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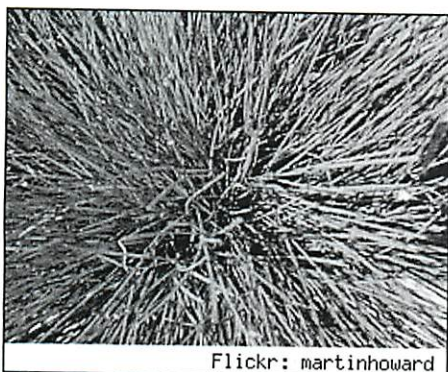
Green or not? Five signs of a truly green product

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The growing market for earth-friendly products and solutions has given homeowners a lot of choices, but how do you know what's truly green versus "greenwashed"? Here are five signs to help measure greenness.

Start with the manufacturer: Green begins at the industrial birthplace of a product, so check out the manufacturer's website or product literature for a written, working environmental policy. It should emphasize reduction, reuse and recycling, and confirm compliance with an industry's voluntary testing programs.

Check the contents: Find out what raw materials go into a product and where they come from, remembering that long-distance transport involves other precious resources. Green manufacturing makes use of renewable resources and energy-efficient processes, while steering clear of harmful synthetic ingredients and the release of harmful substances during the process itself.

The product's journey to and place in your home: Assess what the product is packaged with, and how it's transported to the point of purchase. Also confirm whether or not it'll release VOCs (volatile organic compounds) during and after installation, how much energy it uses, and maintenance requirements.

Disposal strategy: All good things come to an end, and a green one is preferred. This can take the form of content that's separated for recycling, biodegradable elements or the opportunity to make one product into another that's new and useful. Some items may also be returned to the manufacturer at the end of their lifecycle.

Consider the cost: Spending more for something that has less impact on your health and the environment is a good investment, and the greener it is, the better the use of your monetary resources. Also refer to the manufacturer's lifecycle cost analysis for a product, which can help you see beyond immediate comforts and conveniences into the sustainable future of your home improvement plans.

Tom Kraeutler is the **Home Improvement Editor for AOL** and co-author of **My Home, My Money Pit: Your Guide to Every Home Improvement Adventure**. He delivers **home improvement tips** each week as host of **The Money Pit**, a nationally syndicated **home improvement** radio program.