

ReNew's green landlords

Meet the winner of our Green Landlord Award and find out what really prompts investment property owners to take action.

Tenants all wish they had one, but unfortunately there are not enough to go around. While they are not common yet, entries to our recent Green Landlords competition suggest that water saving, energy smart landlords are emerging.

Last issue we invited green investment property owners to send a description of what they've done to make their investment property more water and energy efficient for tenants.

Entries were judged on the environmental benefit of these retrofits and the initiative shown. There was no doubt that most were full of bright ideas, including the home where tenants put a sign on the garage door indicating if the solar hot water electric boost is on or not. Several indicated that being a Green Landlord doesn't stop once a house is retrofitted then leased, with one organising a Climate Smart Home Service so tenants could track their energy use and another encouraging tenants to sign up to GreenPower.

While most landlords said they were acting volutarily, making the home more energy and water smart because they believe it is the right thing to do, we want to find out what the incentives and barriers might be for the greening of Australia's rental homes in years to come. Do rebates help? Are investors receptive to improving their rental properties? And can real estate agents assist? We'll be looking at this in more detail next issue with the release of an Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report about sustainable rental housing.

Until then, meet more green landlord entrants at www.renew.org.au as they share their rental retrofits.



Green Landlord winner Shane Merrick

My wife and I are very keen to help the environment as much as possible where we can and decided to reduce the footprint of our Hampton investment property for future tenants.

Water saving

We installed a greywater system so the

Green Landlord winner Shane Merrick at home with his three-month-old daughter.

shower water is diverted directly onto the garden bed where it soaks into the sandy soil. This helps to keep all the plants and ferns alive, even during Melbourne's hot summers. We've also diverted the downpipe water into the front garden beds, meaning the front garden is now virtually maintenance free when



Photos: Shane Merrick

Shane's rental property retrofits (clockwise): the old and breezy non-insulated tile roof being removed to install aircell insulation and batts; bathroom walls packed with insulation; one of the downpipe diverters which waters the garden with rainwater; the roof-top SolarVenti warms and circulates air in the front of the house during winter.

it comes to watering. Native plants were planted around the house and have survived really well, with the shower and downpipe water being the only water they receive.

A dishwasher was installed to reduce water use as we found out that dishwashers actually use less water than hand washing. Some people are concerned that dishwashers use too much power, so we bought a model with an eco wash cycle that uses considerably less power than the standard cycle. Low-flow shower heads have also been installed.

Insulation

Double insulation was added to the upstairs attic room, with aircell placed under the colorbond sheets as well as polyester batts in the roof and walls. With this amount of insulation, upstairs no longer needs heating in winter, as the

heat rising from downstairs is more than enough to keep the place warm. Door seals were added to reduce any drafts.

Solar hot water

A gas boosted solar hot water system was installed, so for about six or more months of the year the tenants have free hot water when the gas boosting is not used. The system uses minimal gas, so much so that the gas company thought the meter must have been faulty and came and replaced it. The meter was not faulty and the tenants continue to enjoy very low gas bills.

Solar air flow

We installed a SolarVenti unit in the lounge room to help warm the house and circulate fresh air, mainly during winter when tenants often have all the doors and windows closed.

Smart lighting

Energy efficient light bulbs have been installed throughout the house. A single light bulb hangs from the centre of the ceiling in each room with an energy efficient fitting; we can turn on all the lights in the entire home and use less than 200 watts of power. I don't know of any other house in Melbourne that can make that claim.

Another small thing we did was install a clothes line so the tenants don't need to use a clothes dryer. We stayed in the house while making it more eco friendly, so we could be sure that all the changes were easy to live with and worked properly.

Green Landlord winner Shane Merrick wins two 65 watt, 12 volt solar panels valued at \$700. A special thank you to www.lowenergydevelopments.com.au for the prize.