

Home improvement

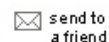
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October 2008



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Compact fluorescent lightbulbs

Don't fall for the common myths about these long-lasting, energy-saving lights

Swapping regular bulbs for compact fluorescents can save you at least \$30 per bulb over a CFL's life. The latest bulbs are better than earlier ones. Yet the myths burn on. Here are some of the most common misconceptions:

Myth: Finding a recycler is hard.

Reality: You shouldn't throw used CFLs out with the trash. But [Home Depot](#), Ikea, and some Ace and True Value stores accept unbroken CFLs no matter where you bought them. Wal-Mart sells the most CFLs. A spokeswoman told us the chain was looking into a recycling program, but it didn't have one as we went to press. You can also contact your public works department or go to www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling.

Myth: Compact fluorescents are pricey.

Reality: Some CFLs now cost less than \$2 compared with \$9 to \$25 in 1999. Several lasted five to 10 times as long as regular bulbs in our tests, and Energy Star versions use up to 75 percent less power. They're also warranted for as long as nine years. Write the purchase date on the bulb in indelible ink. And save your receipt.

Myth: CFLs produce a harsh blue light.

Reality: Many now light like ordinary bulbs. Those with a 2,700 to 3,000 Kelvin (K) number have a warmer, yellower color; 3,500 K to 6,500 K bulbs emit a bluer or whiter light. Energy Star CFLs must include the Kelvin number on the package as of December. Look for CFLs labeled "soft" or "warm" white for light like an incandescent's, and choose "bright white," "natural," or "daylight" for whiter light.

Myth: CFLs flicker when they first light.

Reality: That happened in earlier CFLs with magnetic ballasts. New ones use faster, electronic ballasts.

Myth: These bulbs need time to turn on.

Reality: Turn-on is now nearly instant. But most CFLs we tested took about 30 seconds to reach 80 percent of their brightness, and some flood and outdoor lights took 90 seconds or more. That's why some appear dim at first and aren't ideal for areas such as closets or stairs.

Myth: CFLs contain lots of mercury.

Reality: Each bulb has a tiny fraction of the mercury in a traditional fever thermometer. Energy Star CFLs will have strict limits by the end of this year.

Myth: Compact fluorescent lightbulbs release mercury as they burn.



STILL SHINING Several CFLs from GE, Home Depot, and others are lighting our labs after 10,000 hours.

Photo by Michael Smith

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Reality: The mercury is sealed inside the glass tubing.

Myth: *You need to put on a hazmat suit if you drop one of these bulbs.*

Reality: Exposure to broken CFLs can pose a health risk, especially to a fetus or young child. But don't panic. Open a window, shut off central A/C or forced-air heating, and clear the room for at least 15 minutes as the Environmental Protection Agency recommends. Then follow the EPA'S cleanup guide at www.epa.gov/mercury/spills. And be sure to keep CFLs out of lamps that could easily tip, especially in rooms used often by children or pregnant women.

Myth: *CFLs smoke when they burn out.*

Reality: Today's spent bulbs typically flicker, dim, or emit a reddish-orange glow. If one you own smokes or smolders, turn off power to the light and allow the bulb to cool before removing it and taking it to a retailer or other recycler.

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