

Green Earth



Tax Credits Make Green Driving Cheaper

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 included new tax credits for qualified plug-in electric vehicles or fuel cell vehicles, starting Jan. 1.

CLAIMING A NEW CAR

Both individuals and businesses can get up to \$7,500 for buying a new green vehicle as long as they bought it for their own use and not for resale and will use it primarily in the United States. Furthermore, their modified adjusted gross income may not exceed \$300,000 for married couples filing jointly, \$225,000 for heads of households, and \$150,000 for all other filers.

The IRS says you may use your modified adjusted gross income from the year you take delivery of the vehicle or the year before, whichever is less.

The vehicle itself must also meet some qualifications, according to IRS.gov. These are:

It must have a battery capacity of at least seven kilowatt hours.

It must have a gross vehicle weight rating of less than 14,000 pounds.

Be made by a qualified manufacturer.

Undergo final assembly in North America.

The seller must report required information to both the buyer and the IRS at the



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time of the sale.

The manufacturer's suggested retail price of the vehicle must be less than \$80,000 for vans, SUVs and pickup trucks and \$55,000 for all other vehicles.

You should be able to find most of this information on the vehicle's window sticker. The Department of Energy maintains a list of eligible electric vehicles with final assembly in North America that you should check before purchasing. It will show you how to decode the VIN to give you the place it was assembled.

To claim the credit, the IRS says you should use Form 8936, Qualified Plug-In Electric Drive Motor Vehicle Credit (Including Qualified Two-Wheeled Plug-In Electric Vehicles) with your tax return. To fill out this form, you'll need the car's VIN.

CLAIMING A USED CAR

You can also claim a credit if you buy a used electric vehicle or fuel cell vehicle from a licensed dealer for \$25,000 or less. The credit will equal 30% of the sale price up to \$4,000.

To qualify, the purchaser

must be an individual who bought the vehicle for their own use, may not be claimed as a dependent on another person's tax form, and may not have claimed another used clean vehicle credit in the past three years.

Your modified adjusted gross income must be less than \$150,000 for married filing jointly or surviving spouse, \$112,500 for heads of households and \$75,000 for all other filers. Like the new vehicle credit, you can use your modified AGI from the year you take delivery of the vehicle or the

year before, whichever is less.

The vehicle itself must have a sale price of \$25,000 or less, and be at least two years earlier than the calendar year in which you bought it. If you're buying this year, it would need to be a 2021 or older to qualify. It may not have been transferred after Aug. 16, 2022, to a qualified buyer and it must weigh less than 14,000 pounds. The battery capacity must be at least seven kilowatt hours and you must primarily use it in the U.S. Lastly, you must also have bought the vehicle from a dealer, not in a private sale.

Costa Rica Among Top Destinations

It doesn't get much greener than the verdant valleys and jungles of Costa Rica.

The country bills itself as one of the world's top ecotourism vacation spots with good reason. Though the country itself is small, it makes up 5% of the earth's biodiversity.

Costa Rica is home to 29 national parks, 19 wildlife refuges, eight biological reserves and numerous protected areas. It has mountains, volcanoes, beaches on both the warm Caribbean Sea and the cooler Pacific Ocean, rainforests and more. Here are some of the highlights:

BARRA HONDA NATIONAL PARK

This 5,000-acre park is located near Nicoya. It protects a cave system with stalactite and stalagmite formations and the 1,476-foot Barra Honda Peak. The peak is made of old coral reefs pushed skyward by tectonic activity. Nineteen caves have been explored in the park, including the Terciopelo Cave, which is open to the public.

The park includes potable water, restrooms, lodging, an information center and lookout points over the Tempisque River.

COCOS ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

UNESCO declared this national park a World Heritage Site in 1997. Surrounded by



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sparkling turquoise water, Cocos Island is the center of an abundance of marine life. The island itself is home to evergreen forests and waterfalls. The park includes an information center, ranger station, trails, restrooms, potable water and lookout points. You can reach the island by boat from the Port of Puntarenas.

GUAYABO NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONUMENT

Just northwest of Turrialba, the Guayabo National Archaeological Monument protects pre-Hispanic structures made of rounded river stones

built from 1000 B.C. to 1400, an occupation of 2,400 years. It also includes evergreen pre-montane rainforest.

IRAZU VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK

This park protects the Irazu, the tallest volcano in Costa Rica. An active volcano, Irazu has a long history of eruptions. It has three craters — Hermosa Beach, Principal and Diego de la Haya — and the Sapper formation, from which the Caribbean and Pacific coasts of the country may be seen. Visitor services in this park include a ranger station, trails, restrooms, a cafeteria, parking

and natural viewpoints.

LA AMISTAD INTERNATIONAL PARK AND BIOSPHERE PRESERVE

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, this park covers both Costa Rica and Panama. It's the largest tropical forest-covered mountain system in the country and contains wet, rain and cloud forests.

It includes four parks or preserves and several forest and indigenous preserves.

Visitor services include trails and natural view points. There are four sectors of the park, each with its own entrance.

The Tres Colinas Sector is near Potrero Grande.

The Pittier Sector is near San Vito. The Biolley Sector is near Las Tablas de Potrer Grande and the Santa Maria Sector is near Santa Maria.

TENORIO VOLCANO NATIONAL PARK

See palm trees, ferns, bromeliads and orchids in this park nestled in the Guanacaste mountain range.

It's also home to white-faced monkeys, anteaters, pumas, tapirs and exotic bird species.

It has potable water, restrooms, an information desk, trails and lookout points.

Foods That Minimize Your Impact

It's easy to say that you're making the best environmental choices when it comes to an electric car or your recycling bins.

But you can also make better-for-the-Earth decisions when it comes to your eating habits as well.

Real Simple editors made a list of the most environmentally sustainable foods you can eat and most of them turn out to be really good for you, too.

PULSES AND BEANS

Beans, lentils, peas and chickpeas are really good at converting nitrogen from the air into a form that can be used by plants. The plants that grow beans and pulses also use green water, which is water from precipitation that's already stored in the root zone of the soil. They're also really good for your diet, too, bringing fiber, protein and B vitamins to your plate.

LEAFY GREENS

Think kale, spinach and arugula and all their friends. These leafy vegetables are rich in vitamins and antioxidants. They are also light on resources in terms of farming and, if you buy local, they're especially good for the environment. Even better, these lightweight, hardy crops can be grown in a pot or window box for your own salad garden.



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MUSHROOMS

Fungi can grow where many other foods can't and the Mushroom Council says that mushrooms require less water than many other crops are also generate a smaller amount of carbon dioxide emissions. There are more than 2,000 edible varieties of mushrooms

and they're also high in protein and fiber.

CEREALS AND GRAINS

Long the backbone of the human diet, cereals and grains are packed with dietary fiber, minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. They also rank fairly low on greenhouse gas emissions and require less water than

animal-based products.

ALGAE

The World Wildlife Federation calls algae one of the Future 50 Foods. It's responsible for half of all oxygen production on earth and is the foundation of all aquatic ecosystems. It contains essential fatty acids, vitamin C and

iodine. It's also packed with protein and can be harvested year round.

When you consider adding algae to your diet, Real Simple says to look for NSF certification and third-party testing that passes.

Some types of edible algae are chlorella, spirulina, seaweed and sea moss.

Recycling In the United States

Each U.S. municipality and waste system that offers recycling has its own process, but the Environmental Protection Agency says there are essentially three steps: Collection, processing and remanufacturing. Let's look at how recycling works and its benefits.

THE PROCESS

Recycling starts with collection, when recyclable materials are generated and collected by the hauler. Next comes processing, when those materials are delivered to a facility where its sorted, cleaned of contaminants, prepared for transport to a milling facility or a manufacturing facility. Some items, such as glass and plastic require more processing and may go to other kinds of plants. Last comes remanufacturing, where recyclables are made into new products.

THE BENEFITS

Recycling reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators, saves natural resources and prevents pollution and reduces greenhouse gases. It also saves ener-



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gy and supports American manufacturing, the EPA says. The Recycling Economic Report found that recycling accounts for 757,000 jobs, \$36.6 billion in wages and \$6.7 billion in tax revenues.

CHALLENGES

However, even with the obvious benefits of recycling, there are challenges to recycling in the United States. It can be difficult, the EPA says, for con-

sumers to understand what materials can be recycled, how they're recycled and where to recycle materials.

The agency also says that the country's infrastructure failed to keep pace with the types of waste. Manufacturers and the recycling industry need to communicate more to better manage the recycling of new materials, it says.

Domestic markets for recycled materials need to be

stronger, the EPA says.

"Historically, some of the recycled materials generated in the United States have been exported internationally," it says.

"However, changing international policies have limited the export of materials. We need to better integrate recycled materials and end-of-life management into product and packaging designs."

RECYCLING STRATEGY

The National Recycling Strategy aims to recycling rate to 50% by 2030. It has five strategic objectives: improve markets for recycling commodities, increase collection and improve materials management infrastructure, reduce contamination in the recycled materials stream, enhance policies to support recycling, and standardize measurement and increase data collection.

Best Cooking Oil For Your Kitchen

Many recipes start with a medium high heat and a tablespoon or two of some fat.

From butter to more exotic oils there are tons to choose from. And each has their own homes in different applications. While you may have considered smoke points, flavor and other things, you may not have considered the environmental impact.

OLIVE OIL

Olive oil is one of the most popular oils in the U.S., which Treehugger says consumers 80 million gallons of it every year. Most of the world's olives are grown in the Mediterranean, and the demand has created a soil erosion problem.

COCONUT OIL

Coconut oil is solid at room temperature and liquid when heated and makes an excellent substitute for butter. It's a saturated fat, which can help keep you full longer. However, most coconut oil has taken a toll on coconut farmers in Asia, many of whom live in poverty. Fair Trade USA says that consumers should look for fair-trade coconut oil to ensure their purchases don't exploit growers.

VEGETABLE OIL

Vegetable oil comes from a mixture of oils such as safflower, sunflower and soybean. It has a high smoke point but lit-



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tle taste and little to no nutritional value. Vegetable oil has high amounts of omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids and the process used to make them uses a range of industrial chemicals and solvents. Treehugger recommends you opt for organic vegetable oils whenever possible.

PALM OIL

Palm oil, Treehugger says, is

the reason for environmental destruction in Malaysia and Indonesia, where most of the primary palm oil producers are located. Palm oil is included in nearly 50% of items in the supermarket, from food to hygiene products, but its production destroys habitat for animals and results in peat-bog fires that generate smoke. There are efforts to make palm oil more sustainable, but it's

difficult to get producers on board.

CANOLA OIL

Canola oil is a Canadian invention. It's similar to vegetable oil, but most of the canola produced in North America is made from genetically modified crops.

Treehugger again recommends going in for organic, if available.

BUTTER

Butter is mostly saturated fat and, obviously, is an animal product.

Treehugger says to help lessen your impact, consider the source of your butter. Find high-quality butter from grass-fed cows, and you can take advantage of the fact that butter is, by and large, a minimally processed food.

Be A More Green Pet Parent

Sustainable living includes our four-footed, feathered and finned friends as well.

Nearly three-quarters of pet parents polled by Rover said they are interested in learning how to live more sustainably with their pets. More than 80% say that taking care of their pets in an environmentally friendly way is important to them. Here are some ideas on greening up your pet's life.

POOP BAGS

Dogs poop, on average, 274 pounds of dog poop per year. And, if you're a good pet parent, you're scooping all of that up in a poop bag. Start by using eco-friendly biodegradable poop bags, and then make sure you meet the brand's specific disposal requirements.

LITTER LIABILITIES

Cat litter has long used clay as its primary material. Clay-based litters contain sodium bentonite, which makes the cat litter clumpy and easy to scoop. But sodium bentonite is strip-mined, which can destroy forests and wild habitats. Sodium bentonite is also not biodegradable, meaning it piles up in landfills. But there are new litters on the market to try, including those made with sawdust shavings, walnut shells and wheat.

PET FOOD

Pet food is a controversial



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topic. And while you may have carefully pored over nutrition labels, have you ever considered the environmental impact of your pet's food? Rover recommends choosing organic pet food and treats for your best friend. It also points out that foods labeled natural are less regulated than organic foods, so choose those first.

BIOFRIENDLY BEDS

You can find all kinds of pet beds that are made from recycled, biodegradable or biobased materials.

Look for beds with removable, machine-washable covers. Keeping the bed out of the laundry, Rover says, preserves its shape and fullness.

SHOP LOCALLY

Just like with human products, pet products are most environmentally friendly when produced locally. Reducing the distance of travel and the packaging needed makes locally produced the way to go when reducing your impact on the earth. Look beyond pet foods and treats and shop locally for dog and cat toys, bedding and

more.

Some pet toys come from as close as your bathroom cabinet. You can make your own pet toys out of old towels, T-shirts and clothing that may have otherwise ended up in the landfill. If you're in the store, look for toys that contain less plastic and more durable rather than cheap toys that they'll go through quickly.

Going Green Is As Close As Your Garden

Make more than just your thumb green by creating a sustainable garden that works well in your climate and with the wildlife that lives around you.

You can start by using recycled garden materials such as hoses and tools. Then choose some of these ideas.

SUCCESSIONAL BLOOMS

Plan your garden so that plants flower continuously throughout the year. Having plants flowering all the time is not only beautiful, but it also keeps your local pollinators fed throughout the year. It can also keep beneficial, pest-eating insects in residence so that you can use fewer pesticides and chemicals.

COMPANION PLANTING

Another technique to cut down on pesticide use is planting things together that will discourage pests. An example is tomatoes and the marigolds that keep away the pests that eat your tomatoes. Another example is carrots alongside garlic and onions. The aromatics mask the smell of the carrot, keeping the carrot root fly away.

CHOOSE RESISTANT PLANTS

By choosing plants that are resistant to diseases and pests



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common in your area, you can not only reduce your work load in the garden, but you will also reduce the need for chemical support, such as pesticides and fertilizers. Choosing resistant plants will also mean they thrive year after year, reducing your need to plant new plants.

COMPOST

A green garden starts with a rich soil. You can improve your soil and your relationship with the planet by learning to make compost. Late summer to early winter is the peak time to make compost, but any time of year is a good time to start a

compost pile. Locate your pile in dappled shade and create the right mix of compost with green material such as grass, fruit and vegetable peelings, brown material like straw in a ratio of 25 parts brown materials to one part green materials. Turn your compost regularly,

lifting it and mixing it with a fork to aerate it as it rots down. Compost should also be kept moist and, in no time, you will have compost ready to use. You'll know when it's ready when it has a rich, crumbly texture and is deep brown with the smell of damp earth.