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Appleberry Treasures offers sustainability at low cost

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If you want to make a sustainable investment for a few thousand dollars, install a few solar panels on your home to heat your water.

If you want to make a sustainable investment for a few dollars, consider buying a scented candle.

Just make sure it's the right kind.

For three years, Sherri Trachsel, 43, has moonlighted as a vendor of scented candles. The job is only part time -- it supplements her full-time work at a bank, and she doesn't make the candles herself -- they're made by a company in Wilkes-Barre, Penn., and distributed to sellers across the country -- but for Trachsel, the home business is a small, good thing.

She got to name her operation -- Appleberry Treasures -- and sell a product she is proud of: Scented candles made from natural products.

Buying a candle from Trachsel probably won't draw the same envious stares as a hybrid car or a gallery of solar panels in your backyard, but as candles go, Trachsel says these are the good kind. They're made from natural products such as soy, vegetables and beeswax, and their makers spurn the use of paraffin, which is often found in cheaper candles and can activate a person's allergies.

Trachsel's candles, made by a company called Mia Bella, also use cotton wicks, which lack the metal often found in candles, allowing the candle to burn 90 percent soot-free, meaning even an obsessive candle user is less likely to find his or her walls dusted with black streaks.

"Through the years, if you burn a lot of candles, you can tell that you do. Your house gets kind of smoky," says Julie Bohm, a regular customer of Trachsel's. "These are clean burning."

Even for the rock-ribbed environmentalist, however, the appeal of these candles will likely be something other than the ideological because they smell nice. And for people who like nice smells, Trachsel's naturally made, allergy-friendly candles might be a good way to go.

"In the fall you like to burn something that smells like someone's baking, a nice warm cozy smell when you walk in," says Trachsel. "And in the summer you like something fresh, like lilacs."