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HOUSE WISE

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Making Changes

By Elizabeth Guinn

We have been busy settling into our new (much smaller) house in Gloucester. Yes, we moved. Our house sold and we moved into a small house near our property so we can focus on construction, yeah!!!! New houses come with lots of work and lots of decisions to make.

We chose a small house that met our immediate needs and needed some tweaking. Of course, one of the first things we did was make a quick evaluation of how we could make the house as energy efficient as possible. We chose a house with an extremely efficient gas furnace in the 90% range. This made us feel good about the heating side of things. We did, however get our favorite HVAC guy, Gary, from Minerve's Heating and Air to come and evaluate how things were laid out. He made some suggestions about duct size and placement of lines in the attic, all of which we had him change according to his recommendations. Once you find a contractor you can trust and

We've Moved!

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Dan's Desk – Sprucing up the Outdoors.

By Dan Guinn

It's time to start thinking about working on your yard and the exterior of your house for spring. I know spring is just around the corner when my ten year old begins planting seeds in as many small containers as she can find and then places them strategically on the floor just inside the rear, southern-facing patio door and then warns me not to step on them. It's like navigating a field of land mines every time you go in or out the door.

I always start with big plans each spring and then get

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then you ask for their opinion, be prepared to follow up on their advice. Gary has been in the business for quite some time and I trust his recommendations when it comes to making things work as efficiently as possible.

The next step was to purchase a washer, dryer and refrigerator since the house didn't already have any. This is always an exciting task. There are so many new features out there and many new Energy Star rated appliances to choose from. We decided to head to Lowe's to see the latest in the appliance world. We found it very helpful to go directly to the appliance salesman and ask to see only the top Energy Star rated appliances and start there. There are just too many choices out there and choosing the highest Energy Star rated equipment is so important that it just isn't worth looking at all the rest.

We started with the refrigerator. By asking to see the best rated fridges that they have, we were directed to the Samsung models. I have to admit that I have never even considered purchasing a Samsung appliance in the past. We were thoroughly impressed with the high Energy Star rating that the Samsung received and the fact that the unit was programmable. This thing has a digital display on the door. We went with the French Door model, another thing I didn't even know existed. The French door model has two upper doors for a fridge and a freezer much like a side by side refrigerator, including the ice and water dispenser, with two drawers on the bottom. The drawers are programmable so I can make them a freezer, a fridge or a fresh vegetable compartment, I can program it to meet my needs. Since we eat so many of our vegetables fresh I programmed the larger drawer to be a large fresh vegetable compartment. This is an amazing feature that is getting a lot of use.

This unit is quiet, large with enough space for food for a family of five and the kids have been entertaining themselves setting off the open door alarm.

Now onto the washer and dryer selection. I am a believer in buying matched sets when it comes to the washer and dryer. We also purchased a brand here that we have never purchased before, you guessed it, Samsung. We looked at several different models of washers and you should start with the washer. Dryers are not Energy Star rated because there is so little difference in their energy usage that it doesn't make it worthwhile to rate. So if you are going to save money on your energy bill, you need to make a good choice on which washer to buy.

We were insistent on only purchasing a front loader. These

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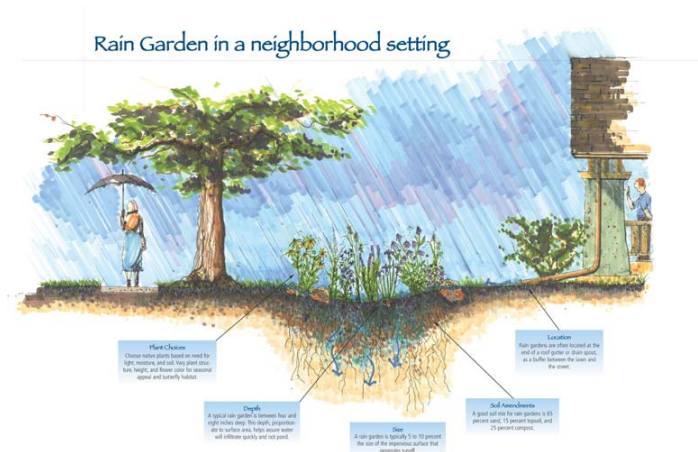
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frustrated because I never seem to get it all accomplished. This year I'm making a list. Well, at least my wife is. I'm making sure that I'm adding lots of touches this year to my new yard that will make it pleasant to relax and barbeque in while saving me money at the same time. Yes, even your yard can help you save money on your energy bills.

Let's start by talking landscape lighting. Gone are the days of digging trenches to hide the low voltage wire for your landscape lighting. With all the solar cordless varieties available why would you even consider going back to the old kind anyway? You can pick up a pack of 4 extremely nice lights in a variety of finishes for under \$100. But I found an even better solution that will cost you a whole lot less on my last trip through Lowe's. For under \$5 a piece you can now pick up single solar yard lights. They are made of black plastic with small LED lights in them. All you have to do is switch them on and stick them in the ground. I put several between my front door and the mailbox after going out the other night and forgetting to leave the front porch light on. They illuminate the path, the driveway and even the front porch and they turn themselves on when it gets dark so no more fumbling for keys in the dark. They even leave a beautiful star pattern on the ground. All for \$5, can't beat that.

My next area to work on is to add some rain gardens. Since my new yard has a gentle slope to it, this should work out great. Rain gardens are small depressions in the ground that intercept the rainwater flowing across your yard and contain some of it, reducing the amount of rainwater that leaves your yard. The small bowl shaped depressions are then planted with water loving plants. Watch how the rainwater is already moving across your yard in a rain event and find a spot to intercept it. Start small, maybe 50 square feet in overall size. You want to dig the hole larger than you want it to be and backfill the basin with about a foot deep of fast draining soil. Berm up the downhill side of the planting bed with either dirt or stones.

When your next rain comes, watch and see if you need to adjust the size to make it work better. Yes, you do need to actually stand out in the rain for this part. Two words of caution, never put one closer than 10 feet from your house and never put one within 20 to 30 feet from your drain field if you have one.

With a series of these planted basins, you can reduce the run off from your yard significantly. This is a great way to save on your water bill. By intercepting and using the rainwater more efficiently, you will have to water your gardens less frequently and you will be

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helping to clean the rainwater that eventually ends up in the Chesapeake Bay. And if you use a well for your irrigation purposes, that's less energy pumping water.

If you have pictures of rain gardens you have installed, send them to us and let us take a look at your handiwork.

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washers use much less water than the older style top loaders. Why spend all that time making a good selection based on energy usage and then blow it on water usage? Not to mention that you have to hear all that extra hot water and that takes energy as well. Once again, we asked to see the top Energy Star rated washers and we ended up looking at the Samsung. Not only does it use very little energy, it even generates its own power by taking advantage of the spinning drum. To demonstrate, the salesman put his hand inside the unit on the drum of an unplugged machine and gave the drum a spin. The whole power panel lit up and was ready to be programmed for its next wash. This machine spins at 1200 rpm's, which means the clothes will need less dryer time after each washing, another energy saving feature.

I was a little worried about what 1200 rpm's would feel like in our new house since the washer and dryer are upstairs. I am happy to report that we can't hear the washer or dryer downstairs and they are just in a closet, not a sound proof room! Very nice, especially considering the rate of speed that this thing is turning at. If you've ever had a washer walk across the floor, you know it's not pleasant. I'm happy to report that my new Samsung is content staying in one place.

We have several other energy saving changes we are working on, I'll save them for next month. I just love keeping you in suspense.



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