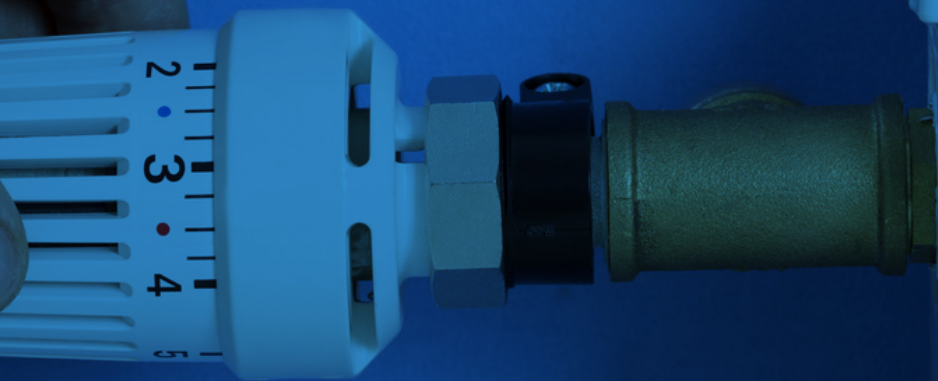


30 WAYS

TO REDUCE

HEATING
AND COOLING
COSTS



Essential
Home and Garden

30 Ways To Reduce Heating and Cooling Costs

What is one thing that the hottest months of summer and the coldest months of winter have in common?

You, sitting in your home trying to decide between being comfortable and saving money.

It's a battle we all fight. And one we rarely win, no matter which side we choose. After all, many of us struggle to pay our bills or save money as it is. Throwing away extra cash just to keep your home a few degrees warmer seems like such a waste. That is until you're shivering through your morning routine or sweating in bed overnight.

Luckily, there are some simple steps you can take to lower your heating and cooling bills, all without having to sacrifice your comfort. Keep reading to find out how you can keep the temperature inside your home more pleasant without having to pay more in energy costs.



17 WAYS TO SAVE MONEY



ON WINTER HEATING COSTS

If the thought of snow falling and temps dropping has you bundled in thermals - even inside your home - you're not alone. Here are 17 tips for keeping your house warm this winter without having to turn up the thermostat.

Seal up air leaks



Gaps under doors, around windows, under baseboards, even around outlet covers and light fixtures let cold air into your home during the winter. Take some time to examine each of these areas. You might even consider using a lit candle to test for air leaks. If you see the flame flicker near a gap or seam, you know that air is moving through.

Replace old, or add new, weather stripping around doors and windows. And use caulk to seal up the gappy baseboard. For leaks around outlets and fixtures, consider stuffing more insulation into the wall, then patching the drywall as needed.



Program your thermostat

Probably the easiest and most effective way to lower your heating bills is to invest in a programmable thermostat. These digital thermostats allow you to crank up the heat only when you really need it, such as in the mornings while getting ready for the day and the evenings when you get home from work.

Whenever you're at work or asleep, setting the thermostat to the lowest temperature you can handle--65 degrees is a great starting point. Most programmable models even offer special programming for the weekend, so you can adjust for a later wake time and up the daytime temp if needed.



By adjusting the thermostat lower by just 7 degrees overnight, you could save up to 10% on your heating cost annually.



Cook something (or better yet, bake!)



Stoves and ovens put out a surprising amount of heat, and they make for a great way to warm up on a cold winter's day. Aim to cook fresh meals during the coldest part of the day (e.g., in the evening) and save microwaveable leftovers for work.

Look for traditional winter recipes like soups that have to simmer for hours or baked meats and veggies (or muffins!) to extend the cooking process and add extra warmth. Getting the entire family involved in the meal prep is a great idea, too. Not only will it allow for more time together, but it will bring everyone into the warmest area of the house for a couple of hours, allowing you to lower the thermostat temporarily.



Open blinds during the day and shut them at night



If you get a rare glimpse of the winter sun, take advantage of it by opening your curtains. This passive solar heat can quickly turn a frigid living room into a comfy oasis—without costing you a dime. Plus, the light and vitamin D the sun brings can do wonders for your winter mood.

Once the sun goes down and the temperature drops, close up your curtains and blinds to seal the heat in. Investing in extra-thick window treatments will further insulate your home against drafts and cold.



Have your furnace serviced annually



The goal of most of these tips is to use your furnace less frequently, but when the central heat does kick on, you want it working as well as possible. By keeping up with annual maintenance and having your HVAC system serviced in the fall, you can reduce energy waste due to inefficiency.

If you don't have the extra cash to pay a professional to look over the system, you can still give it a boost by performing an annual cleaning. Take your vacuum attachment and go over all registers, vents, and the areas around your furnace.



There are plenty of great resources out there for DIY cleaning of furnace elements and burners that are worth looking into as well.



Use exhaust fans sparingly



Bathroom fans are necessary for removing excess humidity and odors from your home, but they also suck out a good amount of heat since warm air rises and collects around the ceiling. To avoid losing all that extra warmth you've been trying hard to save, use these vents only when needed.



Installing timer switches in place of traditional on/off switches is one way to assure these vents don't get left on longer than intended.



Bundle up



Adding an extra layer to your attire while in the home is another way to feel warmer without increasing your energy use. In addition to extra clothing during the day, you can also opt for warmer pajamas at night and additional covers on the bed. By relying on these manual forms of warmth, you can easily set your thermostat a few degrees lower overnight, which equates to huge savings throughout the winter.



Shut rooms you're not using

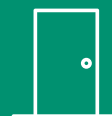


By closing the doors to rooms you aren't currently using, you'll help keep them at a more consistent temperature. That way, next time you need to go into that room, it's already warm, negating the need to crank the thermostat or use supplemental heaters.

This process also isolates the halls and stairways of your home. Usually, much of the heat generated by the registers in these areas end up migrating into rooms on your top floor.



By keeping doors shut, you can slow this process, which will keep these areas just as toasty as the areas inside the shuttered rooms.



Keep heat registers clear



Your heater can only run as efficiently as your registers and vents allow. Keep furniture and rugs off of registers so newly generated warmth can move freely into every room. Just as important, be sure the central heating intake vents are clear as well. If your system cannot pull fresh air in, it will struggle to push hot air out.

Besides keeping items away from vents, cleaning the registers every month is beneficial. Use your vacuum brush attachment to remove hair and dust. Then pull the register and use the extension to clear out any collected debris in the duct.



Drop the temp while you're away



Even if you don't have a programmable thermostat, you can save money on your heating by setting a reminder to lower the set temp before leaving the house and before you go to sleep at night. If you do have a programmable thermostat, you can still save extra money by remembering to drop the heat anytime you leave the house for an extended period.



Just remember to keep your temperature set high enough to avoid freezing pipes. Usually, 60 to 65 degrees will be enough, depending on the outside temperature.



Replace your furnace filters



Another factor that can quickly impede the heating efficiency of your furnace is a dirty filter. Be sure to change out your furnace filter at the beginning of each winter. Depending on the filter's rating, you will need to replace it again every one to three months. Longer-lasting filters cost more but can save you money in the long run.



Choose supplemental heating options

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If bundling up isn't enough to keep you warm in your home office or while working on projects around the house, consider using targeted supplemental heating rather than cranking up the thermostat. A small electric heater or gas fireplace is a great way to warm just the room you are in without paying to raise the heat in the entire house. These options are most economical when combined with a lower set thermostat temperature.



Turn on ceiling fans

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One problem that can lead to areas of cold air in your home is a lack of airflow. By turning your ceiling fans on low, you can create just enough movement to push hotter air into spaces that normally stay cool. To avoid creating more drafts, always switch your fans to run clockwise, also known as the “winter setting,” during the frigid months.



When moving this direction, the tilted blade edges cut through the air, pulling cool air up to displace and push down the warmer air near the ceiling.



Use your fireplace sparingly



Throwing a cord of wood in the fireplace and lighting it up may seem like the best way to reduce central heating costs, but this isn't always the case. Fireplaces can also cause heat loss since the generated heat and the room's warmth escapes through the flu and out in the chimney.

Using the fireplace is only advisable when you will spend most of the day in that room and turn down the house's central heat.



When not in use, be sure to close the damper on your flu to avoid losing warm air up your chimney.



Consider an energy audit

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If you are really struggling to keep your house warm and your heating bills down, you may consider getting an energy audit done. This service is usually provided free or for a small fee by your utility company. A technician will come to your house and inspect it using special tools that detect heat loss and temperature changes. Based on what they find, they can then give you personalized recommendations for lowering your heating bill.



Add insulation where needed

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One recommendation that often comes out of an energy audit is the need for additional insulation in certain areas of your outer walls. Remodeling, electrical work, and other home projects can disrupt existing insulation, causing gaps for cold air to move into your home.

Adding extra insulation to these gaps, replacing older, less efficient insulation, and pumping spray insulation into your attic spaces can all help your home stay warmer.



Replace your old furnace

Replacing an outdated furnace comes with a large upfront cost, but it can save you boatloads in the long run. Central heating systems have only gotten more efficient over the last couple of decades. If your furnace is older than this, it may be worth considering a replacement. Look for an energy-efficient rated model to save extra money on heating and potentially receive a tax credit.



13 WAYS TO SAVE MONEY



ON SUMMER COOLING COSTS

Many of the tips above will also help to keep your home cooler in the summer. But the hottest months of the year will take some specific tactics to prevent you from sweating indoors. Here are 13 tips to help you beat the heat without paying for it.

Time your electronics use



Large electronics, like computers, TVs, and stereos, put out a lot of heat. By reducing your tech use during the hottest hours of the day, you can help keep your home cooler. At night, you can open a window to encourage any excess heat to move outside instead of adding to the temperature in your home.



Turn on ceiling fans



Ceiling fans help increase airflow in the winter months. In the summer, they do this and more. By turning your fans to spin counterclockwise—so the blade’s wide surface pushes against the air—you can reduce areas of stagnant heat and increase downdrafts to help you feel cooler.

If you aren’t using the AC, you may even consider opening the windows on your lower level while the fans circulate air on the top floor. By doing so, you can create extra airflow to keep surfaces cool and help bring fresh air into your home.



Use a programmable thermostat with your AC



Just as with the heater, your programmable thermostat is key to lowering your cooling bills in the summer. There is no reason to have your AC going while you aren't home (especially if you use some of our other tricks to keep your house from overheating).

Use your thermostat program to prevent your AC from kicking on in the morning or while you're at work by setting it higher than the temperature your house is likely to reach. Program the AC to kick on just before you get home from work, or better yet, use [a smart thermostat](#) that you can program from your phone as you walk out of the office. When you lower your set temperature, shoot for the highest setting that will still feel comfortable and cool to you.



Seventy-five degrees is generally a good trade-off between saving energy (and money) and getting some much-needed relief from the heat.



Upgrade your windows and doors



Just as windows and doors can let heat out in the winter, they let a lot of heat in during the summer. Weatherstripping can help, but newer windows offer features like UV blocking, and layering reduces how much heat the sun forces into your home. Thicker exterior doors with internal insulation can also keep the cool air in and the hot air out.



Keep your AC tuned up



A healthy AC is an efficient AC. Consider getting a professional out at the beginning of the spring to tune up your system. They can also offer advice on how to increase airflow around the unit and maintain filters and parts to avoid excess energy use.



Avoid cooking inside during the day



Barbecuing in the backyard is a quintessential part of summer. It's also a great way to avoid adding more hot air to the inside of your house. Save baking and stovetop cooking for the evening hours when you can open windows in the kitchen. Or, better yet, opt for grilling outside or preparing fresh meals that don't require heat.



Block out the sun



South-facing windows are great for warming your house in the winter but are problematic in the summer. Use drapes to block out the sun as needed throughout the day. Once the sun is no longer shining through a particular window, open the drapes to provide natural light and reduce the heat put out by non-LED light fixtures.



Plant deciduous trees around your home



This step requires a little commitment, but it can have an enormous impact on your cooling costs for years to come. By planting deciduous trees along the south side of your house, you create a natural canopy of shade during the hot summer months.

And by choosing deciduous trees, you'll still be able to take advantage of passive solar heating in the winter months after these trees have shed their leaves.



Upgrade your cooling system



If you have an older AC, it may be time to consider an upgrade. Look for a model with a high energy efficiency ratio or one that has been Energy-Star certified. You may also want to consider alternative cooling systems such as evaporative coolers, which use water evaporation to cool your home.



Room ACs or ductless units are also a great alternative to central cooling if you're using only one or two rooms throughout the day.



Use the exhaust fan while you shower



Showering can quickly turn a cool bathroom into a hot sauna. Using your exhaust fan while you shower will move all that hot, moist air up and out of your house before it has a chance to dissipate into other rooms. Turning the fan on in a top-level bathroom in the afternoons can also help move out hot air that has naturally accumulated throughout the day.



Open windows when temperatures drop



Once the temperature outside dips below the temp inside your house, it is time to open windows and turn on ceiling fans. Not only will this bring fresh air into your home, but it will help cool things off quickly with little energy expenditure. In many climates, leaving your windows open overnight will cool your house faster than an AC can, at least until the swelter of late summer arrives.



Spend more time in the basement



The coolest area of your home is the lowest level because hot air rises. If you have a basement, take advantage of this phenomenon by spending more time down there.

Moving your home office or entertainment center into the basement during the summer will make it easier to cool off without having to crank up the AC.



Install a whole-house fan

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The hottest place in your home is often the attic, where a combination of direct sunlight and rising hot air blend to make for one uncomfortable space. This heat dissipates into the top level of your home throughout the day. One quick, efficient way to force all this hot air out of your attic while simultaneously bringing cool air up from the lower levels is with a whole-house fan.

Installing them on the top floor's ceiling, along the hallways or stairs, pulls air from the house into the attic space, forcing the hotter air out through the attic vents.



The warm air from your top-level moves into the attic, while the colder air from your basement cools off your entire house.



Stay Comfortable without Breaking the Bank

Summer and winter are both beautiful seasons with a lot to offer. But when those seasons threaten to bring frigid or sweltering temperatures inside your home, it makes it hard to think about anything other than all the money you'll have to spend to stay comfortable.

But if you put these 30 tips to use, you'll soon see that it is possible to enjoy these seasons without having to experience them inside your home or pay to keep them out.

