

Green rentals piece

## **Going Green Can Attract Renters**

By Susan M. Galardi

Homeowners who make eco-friendly decisions can tout the benefits of being green as a way of attracting renters who are interested in sustainability, and in saving money.

While the 2011 rental market is considerably more robust than the last two years, finding good tenants is still a competitive business. And smart homeowners are taking steps to make their properties stand out. But this season, attractive isn't about home staging or more sisal rugs and white slipcovers; it's about paring down the actual cost of the rental. Not the asking price, but the carrying charges, with solutions that are energy-conscious, eco-friendly and often money saving.

Beth Troy, an agent at Town & Country Real Estate in East Hampton, told of a homeowner whose property became the top choice for renters for just those reasons.

"I took out a couple from New York ... They narrowed it down to four properties in Sag Harbor," she said. "What tipped the scales was that one of the homeowners said she was putting in a solar heater for the pool. The couple was willing to pay more for the rental, knowing that they'd save thousands of dollars on fuel. The solar heater was the deal maker."

Ms. Troy said that many renters, especially those new to the Hamptons, have sticker shock when it comes to the extras involved in renting a home, such as landscape maintenance, and

monthly utility and fuel bills. Fortunately, those still looking to rent out houses have time to make some relatively quick, low-cost adjustments.

One such example would be the solar pool heater.

Since 2003, Sunshine Solar Tech in Jericho has installed a solar roof panel system that replaces traditional heaters in more than 1,200 homes on Long Island. According to Sunshine president and owner Kevin Wert, the system can raise the water temperature by up to 15 degrees. The average cost for the system is \$6,200, compared to the cost of a gas or electric heater, which can cost up to \$4,000. But after the initial outlay, the only cost going forward is associated with running the pool pump.

Another way to save money: block the sunlight. Options include fixed or retractable window awnings and solar shades. The costs for retractable awnings vary greatly. Generally, solar shades cost considerably less—from about \$150 to \$200 per standard window. But while shades do a lot to keep out glare and lessen the sun's heat, they are less effective than awnings, said David King of C.E. King and Sons in East Hampton.

“With interior solar shades, the sun has already come into the room through the window,” he said. “The heat is basically trapped behind the shade. With an exterior awning, sunlight never enters the room.”

Landscaping costs are another way to save by being green. According to garden designer April Gonzales (who also writes about landscape design for The Press), there are a few ways to lower maintenance costs when it comes to lawn and garden areas.

“In your garden beds, stay away from high maintenance flowers and shrubs that need a lot of deadheading,” she said. “Use

'workhorse plants' like the new lantanas. You get lots of color with little work." She added, "Flowerpots require a lot of TLC, but if you put them on a drip system, you won't need to have someone come by three times a week for watering."

Ms. Gonzales reported that grass technology has also changed the game when it comes to mowing costs.

"If you have a traditional lawn and water a lot, you have to mow a lot," she said. "There are new varieties of grasses that require less maintenance, specifically low-mow fescues and micro-clovers. They will absolutely stretch out the time between mowings. But if you have a traditional lawn, you're still tied to mowing about once a week."