

Tips on Lowering Your Heating Costs

Here we are, noticing our summer tans fading, dark roots growing out from our scalps, and waiting for the first winter snow fall amidst the freezing rain and blowing wind. Winter is rearing its ugly head and so are heating costs. The television and web are full of great ideas on how to save money on energy costs, but more often than not it takes money to save money. For many, spending money on major home improvement projects to make a home more energy efficient just isn't in the cards this year.

I am here to tell you that you still have options. You do not have to spend a bunch of money to cut your heating costs. Below you will find nine tips on how to save money on energy bills without breaking the bank. Each tip should cost from nothing to very little. Follow these ideas that all of us should have thought of a decade ago, and say good-bye to shocking heating bills.

1. Bundle up! Running around with shorts and a tank top in the middle of winter just doesn't make much sense. Winter is winter because it is cold, so act like it even if you're just sitting around the house. Put on a sweater or sweatshirt, wear socks and fuzzy slippers. Place a soft, comfy blanket on the couch to cuddle up in while watching TV, reading or chatting with friends. Put throw rugs on hardwood and tile floors to eliminate the shock of the ice cold surfaces. It doesn't cost anything to wear warmer clothes inside and by doing so you can keep the temperature inside the house a few degrees cooler and save big.
2. Not all doors are used in the winter, nor are the windows, so plastic up the windows and doors that are going to go unused. There are window kits for sale for about \$5 per window. These can help to eliminate drafts to keep in the heat! Can't afford the kits or plastic sheeting? Hang blankets to help insulate! If you are creative enough, you can hang it to look shabby chic!
3. Turn the heat down at night and when no one is home. This doesn't mean turn the heat to 40 degrees, but turning it down to 60 overnight or while you're away can make a big difference. Think about it; why keep it 70 degrees when you're either sleeping or out of the house for more than 12 hours a day? You can adjust the thermostat manually for free, but if you want to spend a few bucks a programmable thermostat is a great investment.
4. After baking cookies or making dinner in the oven, leave the door open a crack. There's a lot of heat in that oven, so letting it escape puts the heat to good use by warming up the kitchen and surrounding rooms meaning the furnace has to run a little bit less.
5. Use a space heater only in the current room you are hanging out in. This will take the nip out of the air to make you feel more comfortable without heating all of the other rooms in the house and wasting energy.
6. Use silicone to fill any cracks in doors, windows, etc, including the basement floor and walls. You would be surprised at how much heat is lost through cracks that seem insignificant. A tube of caulk or silicone will only run you a few dollars and it's an easy weekend project.
7. Close any vents going to rooms that are not used regularly. That guest room that sits empty when you don't have any guests? Close the door and the vents. Doing so can easily cut 100-200 square feet off of your energy footprint.
8. Put weather stripping around windows and doors. Weather stripping helps quite a bit, especially in older homes. You'd be surprised how the seals around your doors and windows can deteriorate over time.

9. Cover up the attic entry with plastic, pieces of insulation, old blankets, weather stripping, saran wrap, painter drop cloth, or even a few old shirts. Any of it will help to slow, if not, stop, the drafts and warm air from floating away through your roof. Heat rises and may be getting pulled right up through the attic so you may not notice a cold draft even though your expensive hot air is floating away.

All of these tips are good, old fashioned, common sense thoughts that don't take but a few minutes and maybe a few dollars to implement. True these thoughts won't save you thousands like all new windows would, but they will help you to save as much as possible with what you have.

From - About.com

Thermostats, where they are located in your home, and how you set them can be the most important factor in determining the size of your fuel bill.

1. When you'll be out for an evening, turn down the thermostats. If you'll be away for a weekend or more, lower the thermostats to 55 F. You'll save on heating without risking a freeze-up of your water pipes.
2. Whenever you can lower your thermostat dramatically for a few days or more, you'll save a little on the operation of the [refrigerator](#) and freezer, which won't need to work so hard to maintain their cool.
3. How low can your thermostats be set? At our house, we've gotten accustomed to 68 F as a comfortable norm. Reduce the heat just 1 degree at a time and try it for a week. Each 1-degree drop for an eight-hour period reduces your fuel bill about one percent. Gradually, you might be able to go down 3 or even 4 degrees comfortably and [save a chunk of money](#).
4. Try turning down the thermostat 5 to 10 degrees at night, and then turn it up again in the morning when the coffee is brewing. If you can get used to that, you'll save 5 to 10 percent of your heating bill. Once common myth is that when you reduce the thermostat for only a few hours it will take more heat to bring your home back up to the desired temperature. This is not so. You will save money and fuel because your heating system will not have to keep your home so warm. You will use less energy overall even when you warm up your house from a cooler temperature.
5. For greater ease and comfort, install a programmable set-back thermostat. They are available for most gas- and oil-fueled central heating systems. In this way, you can have the heat turned up before you get up in the morning and lowered [just as you get into bed](#). You may not even notice that you are setting back your thermostat. Most of these thermostats come with two setbacks. Therefore, you can also set back the thermostat for the hours when people are in school or at work.
6. Some setback thermostats have different setbacks for weekends. If you frequently forget to setback your thermostat, the programmable setback thermostats will be a great investment. Even if you are already pretty good at remembering, these devices can frequently enable you to set back the thermostat a few extra degrees, providing you with additional savings.
7. If you heat with electricity, you can take advantage of the individual room thermostats that make it possible to shut off unused rooms and to have cool settings in some rooms and warmer settings in others. Using this feature of electric heat will definitely reduce your fuel bills. If you have a thermostat that controls a relatively large area, you should still consider a setback thermostat. You will need an electrician for this installation.

8. Do you need to talk yourself into a lower thermostat setting? Here's an argument. Your plants are healthier in the cooler air. The health of your plants isn't in the same league with your personal comfort? All right, you'll be healthier in the [cooler air](#). Your body will burn a few more calories keeping you warm, thereby helping you to lose weight and improve your general health. Besides, if you've already insulated and tightened your home, you will probably be just as comfortable at lower temperatures.

9. When it's time to open the windows for a little [fresh air](#) in the spring, remember to turn down the thermostats. Those cool breezes that feel so good will send your furnace on a fuel-burning rampage unless the thermostats are reset.

10. Planning a [party](#)? Turn the thermostats down. Each guest is the equivalent of a 175-watt heater, and a large group will warm up the place without the furnace or the heating units in operation.

From - 547 Ways to be Fuel Smart

Five Action Steps to Cut Natural Gas and Propane Use

With the recent cold snap hitting California, you can take some steps to reduce the amount of energy that you're using to lower your bill. Here are some suggestions.

Turn down your thermostat to 68 degrees. For every degree you lower your heat in the 60-degree to 70-degree range, you'll save up to 5 percent on heating costs. Wear warm clothing like a sweater and set your thermostat to 68 degrees or lower during the day and evening, health permitting. Set the thermostat back to 55 degrees or off at night or when leaving home for an extended time, saving 5-20 percent of your heating costs (heat pumps should only be set back 2 degrees to prevent unneeded use of backup strip heating).

Replace or clean furnace filters once a month. Dirty filters restrict airflow and increase energy use. Now is also the time for a furnace "tune-up." Keeping your furnace clean, lubricated and properly adjusted will reduce energy use, saving up to 5 percent of heating costs.

Reduce hot water temperature. Set your water heater to the "normal" setting or 120-degrees Fahrenheit, unless the owner's manual for your dishwasher requires a higher setting. Savings are 7-11 percent of water heating costs. Insulate the first 5 feet of pipe coming out of the top of your water heater or the whole length until the pipe goes into the wall if that is less than five feet. Pipe insulation is available from your hardware store.

Seal up the leaks. Caulk leaks around windows and doors. Look for places where you have pipes, vents or electrical conduits that go through the wall, ceiling or floor. Check the bathroom, underneath the kitchen sink, pipes inside a closet, etc. If you find a gap at the point where the pipe or vents goes through the wall, seal it up. Caulk works best on small gaps. Your hardware store should have products to close the larger gaps.

Consider replacing your old gas appliances with an ENERGY STAR® water heater or furnace. If your gas water heater is more than 12 years old, consider replacing it with a newer, more efficient model. The best indicator of a water heater's efficiency is the Energy Factor (EF). The higher the EF, the more efficient the water heater. The minimum EF required for gas utility rebates in California is 0.62. If your furnace is over 15 years old, consider replacing it with a newer ENERGY STAR rated model that is about 15 percent more efficient than standard models.

Fast and Free

Cutting back unnecessary energy use is an easy way to keep your hard earned money in your pocket. Here are some suggestions you can do at home, at absolutely no cost to you.

Let the sunshine in. Open drapes and let the sun heat your home for free (get them closed again at sundown so they help insulate).

Rearrange your rooms. Move your furniture around so you are sitting near interior walls - exterior walls and older windows are likely to be drafty. Don't sit in the draft.

Keep it shut. Traditional fireplaces are an energy loser - it's best not to use them because they pull heated air out of the house and up the chimney. When not in use, make absolutely sure the damper is closed. Before closing the damper, make sure that you don't have any smoldering embers. If you decide not to use a fireplace, then block off the chimney with a piece of rigid insulation from the hardware store that fits snugly into the space (dampers don't shut fully without some leaking).

Eliminate wasted energy. Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms. Unplug that spare refrigerator in the garage if you don't truly need it - this seemingly convenient way to keep extra drinks cold adds 10-25 percent to your electric bill. Turn off kitchen and bath-ventilating fans after they've done their job - these fans can blow out a house-full of heated air if inadvertently left on. Keep your fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning to prevent up to 8 percent of your furnace-heated air from going up the chimney.

Shorten showers. Simply reducing that lingering time by a few minutes can save hundreds of gallons of hot water per month for a family of four. Showers account for 2/3 of your water heating costs. Cutting your showers in half will reduce your water heating costs by 33 percent.

Use appliances efficiently. Do only full loads when using your dishwasher and clothes washer. Use the cold water setting on your clothes washer when you can. Using cold water reduces your washer's energy use by 75 percent. Be sure to clean your clothes dryer's lint trap after each use. Use the moisture-sensing automatic drying setting on your dryer if you have one.

Put your computer and monitor to sleep. Most computers come with the power management features turned off. On computers using Windows, open your power management software and set it so your computer goes to sleep if you're away from your machine for 5 to 15 minutes. Those who use Macintosh computers look for the setting in your Control Panels called "Energy Saver" and set it accordingly. When you're done using your computer, turn it off (see next tip). Do not leave it in sleep mode overnight as it is still drawing a small amount of power.

Plug "leaking energy" in electronics. Many new TVs, VCRs, chargers, computer peripherals and other electronics use electricity even when they are switched "off." Although these "standby losses" are only a few watts each, they add up to more than 50 watts in a typical home that is consumed all the time. If possible, unplug electronic devices and chargers that have a block-shaped transformer on the plug when they are not in use. For computer scanners, printers and other devices that are plugged into a power strip, simply switch off the power strip after shutting down your computer. The best way to minimize these losses of electricity is to purchase ENERGY STAR® products.

Inexpensive Energy Solutions

Every home is different. With a quick trip to your local hardware store, you have even more choices at hand.

Choose ENERGY STAR® Products. Replace incandescent light bulbs with ENERGY STAR compact fluorescent light bulbs, especially in high-use light fixtures. Compact fluorescent lights use 75 percent less energy than incandescent lights.

Plug your home's leaks. Install weather-stripping or caulk leaky doors and windows and install gaskets behind outlet covers. Savings up to 10 percent on energy costs.

Install low flow showerheads. If you do not already have them, low-flow showerheads and faucets can drastically cut your hot water expenses. Savings of 10-16 percent of water heating costs.

Wrap the hot water tank with jacket insulation. This is especially valuable for older water heaters with little internal insulation. Be sure to leave the air intake vent uncovered when insulating a gas water heater. Savings up to 10 percent on water heating costs.

Good Energy-Saving Investments

Do you need any new appliances, or are you planning to do some remodeling? Consider these energy efficiency suggestions before you purchase.

Choose ENERGY STAR appliances and electronics. When buying new appliances, choose ENERGY STAR-certified models. For example, a new ENERGY STAR refrigerator uses about 20 percent less energy than a standard new refrigerator, and 46 percent less than one made in 1980. A new Energy Star® clothes washer uses nearly 50 percent less energy than a standard washer.

Install a programmable thermostat. If you have a heat pump, select a model designed for heat pumps. Set-back thermostats can save up to 15 percent on energy costs.

Increase ceiling insulation. If your ceiling is uninsulated or scantily insulated, consider increasing your insulation to up to R-38 to reduce heating costs by 5-25 percent.

Seal ducts. Leaking ductwork accounts for more than 25 to 30 percent of heating costs in an average California home. Consider hiring a contractor to test the tightness of your ducts and repair leaks and restrictions in your duct. Many utilities have programs to assist you. Check out the Flex Your Power Web site for rebate and consumer programs or contact your local utility.

High-efficiency windows. If you are planning to replace your windows, choosing ENERGY STAR windows can reduce your heating and cooling costs by up to 15 percent.

From - www.consumerenergycenter.org