said to make them sweeter. If the winter is somewhat mild, you might even occasionally find a hardy broccoli plant or two that have survived under the snow to send out shoots at the first signs of spring.

After you've nurtured your own plants through to harvest time, you'll change your mind after tasting this vegetable picked fresh from your garden. It's delicate, tender, tasty, and sweet—quite different from the often woody and flavourless variety found in stores that has been subjected to shipping and long storage.

Steam or stir fry broccoli lightly, or you can boil it for a few minutes in a small amount of water to retain its nutrients and bright green colour. Cooking helps to break down the fibre and enhances digestibility, but overcooking causes it to lose nutrients. Vitamin C, for example, is particularly sensitive to heat and is also water-soluble.

Boiling causes water-soluble nutrients to leach into the cooking liquid, which usually goes down the drain. But this liquid should be saved and used in soups, stews, and other recipes. If you don't overcook broccoli, you won't get that unpleasant, sulphur-like odour smelling up your kitchen.

If you still have doubts about broccoli, try it in a cream soup; there's no denying that adding cream and butter will make any vegetable taste good. The recipe here, however, is for a non-dairy, vegetarian soup. For a more traditional cream soup, substitute chicken broth for the liquid, whole milk or half and half for the soy milk, and butter for the margarine. As an added touch, top with some grated cheddar cheese.

Vegan cream of broccoli soup

If you are allergic to soy, try using a non-dairy "milk" of your choice, such as unsweetened plain rice milk, oat milk, or hemp milk.

500 g (4 cups) fresh broccoli, chopped, lightly boiled or steamed (reserve the liquid)
500 ml (2 cups) liquid from cooked broccoli or vegetable broth
50 ml (1/4 cup) margarine (preferably non-hydrogenated)
1 large onion, chopped
50 ml (1/4 cup) flour
500 ml (2 cups) unsweetened plain soy milk (preferably non-GMO, or not genetically modified)
2 ml (1/2 tsp) dried dill, or to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Boil or steam the broccoli for a few minutes until it is just tender but still bright green in colour. Drain and reserve the liquid. Set both aside.

In a medium 4 litre (4 quart) pot over medium-low heat, melt the margarine and sauté the onion until soft and translucent. Slowly stir in the flour, mixing with the margarine and onion to make a roux (somewhat of a paste). Slowly add in the reserved broccoli liquid or broth (or a combination of both if you don't have enough cooking water from the broccoli), stirring so that the mixture becomes smooth.

Slowly add the milk, stirring continuously. The soup will thicken. If you like it thinner, stir in more broth or milk until it reaches the desired consistency. When it comes back to a low boil, add in the chopped cooked broccoli. Cook for a couple of minutes longer until the broccoli is heated through. Add the dill, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Top with some non-dairy cheese and serve with whole grain French bread.



WARM AND COMFORTING: Two delicious soups with crispy bread sticks keep the winter chill at bay. SANDRA SHIELDS/THE EPOCH TIMES

Winter soups

By **SANDRA SHIELDS**
Epoch Times Staff

There's no better time than a cold dreary day to cozy up in an overstuffed chair and sip some hot flavourful soups. Add crusty cheese and garlic bread sticks and you'll feel immune to the wintry weather. If you have to be outside at mealtime, these delicious soups travel well in a thermos to the ice rink or other outdoor activities. No need to pack soup bowls and soup spoons, just bring mugs and fill them up!

Beet borscht
Makes 2 litres (8 cups)

500 ml (2 cups) beets, peeled and diced fine
250 ml (1 cup) onions, diced fine
175 ml (3/4 cup) carrots, peeled and diced fine
15 ml (1 tbsp) butter
500 ml (2 cups) beef, chicken or vegetable stock
250 ml (1 cup) cabbage, finely shredded
15 ml (1 tbsp) apple cider vinegar
1 sprig chopped parsley or dill
Bay leaf, dried
Salt and pepper to taste

In a medium saucepan with a small amount of water simmer beets, onions and carrots with the lid on for 20 minutes until tender. Add butter, stock, cabbage, vinegar, parsley or dill, bay leaf and salt and pepper. Simmer with lid on for an additional 20 minutes. Ladle soup into bowls or mugs and garnish with a dollop of sour cream and fresh dill.

Roasted squash soup with jalapeno pepper
Makes 2 litres (8 cups)

1 medium butternut squash
1 medium onion, diced
45 ml (3 tbsp) olive oil
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced fine
1 small jalapeno pepper, seeded and diced
2 ml (1/2 tsp) red pepper flakes
3 ml (3/4 tsp) cumin
3 ml (3/4 tsp) salt
1 litre (4 cups) chicken or vegetable stock
Juice of one lime
Cut squash in half and discard seeds. Rub cut sides of squash with olive oil and place on a parchment

paper lined baking sheet, cut side down. Bake for 35–45 minutes at 180 C (350 F) until tender. Scoop out flesh from shells.

Set a large saucepan or pot over medium-low heat and add 45 ml (3 tbsp) olive oil and onion. Stir until onion softens and is lightly browned. Add the garlic and cook for a few minutes. Add the jalapeno, red pepper flakes, cumin, and salt and cook until fragrant. Add the squash and stir until mixed well. Pour in the broth and cook for 30 minutes.

Working in batches, blend soup until smooth. Add lime juice. Ladle into bowls or mugs and garnish with cilantro leaves.

Crusty bread sticks:

1/2 baguette
75 ml (1/3 cup) olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
Parmesan cheese

Cut baguette on the diagonal in 1/2"-wide pieces. Mix olive oil and garlic together and brush over baguette. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese and broil at 200 C (400 F) until brown, about 6–8 minutes.

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The wonder of recycled concrete and glass countertops

By **LISA SIM**
Epoch Times Staff

What is elegant, beautiful and tougher than granite? Recycled concrete and glass countertops, of course. Although not a new product, these countertops are still being discovered by many as the perfect answer

to an eco-friendly kitchen countertop. Tough and durable—not to mention gorgeous—these countertops are more resilient than granite and stain-resistant as well.

Ice Stone manufactures a high quality 100 per cent recycled glass and concrete material that can be used as countertops, vanities, flooring, and

wall mounts. It comes in a fancy array of colours, and if that's not enough the company offers customers the opportunity to customize their colour. With recycled concrete and glass, unlike granite, you don't have to blow up a mountain to get it. Now that's sustainable. Check your local green building suppliers or visit www.icestone.biz.