

THE EFFICIENT HOME

My Zen Place

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older home needs.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

ADOPTING A GROWTH MINDSET



With article after article that focuses on improvement, the magazine's second issue has helped me focus on growth. We all have time to grow and evolve—to better ourselves.

Our state has set goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 60% from 2006 levels by 2031—and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. Keeping an open mind and continually looking for ways to help us get there creates the perfect environment for positive change.

Much of this can seem overwhelming. Net-zero emissions can look like an intimidating goal. When faced with a potentially overwhelming task, I repeat a simple mantra, "Small actions add up to make a big impact." What you're doing matters. What you're doing makes a difference.

Together, all these so-called small actions aren't going to be just a tiny part of reaching this goal. They are going to be the difference between failure and success. I firmly believe that together, through small actions and by focusing on continual growth, we can make great things happen. And this issue can be your first exercise in honing your growth-focused skills.

Carving out some alone time with this publication—or any publication, or a book—can also give you the mindset to focus on your personal improvement.

So, take a chance and change your outlook. In no time, you'll be instinctively looking to and shaping your life—a life where our small choices today will make a huge impact tomorrow.

ERIC A. RIOPKO

MANAGER, ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS
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AMEY BAYES

SENIOR EFFICIENCY PROGRAM MANAGER

Amey loves a good home improvement story. Especially those that end with energy savings. Ask her about HVAC systems, smart thermostats or home energy audits, and buckle in. Amey's here for it all, and she can't wait to see what the future holds.



BEN SCHOTT

SENIOR EFFICIENCY PROGRAM MANAGER

Ben knows firsthand how energy efficiency can put older homes on a path to new life. He saw it early in his career as a home retrofitter. He now sees it in the smiles of people taking control of their energy use and finding a new reason to love their homes.



CYNTHIA EDWARDS

SENIOR EFFICIENCY PROGRAM MANAGER

Cynthia approaches life with a curiosity mindset. What's she curious about these days? How innovations in the rapidly changing world of appliances will revolutionize the energy efficiency of the products we rely on every day.



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THAT TIME OF YEAR

THE MYSTERY

ROOM

(O V E R Y O U R G A R A G E)

Oh, the elusive mystery room. It has a certain amount of utility. You can see it as a storage unit, if everything you store will hold up to the varying temperatures. This approach can be limited if those temperatures are very varied. You just can't store anything that could end up melting in the summer or getting freezer burn in the winter. Very limiting.

Another option? The coveted extra guest room. Again, the changing temperatures can be a factor and limit usage—unless you tell your guests they're on a survival reality

TV show, and your mystery room is one of the challenges. Also very limiting.

To sum up: The good news? You have a bonus room. The bad news? You can only use it when Mother Nature allows you to.

Well, that's about to change.

Mother Nature can't stop you from turning a seasonal option into a full-fledged, year-round space. Here are a few stages to transform your mystery room into not just a livable room—but a destination—in your home.



What's behind the walls matters. A lot.

Yes, your ceiling is probably insulated. But how well? Most ceilings have fiberglass insulation. This is good but not great, and your mystery room needs the best. That's because your room has more surface area in contact with the outside air, making it more susceptible to temperature fluctuations. Every time you open your garage door, it's like opening a half-dozen windows at the same time. So, yeah, this is the perfect opportunity to knock your insulation up a notch.

Welcome to the world of spray foam insulation. Traditional insulation covers the larger spaces but allows cold and hot air to sneak through cracks. There's not a complete seal. Spray foam, on the other hand, fills all the nooks and crannies, giving you the tightest seal.

Get your underfoot under control.

Floor insulation is another great way to save. You install it between the floor joists, which are the horizontal structures that underlie your subfloor and finished floor, the latter being the hardwood or carpet you chose for the room.

Insulating below your subfloor has two benefits. First, you get protection from the elements—helping you keep your mystery room comfortable year-round. Second, you get significant sound insulation. That second one is big, especially if your mystery room will double as your kids' band practice space.



Your windows don't need to be such a pane. (See what we did there?)

The gaps, the drafts, the leaks—your windows may be more than a constant source of frustration. They could be costing you money. It's enough to make a person commit to better windows. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, upgrading your windows to ENERGY STAR® certified options could save you an average of 12% on your annual household energy costs.

That's a lot to take in. You may wonder where to even start. One option would be to take advantage of BGE's Home Performance Program. A participating contractor will come to your home and assess your spaces, your appliances, your heating and cooling equipment and, yes, even your mystery room. The audit is just \$100 (but a \$550 value) for BGE customers, and it can help you determine your best course of action. What's more, you could qualify for rebates on average of \$3,000 for your energy-saving home improvements. It just may be the best way to transform your **mystery room** into a bonus or guest room that is **OMG** awesome.

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THE TOY BOX

Cool gadgets

MAKE
BEING HOME
MORE ENJOYABLE

What's better than a new gadget that makes your home life better? How about a new gadget that brings you a bit of comfort? Read on for five unexpectedly awesome gadgets that give you greater control of your domain, from how you kick back to how you tidy up.



If you use your **voice-activated assistant** 20 to 30 times a day.

If the phrase “Tech Head” has been used to describe you, these smart, voice-activated lights will warm up your home—emotionally speaking. A doorway to a world of ultimate lighting control, these gadgets transform your home into a sanctuary of light that will adjust to your every whim. And all you’ll need is your voice to light the way.

SMART LIGHT BULB:
BCEMarketplace.com, \$69.99

If you enjoy a **spontaneous dance party.**

Are you an audiophile? A multitasker? A trivia hound? A smart speaker will be perfect, no matter your preferred title. This new generation of wireless models offers a long-lasting battery that sips energy, drastically reducing charging time. So you save energy while you work up a sweat rehearsing for your next viral dance video.



If you want to **reduce waste** one banana peel at a time.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that food waste is the single largest contributor to everyday trash. Your family member with the green thumb reports that they need fertilizer. Fortunately, there's a solution for both—the home compost bin. Whether you go with a sleek countertop model for the kitchen or 36-gallon behemoth in the backyard, the right compost bin will help you reduce waste while creating some nutrient-rich homemade fertilizer. That's a move that's good for your pocketbook and the planet.



If you have **tons of electronics** that spend most of their time in standby mode.

You have electronics. You have a lot of electronics. And like it or not, many of them are energy vampires. Now, imagine possessing the power to control all of these standby-energy-devouring devices via your smart hub. An advanced smart power strip gives you everything you need to slay these phantom power suckers, without having to emerge from the comfort of your blanket cocoon on the couch.

SMART POWER STRIP:
BGEMarketplace.com, \$16–\$70





If you see a
hot bath
as an inalienable right and
want to make the tub your
new home office.

You go through bath bombs like potato chips. You have considered installing a TV in the bathroom and think pruney is the natural state for your fingertips. Consider a heat pump water heater as your perfect upgrade. It can help a typical family of four save up to \$550 a year in energy costs compared to your traditional water heater. Just don't try to write off the upgrade on your taxes as a "business expense." We checked. It doesn't work.

HEAT PUMP WATER HEATER:
BGESmartEnergy.com/HeatPump2
up to an \$800 rebate + federal tax credit*

We hope these suggestions add a dash more joy (and perhaps some savings) to your hang time at home. You can brag about your energy-saving prowess or keep it to yourself. Your secret's safe with us.



For rebates and discounts
on more energy-saving gadgets
for your home, visit
BGESmartEnergy.com/Rebates2
or **scan the QR code** to learn more.

*See website for more information.
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Is your HVAC trying to tell you something?

That odd rattle, increase in humidity or jump in your energy costs may simply be a cry for help. An HVAC tune-up through BGE can improve the efficiency of your system, extend its life and just might lower your bill.

Schedule today **at no additional cost**. Visit BGESmartEnergy.com/Tuneup2

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TREND WATCH

THE END OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC ... ANYTHING

We know. When everything from the cap on your orange juice to the band on your smart watch is made from plastic, pushing for conservation may seem like a big ask. But look at it this way—this is your chance to make the biggest impact in ending single-use plastic.

You may ask yourself,

“Why plastic? It’s not that bad, is it?”

It is. It really is.

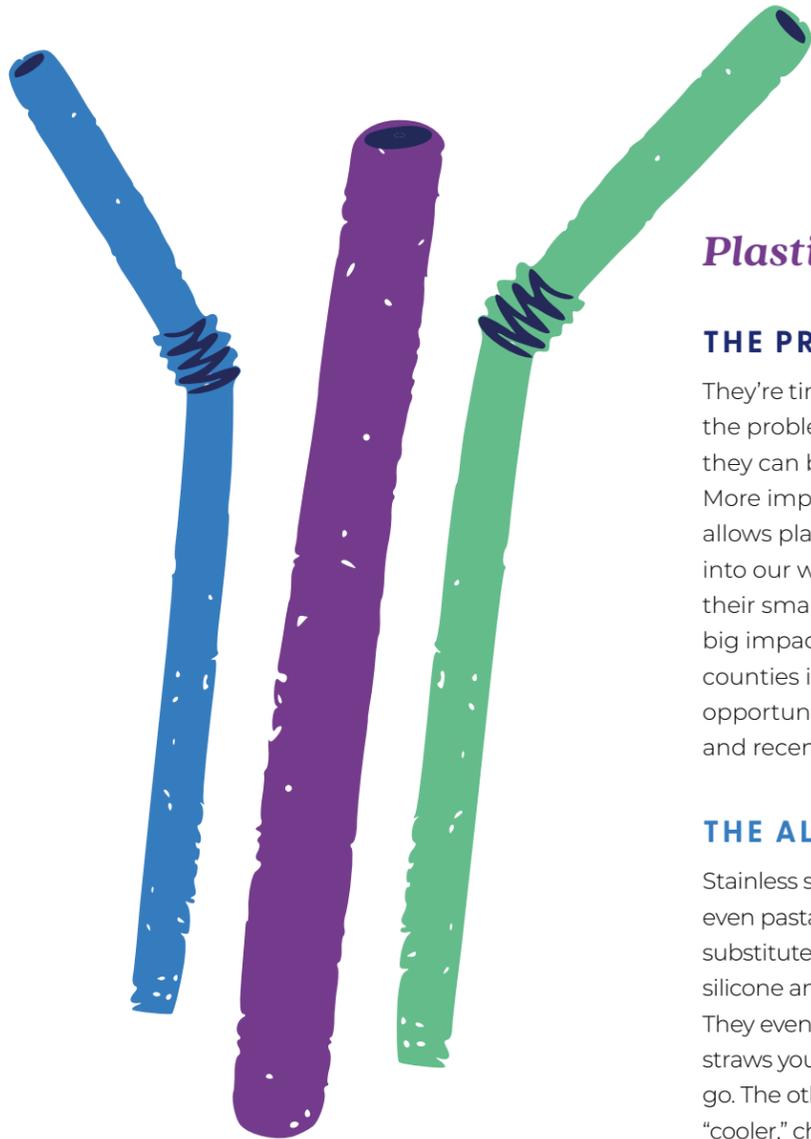
Here’s why: Plastic doesn’t biodegrade. It only breaks down into microparticles that pollute our environment. We call them microplastics, and they can contaminate our water and food.

You may also ask yourself, “But plastic is recyclable. That should make this all better, right?” Wrong. The sobering fact is that only 9% of plastic gets recycled. This means when you use plastic for a single use, there’s a 91% chance you’re contributing to pollution.

Our intention isn’t to deliver a guilt trip. Instead, it’s to prioritize single-use plastics as the single-best way to make a difference.

THE SOBERING FACT IS THAT ONLY 9% OF PLASTIC GETS RECYCLED.

HERE ARE THE TOP SINGLE-USE OFFENDERS.



Plastic Straws

THE PROBLEMS

They're tiny, right? Well, that's kind of the problem. Because of their size, they can be overlooked for recycling. More importantly, their light weight allows plastic straws to easily blow into our waterways and oceans. And their small size ends up making a big impact on marine wildlife. A few counties in Maryland saw this as an opportunity to make a difference and recently banned plastic straws.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Stainless steel, bamboo, rice and even pasta straws all make for a good substitute. You can also request paper, silicone and plant-based straws. They even make reusable, collapsible straws you can take with you on the go. The other, some might argue "cooler," choice is to use no straw at all.

Coffee Cups and Lids

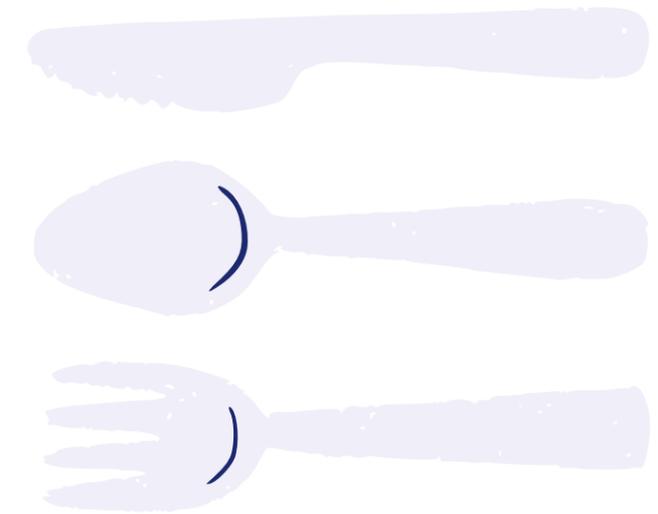
THE PROBLEMS

We throw away 50 billion coffee cups each year. These cups may seem more paper than plastic, but the insides of the cups are coated in plastic. And then there are the plastic lids. This is a tough one. It's wise never to get between someone and their caffeine. Fortunately, other options will allow you to be earth friendly while still getting your morning fix.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Bring your own reusable travel mug to your favorite coffee destination. Not only will you be helping out the planet, but you'll score serious barista cred for thinking ahead. Or you can grab a seat and sip your coffee alfresco. Hey, we're all for bringing a little European café culture home to Maryland.

And, if you have to have your coffee to go, just pass on the lid. Your planet will thank you.



Plastic Cutlery

THE PROBLEMS

Plastic use tripled during the pandemic, and takeout plastics played a major role in that increase. Sadly, many food delivery options came with a set of plastic cutlery. Because these items are hard to recycle, they are unusually damaging to the environment.

THE ALTERNATIVES

You can request that your delivery provider not include plastic cutlery—after all, they mostly deliver to your home. We're guessing you have a few traditional cutlery options lying around. You can reuse or recycle the cutlery delivered, and you can always support businesses that are already making these eco-friendly choices. Finally, there are biodegradable options that you can buy yourself or request from any business.

Plastic Bottles

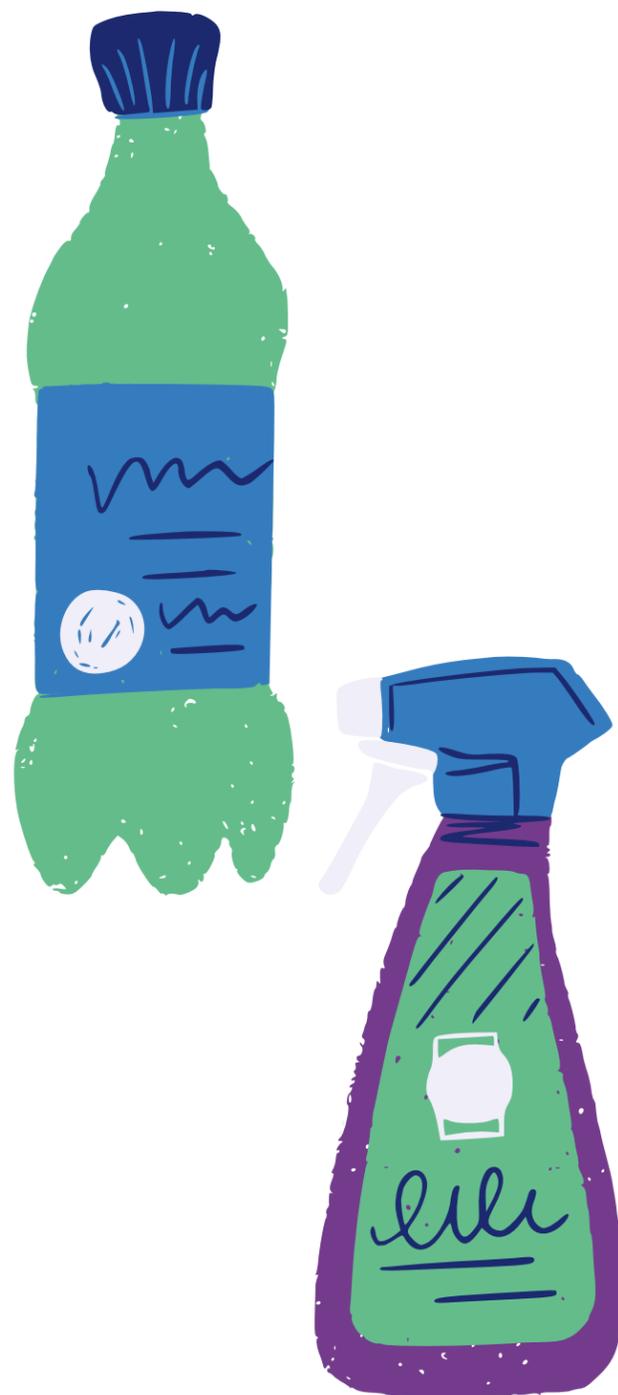
THE PROBLEMS

Only one of every six plastic water bottles is recycled. That's resulted in 2 million tons of discarded water bottles ending up in landfills. And counting. Add in the fact that plastics are produced with fossil fuels, and you compound the negative effect of plastic bottles on our world. Some beverage companies are even shifting to plant-based plastics as an earth-friendly alternative.

THE ALTERNATIVES

You can switch to stainless steel water bottles, purchase a water filter for your home and recycle the plastic bottles you use. If you want to step it up an environmentally friendly notch, begin looking for discarded plastic bottles and get them to a recycling bin.

These single-use plastic options are just the beginning. We can make the world a better place without too much effort. Let's combat waste during a time we consume like crazy. You could even make it a New Year's resolution way before the new year begins.



**Open. Clean.
Press. Close.**
Find one more
way to alter costs.

Bo K., Owner
Dry Clean Express
Baltimore

When you own a small business, you have to do it all—including finding ways to cut expenses. We're here to help you save, starting with a complimentary energy efficiency analysis. It's money for the taking. And one thing off your plate.

To schedule your energy analysis or to learn more, visit BGESmartEnergy.com/SmallBusiness2.



YOUR ENERGY. YOUR MONEY.

YOU'LL DEVOUR THESE DELICIOUS AND ENERGY-EFFICIENT RECIPES.

Give your traditional oven a rest and lean on your microwave or slow cooker and save. By substituting your microwave or slow cooker for your conventional oven, you use significantly less energy. Big on flavor, small on electricity consumption—these cooking options will win over taste buds and energy bills by using smaller appliances that use less electricity than a traditional oven. Pretty tasty, right?

Microwave Super-Fast Breakfast Burrito

RECIPE CREDIT: COOKIN' WITH KILOWATTS

Yes, you could go to a high-end breakfast place, wait in line and do your best to charm the waitstaff—and you'd still not hit the culinary sweet spot that this surefire morning hit has. You save energy. You save time. And you only have to spend your charm on the family dog, who can be a surprisingly tough audience.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 SLICES OF BACON
- 1 EGG
- 1 TORTILLA
- ¼ CUP SHREDDED CHEESE

SERVE WITH:
SALSA OR HOT SAUCE

INSTRUCTIONS:

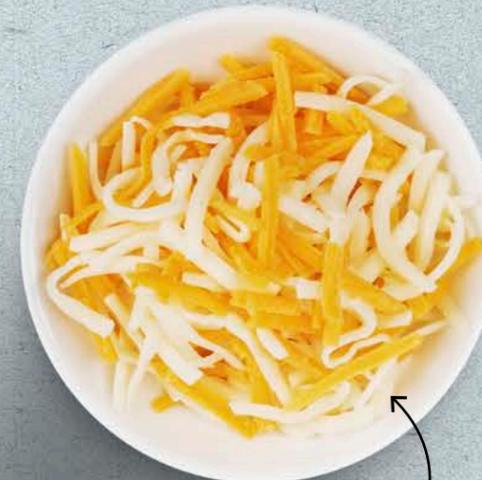
STEP 1. Place bacon on a plate between a double layer of paper towels and microwave for 2 minutes or until it reaches desired crispiness. It will continue to crisp after cooking. Set aside.

STEP 2. Crack the egg into a 4-inch ramekin. Add milk and use a fork to scramble. Cover with a small plate and microwave for 90 seconds. Set aside.

STEP 3. Place tortilla on a plate, sprinkle cheese on top and microwave 10–15 seconds until cheese is melted.

STEP 4. Top the tortilla with cooked egg, bacon and salsa or hot sauce as desired.

WRAP AND ENJOY.



Can't go wrong with a cheddar-jack mix.



Slow Cooker Crab Dip

RECIPE CREDIT: TASTE OF HOME

**CRAB? GOOD.
CREAM CHEESE? GOOD.
MORE CHEESE? ALSO, GOOD.**

When you start with ingredients like these, you can't go wrong. So don't let healthy items like onions get in the way of this killer dip that will get gobbled up without gobbling up your energy. And it's a crab dish, so as a Marylander, you are morally obligated to try this crowd-pleasing dish.

INGREDIENTS:

1 PACKAGE (8 OUNCES) CREAM CHEESE, SOFTENED
½ CUP FINELY CHOPPED SWEET ONION
¼ CUP GRATED PARMESAN CHEESE
¼ CUP MAYONNAISE
2 GARLIC CLOVES, MINCED
2 TEASPOONS SUGAR
6 OUNCES CRAB MEAT, FLAKED AND SHELL REMOVED

SERVE WITH:

ASSORTED CRACKERS
CRAB SEASONING TO TASTE

INSTRUCTIONS:

STEP 1. Combine the cream cheese, sweet onion, Parmesan cheese, mayo, garlic and sugar into your slow cooker.

STEP 2. Stir in crabmeat.

STEP 3. Cover and cook for 2–3 hours.

STEP 4. Garnish with green onions and serve with crackers.

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Slow Cooker Balsamic Pork Tenderloin Awesomeness

RECIPE CREDIT: ADD A PINCH

If two of your favorite things are eating and doing nothing, then this may be the greatest recipe on the planet—which will also help save the planet via your energy-friendly slow cooker.

If done right, these fall-apart, crazy-tender tenderloins will make you slow cooker royalty.

INGREDIENTS:

1 2- TO 3-POUND BONELESS PORK TENDERLOIN
1 CUP CHICKEN STOCK OR BROTH
½ CUP BALSAMIC VINEGAR
1 TABLESPOON WORCESTERSHIRE SAUCE
1 TABLESPOON SOY SAUCE OR COCONUT AMINOS
1 TABLESPOON HONEY
½ TEASPOON RED PEPPER FLAKES
2 CLOVES GARLIC, CHOPPED

INSTRUCTIONS:

STEP 1. Place pork tenderloin into the insert of your slow cooker. In a 2-cup measuring cup, mix all remaining ingredients. Pour over pork and set the timer for your slow cooker (6–8 hours on low).

STEP 2. Once pork tenderloin has cooked, remove it from the slow cooker with tongs onto a serving dish. Break apart lightly with two forks and then ladle about ¼–½ cup of gravy over pork tenderloin. Be warned—you may need a big, slotted spoon to transfer from pot to plate. It's that tender—and that delicious. It serves eight adults or four teenage boys. Totally your call.

Fancy honey dipper is optional. But worth it.

25

Rice Cooker Chocolate Upside-Down Cake

RECIPE CREDIT: FOOD.COM

Traditionally, a rice cooker was meant for healthy, nutritious, decadence-free fare. Until now. It's time to transform your rice cooker into a contraption that would make a pastry chef jealous. Just properly clean your rice cooker after this recipe or your rice may taste like chocolate. Wait. Maybe we have two recipes here.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ½ CUPS ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR
- ½ CUP WHITE SUGAR
- 4 TABLESPOONS UNSWEETENED COCOA POWDER
- 1 TEASPOON BAKING SODA
- ½ TEASPOON SALT (OPTIONAL)
- 1 TEASPOON CINNAMON
- ⅓ CUP VEGETABLE OIL
- ½ TEASPOON VANILLA
- 1 TABLESPOON VINEGAR
- ¾-1 CUP WATER

SERVE WITH: POWDERED SUGAR, BERRIES OR ANY OTHER DESIRED TOPPINGS

INSTRUCTIONS:

STEP 1. Add flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda, salt (optional) and cinnamon into a bowl. Mix all dry items with a whisk.

STEP 2. Add the wet ingredients to the bowl—oil, vanilla, vinegar and water. Mix again. Pour mixture into the rice cooker.

STEP 3. Cook in your rice cooker for 30 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean to test the cake. Bring the bowl out of the rice cooker and cool for 5 minutes.

FLIP THE CAKE TO TOP WITH BERRIES, POWDERED SUGAR OR OTHER SWEET GARNISH OF YOUR CHOOSING.

“You’re sucking the air out of this relationship.”

Lower your energy use, not your expectations.

It's time to clear the air on your old air purifier. Sure, it walked the walk. But at what cost? Today's ENERGY STAR® certified models are up to 27% more energy efficient, so they clean your air without cleaning out your wallet. Some even come with a **\$40 instant discount**. So, why not start fresh? You deserve better.



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MY



P L A C E

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FINDING YOUR CENTER IS ALL ABOUT GOOD ENERGY—INSIDE YOU AND YOUR HOME

We all, on occasion, seek a state of Zen—a calmness where you are centered, at peace and free from distractions. And the ways to reach a state of Zen are as diverse as the people who want to be there. You can meditate. You can pray. You can do goat yoga. You do you as you reach your state of Zen.

IT'S REALLY NOT ABOUT HOW YOU GET THERE. VERY OFTEN, SIMPLY COMMITTING TO THE JOURNEY IS ALL IT TAKES TO SET YOU ON THE PATH TO REACHING YOUR STATE OF ZEN.

And if there was ever a time to take a break, it's now. A recent survey reveals that more than half of Americans report they are addicted to their cell phones. The same survey found that we check our phones 144 times a day. Our screen time has increased by 30% in the past year. And we have gone on average from 2 hours and 54 minutes of screen time a day to 4 hours and 25 minutes. When we're spending more time interacting with a screen than with the world around us, we're due for a change.

OUR ATTENTION SPANS ARE NOT
IN A VERY ZEN-LIKE STATE

According to Gloria Mark, a professor of informatics at the University of California, Irvine, we're losing our ability to focus. In her book "Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness and Productivity," Mark says, "In 2004, we measured the average attention on a screen to be 2.5 minutes. Some years later, we found attention spans to be about 75 seconds. Now we find people can only pay attention to one screen for an average of 47 seconds." This only underscores the need for a vacation from our technology.

THROUGH MEDITATION,
ZEN GOES MAINSTREAM

One of the most popular paths to a state of Zen is meditation. Over 40% of the U.S. population meditates at least once a week—impressive for a Western country that relies mostly on Western approaches to health. Other research shows the practice of meditation has tripled since 2012. The only other complementary health approach that is more popular is yoga, another path to reaching a state of Zen. As a culture, we have widely accepted the mind-body connection on our way to better health.

Now that you have a concept of Zen and the benefits of Zen, you just need a place. Begin with a place you can dedicate to finding some inner peace. It's a place where you can relax, destress and begin on a path to rejuvenation. It could be a room, a nook or even a central space you can temporarily marshal to serve your Zen-seeking purpose.



ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR
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B A L A N C E

PUMP IRON ON YOUR ROAD TO ZEN

Regular physical activity can prevent depression, reduce stress and lower blood pressure. Now, working out often involves a lot of technology. Not here. You want your space to be quiet enough for you to hear your own breath and nothing else. You have many options for decking out your workout space as long as it's an unplugged workout. Think of a pull-up bar and some kettlebells. Just remember, the best workout is one that you enjoy and can do consistently.

It turns out there's a real connection between the environment you work out in and the quality of your workout. Yes, the right temperature, ventilation, carbon dioxide and oxygen levels can increase your workout performance. Enter an HVAC Tune-up. It's the best way to ensure your home's heating and cooling equipment is doing its best to help you do your best. And, because it's available through BGE at no additional cost, it's easy to feel better about your health and the health of your HVAC equipment.

MEDITATING YOUR WAY TO ZEN

Consistent, focused meditation can help you manage stress, reduce negative emotions, increase your creativity and improve your sleep quality. Just remember that shouting "inner peace" is probably not the best way to achieve said peace.

When designing your meditation space, focus on natural light to increase serenity and openness. Incorporate natural elements like wood and stone to develop a oneness with nature. Lastly, create a central focal point with a small table, painting or mirror to help you stay present. This focal point can settle a listless, wandering mind.

And your air should be a vital aspect in creating the perfect mindfulness environment. Meditation is built on your breath, so air quality is key. Anything from cleaning products to candles to simply cooking can diminish the quality of the air you breathe.

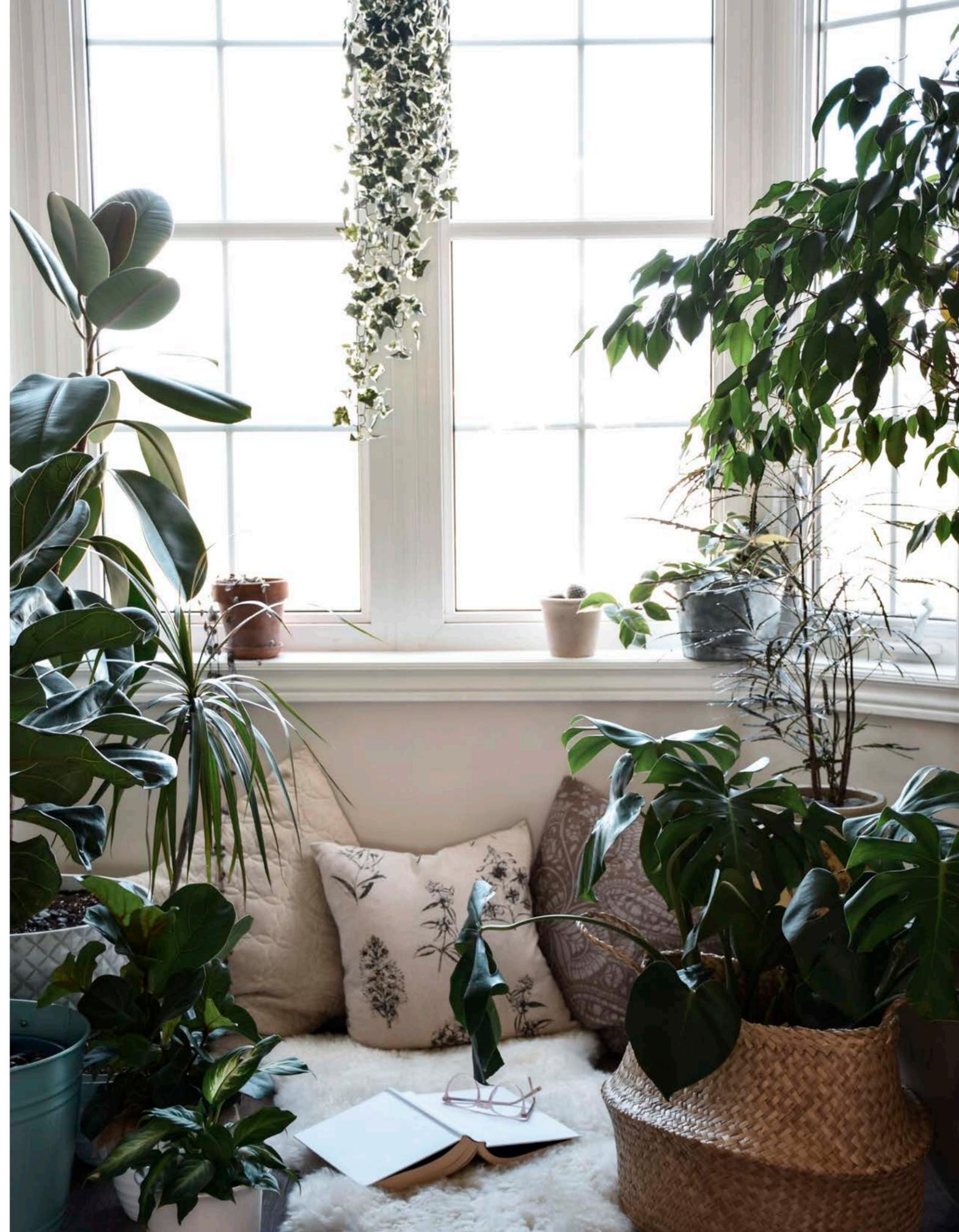
CHOOSE A QUALIFYING AIR PURIFIER AND GET A \$40 INSTANT DISCOUNT.

An air purifier can filter out odors, dust and other airborne distractions to create a more meditative environment. Choose a qualifying energy-saving model and get a \$40 instant discount.

CRAFTING YOUR WAY TO ZEN

Crafting can improve your mood, improve self-confidence, improve your mental agility and decrease stress. What type of craft? Well, that's the good news. It doesn't matter. Choose something you enjoy, and you'll reap the benefits. Just keep the crafting in the craft space. You can't just call your dirty car "distressed" now that you make crafts. That being said, you can allow your crafting sanctuary to be a little cluttered. This isn't about cleanliness. It's about expressing yourself, so anything outside of a full craft apocalypse should be considered part of the process.

Your craft space can be basic or next level. If you want to keep it simple, just pick up a secondhand table that will welcome spilled paint, glue and, yes, glitter if need be. Grab a couple stackable bins to store your supplies conveniently under your table, and you're done.



READING YOUR WAY TO ZEN

Reading regularly can lead to decreased depression, increased empathy and improved cognitive ability. And having your own library is a 100% foolproof way to rediscover your love of books. They're portable, entertaining and never ever need batteries. Just know that reading books that eventually become movies will ruin those movies for the rest of your life. Yes, we know that character's hair should be brown, but

standing up and screaming that in a crowded theater isn't going to change anything.

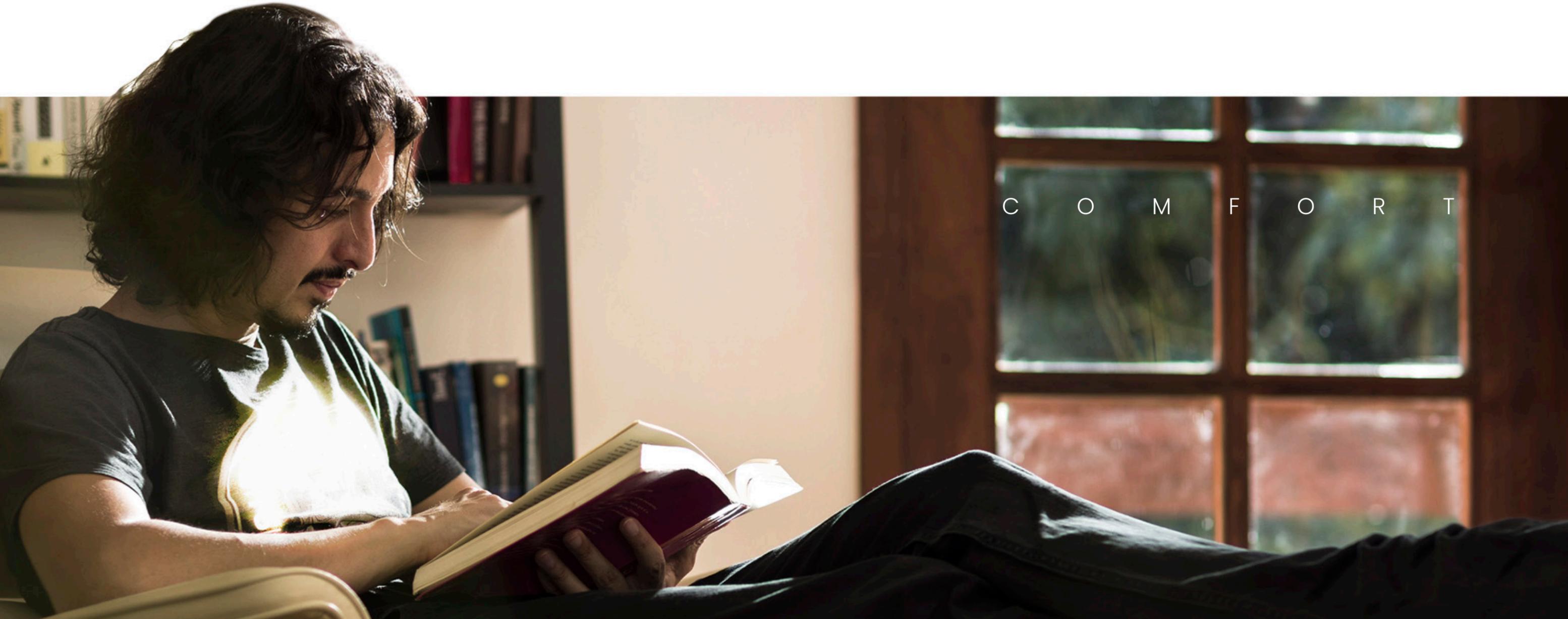
Make the most of your space with bookshelves that are floor-to-ceiling. If you have the room, a rolling library ladder is a feature that is not only practical but also impressive and fun. A comfortable reading chair should be the focal point of your space. And since good, functional lighting is key to any reading marathon, outfitting your Zen reading nook with LED bulbs will save both your eyes and your energy budget. You can even step up your

reading game by choosing the LED bulbs that are most conducive to reading. Look for bluer white light (yes, that sounds like a contradiction, but that's the term). Bulbs that are 5,000K to 6,500K are best for your eyes as you enjoy a good book.

Finally, add accessories to your library shelves, like houseplants, vases and other decorative pieces. This mixed approach to filling your shelves will allow your library to evolve with time as you add more titles to your collection. And don't forget to participate in those free libraries popping up

in front yards and public spaces. Most have the "Take a penny. Leave a penny." approach to book exchanges—allowing you to keep your reading shelf fresh and to donate titles you've read to the greater good.

No matter how you choose to transform your Zen space, one thing should be consistent when it comes to the result. It should be a welcoming escape—a place to shut out the world and focus on yourself. When you use your new destination that way, it will become more than a guest/workout/craft/storage/meditation space. It will be the most cherished place in your home.



C O M F O R T

Shannon Shines

From ambitious 20-something just starting out to star of a reality baking competition on cable television, Shannon Clarke, owner of Starry Night Bakery, has a great story to tell. The good folks at BGE were fortunate enough to be a small—yet successful—part of it.

How did this all start?

I opened the bakery 20 years ago. I grew up in the Baltimore area. I went to pastry school in Boulder, Colorado, came back, lived in downtown Frederick, and managed a cute little bakery a block away until it closed. I worked at a couple of other places and never had the creative freedom to really get into what I wanted to do: flavors, designs, that kind of stuff. I wanted to open my own place.

One day, my father said, “Why don’t you do your own thing? Just open something small. Make what you want and try it out.”

Being 25 and never having owned a business before, I

think I heard “No” about 12 times before I finally found a small storefront. It was 1,200 square feet. Within two years, I outgrew that space. The shop that was right next to me, they were moving out. I asked the landlord, “Can I have dibs on their spot and expand into that?” He told me, “Absolutely, do whatever you need to do.” So, we expanded.

When was that moment when you knew this was going to work?

Within the first year. The orders for cakes for birthday parties, baby showers, anniversaries, gender reveals and weddings

got to the point where I realized I couldn’t take any more orders. When I ran out of fridge space, I literally, physically couldn’t do any more.

And that’s how we still do it. I mean, I’ve got three bakers, two baker’s assistants, four cake decorators, a front-of-house crew, and everybody here still has the same mentality: “I think we can get a couple more orders in.” And that’s when we stop, when we hit our limit of being able to store these products.

So, it was probably within the first year. It kind of clicked, “OK, I’ve got this. I can do this.”

I have an artist background. Even before I got into pastry, I did graphic design, painting and photography. I have that artist eye also. I can create some really cool stuff, and it was not being taken seriously. So, that’s why I decided on pastry school.

Now people will come in and interview and they’ll say, “You know, I really haven’t worked in a bakery.” But I can look and see. I’m like, “OK, you worked in a pizza place. You worked as a bar back. You’ve picked up life skills. You’ve picked up a lot of really good restaurant experience.” That translates too.

“It’s beautiful. It’s so bright and gorgeous in here now.”





It sounds like you have like-minded people.

Yeah, people who don't want to come in and just punch a clock. They want to create. And I like being able to give them that freedom. We recently had a promotion for a baker, and I said, "You can really kill this and take over." And she has. It's like watching her come out of her shell because she's trying all these new items and flavors and just having fun in the kitchen. It's just giving them free rein and letting them go. And that's when the best stuff comes out.

Tell me your reality television story. I have a feeling it's going to be a good one.

My long-time employee, Amber, is just my favorite person in the whole wide

world. She came in and told me, "Hey, I binge-watched this show this past weekend, and I think we should be on it. It's a cupcake competition." And I thought, "I'm already hating it. We don't make cupcakes." She says, "Yeah, but we could. And I think it would be fun."

So, I watched an episode online and told her, "You know they're going to edit out half the stuff we say, which will not be good for television." She's like, "I think we should do it anyway. Let's just see if they would take us." So, I literally sent them a two-sentence email saying, "My friend Amber and I are hilarious together. We are cohorts in crime, just a trip to the grocery store is kind of ridiculous with the two of us."

The showrunners emailed me the next day and asked us to send a quick video. We

shot a video in the shop on a Saturday. Amber edited it together that night and sent it over. They called us first thing Monday morning and said, "You're on."

I turned to Amber and said, "We need to learn how to make cupcakes." And she goes, "Well, you just put the batter in a cup, and it's fine. We'll figure it out." And we flew out a month later and filmed those shenanigans.

You told me your business story, your origin story and your cupcake story. Tell me your energy story. How did this start?

My place is a little bit on the older side. It's been here well longer than 20 years, so the building is starting to have

some issues and so was our overhead lighting. Light bulbs started to go out, so I called the electrician in, and he said, "The ballasts are going bad in your lights." And I said, "OK, how do we replace those?" He said, "You can't right now because of COVID. Everything's on back order, and you can't really replace these things." So, we have lights going out in the shop every day. We're down to maybe 25% of our overhead lighting working, and we can't really work like this.

I talked to my landlord, and he said, "Hey, have you considered contacting BGE about their energy-saving programs?" I went online and sent in a form. I said, "Hey, I'm looking at overhead lighting. I have a bakery." Somebody called me a couple of days later. We set up a time, and they came out to do an energy analysis. The contractor looked at our overhead lights and said, "Yes, we can help you immensely."

When he told me how much it would normally be and then how much it was actually going to cost me, I was thinking, "OK, where's the catch? They'll come in, and they'll change all my lights and charge me next to nothing, and my bill's going to be lower? Yeah, sure."

But then they set up a time. The crew that came out were amazing. We tried to move as much stuff as we could out of their way, and they put drop cloths over everything. They switched out all our overhead lighting for LEDs.

It's beautiful. It's so bright and gorgeous in here now.

As a person who's creating something, light is kind of important.

Oh, yeah. It's night and day because when you first turned it on, I was like, "Whoa." It is super bright.

Details are vital in your business. Can you see more details now?

Oh, absolutely. It was getting bad there toward the end. It's kind of anxiety-producing when lights stop working.

So, the investment was nothing compared to what I thought it was going to be. Like when he said, "It's going to cost you this amount." I was like, "Excuse me? That's it?" I would have done this five years ago had I known.

Shannon Clarke was able to enhance lighting in her bakery with assistance from BGE's Small Business Energy Solutions Program, which covers up to 70% of the cost of qualifying upgrades to lighting and refrigeration equipment. Learn more at BGESmartEnergy.com/Small2.



YOU'VE GOT THIS

YOU CAN INSTALL YOUR OWN SECURITY SYSTEM IN NO TIME.

NO POWER TOOLS
OR EXTENSIVE SHOP
CLASS REQUIRED.

No one knows the age, maybe because it's a different age for each person, but one day you wake up and—poof. You're an adult. You are now expected, if not required, to do adult things. Boring things. Beige things. We don't mean specifically the color but the feeling that color evokes. Day in and day out, things just become more and more ... meh.

Fear not. Adulting isn't all bad.

One great thing is cake. As an adult, you can have cake anytime you'd like. Once you reach a certain age, they just let you. Feel free to test that out anytime. The second great thing you can do as an adult is buy cool gadgets. Again, there is no one to stop you. Today's cool gadget example is a web-based security system you can install yourself.

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*A single screw for
the entire system. See?
Adulting isn't so hard.*



STEP 01.
PUT. THE TOOLBELT. DOWN.

You don't need to wield a 12-volt drill, own a workbench or have taken shop class to install your new security system. The latest web-based security systems are made for relatively quick and easy installation. For example, one popular package requires you to use one screw. A single screw for the entire system. See? Adulting isn't so hard.

STEP 02.
FORGET INSERTING "TAB AA" INTO SLOT "S22."

Following the directions is easy. That's because they're written for the average human—not electricians—so you can actually understand them. Are you more of a visual learner? Great. Most brands have online videos that guide you through every step. You won't have flashbacks to assembling furniture. We promise.

STEP 03.
SET UP YOUR SECURITY EPICENTER.

It's called a hub, but "epicenter" just sounds cooler. Place and plug in this guy near your main entry door. Most have a keypad on top so you can arm and disarm the system by pressing the right code. You can also have different codes for different people. The kids. The babysitter. The dog walker.

Another cool trick is a key fob you can actually wave over the top of it to arm or disarm the system. While doing this may make you feel like a wizard, it will not, we repeat not, make you a wizard. We wanted to make that painfully clear. None of these will be used as much as your smartphone. Here's why: Your smartphone is always with you and charged. Your new security system also has GPS connectivity—a big plus for security systems in that it can detect when you're home or away and respond to threats accordingly.

STEP 04.
GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR SENSITIVE SIDE.

After setting up your hub, it's time to install your sensors. Basic packages include multiple motion sensors and contact sensors for your doors and windows. You may see this as the perfect opportunity to break out the power tools. It's not. Many past systems would instruct you to find studs and drill pilot holes. Oh, how times have changed. Now your sensors come with an adhesive back. Mounting is super easy and won't involve permanently scarring your walls or woodwork.

STEP 05.
INSTALL YOUR DOORBELL CAMERA. GREAT FOR SECURITY AND VIRAL VIDEOS.

Alright, alright, this one may require a tool—a screwdriver. Famously the least intimidating of all tools. Often, you can use the wiring from your traditional doorbell to power your new doorbell camera. Simply pull the cover plate off and use the existing screw holes and wiring.

STEP 06.
INSTALL BONUS CAMERAS FOR FORT KNOX-LEVEL SECURITY.

You can add cameras that are so much more than cameras. They're also motion detectors and include facial recognition software. In time, the system will learn your face and the faces of your household members and frequent visitors to avoid setting off any alerts when you or they move.

STEP 07.
WI-FI ENABLED BUT NOT WI-FI REQUIRED.

The lack of wires and the smartphone capability means you're leaning heavily on Wi-Fi. And if the power goes out, the Wi-Fi goes out. But these systems have you covered. At the bare minimum, if the Wi-Fi goes out, the devices are all battery operated, so the authorities will get an alert if something sets off an alarm. You can also get upgrades that include cellular monitoring and alerts, as well as central station monitoring upgrades to ensure someone is always watching your home.

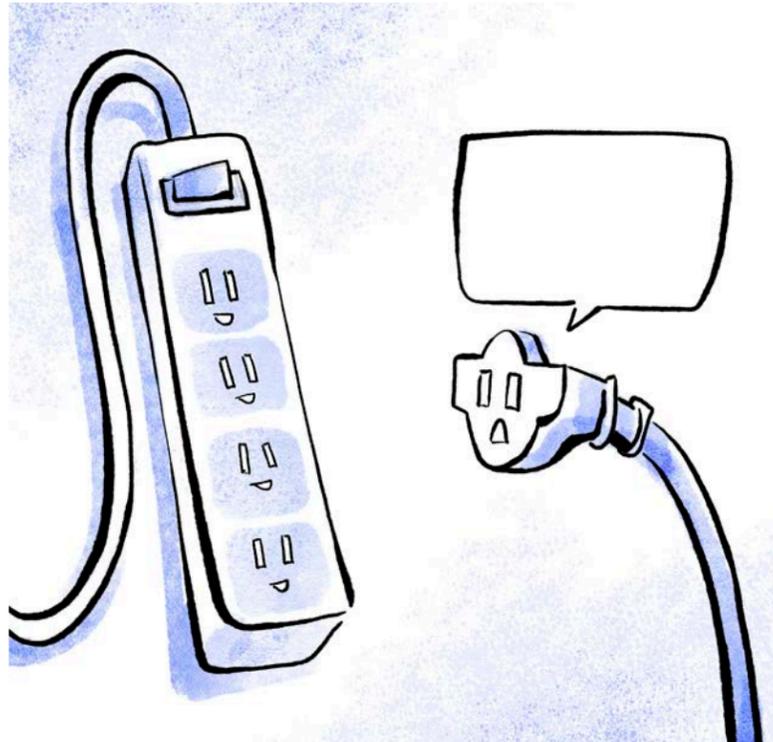
STEP 08.
LASTLY, MAKE YOUR SECURITY PART OF YOUR INTEGRATED SMART HOME STRATEGY.

While security is an obvious priority in any home, taking steps to improve your overall energy efficiency can help offset the energy use required for your new security system.

So, a DIY security system installation is not only within reach, it also doesn't require you to buy a tool belt or spend any additional cash at the hardware store. That being said, hardware stores are quite useful. Yes, you can find an online video for nearly any DIY project, but a video can't answer follow-up questions and give advice. That's what the local mom-and-pop stores can deliver in droves. Build a relationship with the most experienced employee at your local hardware store. It pays to have handy friends.

COMIC CONSERVATION

CAPTION THIS!



Please use the provided QR code or email residential@BGESmartEnergy.com to submit your caption for the cartoon above. The best one will appear in our next edition.



ISSUE ONE WINNING CAPTION

“I better get a cut of the energy savings.”

—JOSH A

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EVERY GREAT EXPERIENCE STARTS WITH A FIRST STEP.

Each time we try something new, we unlock an opportunity to enrich our lives. When it comes to finding pathways to a more energy-efficient lifestyle, there's no better way to get started than with a **Quick Home Energy Check-up**. It's fast. It's easy. And it's included at no additional cost with your BGE service.



Get started at [BGESmartEnergy.com/FirstStep2](https://www.BGESmartEnergy.com/FirstStep2) or scan the QR code to learn more.

EmPOWER Maryland programs are funded by a charge on your energy bill. EmPOWER programs can help you reduce your energy consumption and save you money. To learn more about EmPOWER and how you can participate, go to [BGESmartEnergy.com](https://www.BGESmartEnergy.com).

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Most of a home's energy bill goes to heating and cooling. That's why they chose new ENERGY STAR® certified equipment, which saves them up to 30% annually. Now, that's something to smile about.



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