

Frequently Asked Questions

Where's the straw?

From the outside, the straw bale house looks like almost any other house. But go inside and look through the truth window into the walls: you will see the straw bales, 18 inches thick, inside the earth plaster finish.

What about pests?

The straw bales are very densely packed and sealed by the exterior siding and interior earth plaster. If any insects had gotten in during construction, they could not move or breathe.

Won't the straw decompose?

Organic material, such as straw, requires both oxygen and water in order to decompose. With the siding and earth plaster, no water can get into the walls and the straw. Therefore decomposition should be impossible! Straw has even been found in excellent condition in Egyptian tombs from thousands of years ago!

Won't the straw make a greater fire hazard?

Simply put: no. Many materials laboratories have found that the straw bale/plaster walls have proven to be exceptionally resistant to fire. Due to their tight compaction, bales contain very little oxygen required for burning.

Our Mission

In the spirit of St. Francis, the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center recognizes our oneness with all creation. We promote active learning and healthy relationships with our natural environment to achieve sustainable living.

We appreciate your support

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, we rely on income from our program fees and farm products, a subsidy from the Sisters of St. Francis and the donations and grants of generous persons, businesses and foundations that believe in the urgency and importance of our work.

Please consider helping us to sustain a viable, healthy planet for this and future generations to appreciate and enjoy. Visit our website felctiffin.org to make a secure, online gift. Or, call our Mission Advancement Office at 419-447-0435. Request a copy of the St. Francis Community magazine to learn more about the FELC and other ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis.



Franciscan Earth
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Straw Bale House



The straw bale house, also called Little Portion Green, is an educational and demonstration facility to teach young and old alike how to use natural building materials, save energy and preserve the environment.



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Project Straw

The straw bale house, or “Little Portion Green” as it is affectionately known, is a passive solar, demonstration house designed to showcase low environmental impact living. It is an example of renewable, green building principles and is being used to motivate all visitors in moving away from the use of fossil fuels.

The straw bale house is part of the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center and can be found directly to the east of the center’s large parking lot.



Features

The straw bale house has a very low environmental impact compared to conventional building. It also demonstrates some advanced green design and construction.

Passive Solar

The house is oriented so that its windows predominantly face south. This allows it to use passive solar energy, particularly in the winter when it is most needed. In the winter, the sun is lower in the sky, so it shines through the windows and helps to heat the house. In the summer, the sun is higher in the sky, and the windows are shaded to help keep the house at a comfortable temperature. The triple pane windows also efficiently contribute to maintain the interior temperature.

Energy Recovery Ventilation (ERV) System

The house is insulated at a value of R-70, meaning it is very air tight! The ERV System treats the air as it is exchanged from inside and outside, which keeps the inside at a comfortable humidity. It also reduces the cost, and energy used, for heating and cooling

Mini Ductless Split Heating and Cooling

This is a small but powerful system heats and cools the entire house. By avoiding the energy loss inherent in ductwork, it achieves high energy efficiency and reduces the cost compared to standard heating and cooling systems.

More Features

Recycled Materials

Recycled materials play a prominent part in the straw bale house. The floor is insulated with the innovative sub-slab material Millcell™, which is made from recycled glass. The straw bale house was the first project in North America to use this material. All the carpeting is made from recycled plastic bottles. The house also features recycled countertops and clay tiles.

Energy Efficient Appliances

The house uses some of the most efficient Energy Star rated appliances. LED lighting reduces energy use by up to 80% compared to incandescent lights. Low flow toilets are also used to save water.

Permaculture

Permaculture landscaping develops agricultural ecosystems designed to be sustainable and self sufficient. The landscape around the house exemplifies this principle with a swale, edible landscaping and plants that attract pollinators.

**Call Sr. Jane Omlor at 567-207-5393 to
book a weekend brunch or tour.
Tours are available the first Monday
of each month.**