



7 Ideas for Saving Money and Conserving Energy

We're all concerned about today's energy prices, and the best thing we can do to reduce energy costs is to conserve the fuel that we use. Here are seven tips to cut your energy costs and put more money in your pocket.

1. Upgrade your old heating system

The age of your heating system has a lot to do with how efficient it is, and how much fuel you use. Today's technology has cut many homeowners' fuel bills by as much as 30% a year.

If your heating system is more than 15 years old, upgrading to a new system could produce excellent fuel savings and a positive return on your investment.

You can also consider upgrading just the burner to a new flame retention burner and increase your efficiency significantly.

2. Thermostat tips

Most people mistakenly believe that setting a thermostat higher than the desired temperature means your home will get warm faster. Actually, a thermostat functions more as an on-off switch to signal your system to start or stop working.

The best strategy for thermostat use is to agree on a temperature that will keep everyone reasonably comfortable. You can save about 10% on heating costs by lowering the temperature 10° for eight hours each day. Don't reduce the temperature any lower than 55°, however. This increases the risk of frozen pipes.

For convenience, and to save money, purchase a programmable thermostat. They're inexpensive, easy to use and can lower your heating bills by approximately \$150 per year.

3. Stop air leaks

Ductwork inspections are not only important for checking if your ducts need to be cleaned; they can also find air leaks and prevent heat loss. (Gaps, cracks and disconnections in a duct system can result in the loss of as much as 40% of the heated air from your home's furnace, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.) Poor duct design and inadequate insulation can also limit the amount of conditioned air that reaches a room.

Leaky ducts can increase the amount of dust in your home too. In rare cases, exhaust fumes from your furnace can enter cracks in ductwork and seep into your house.

4. Prevent clogs

You can help keep your furnace filter clean. When the filter is dirty, your furnace loses efficiency and has to work harder; it uses more fuel and costs you more money. If you have a standard disposable filter, replace it about once a month during the heating season. Washable filters should be removed and cleaned as needed. After changing or cleaning the filter, make sure the furnace door or panel is completely closed. (The furnace won't run unless you do this.)

5. Insulate pipes

While the pipes that carry hot water (or steam) from a boiler need less maintenance than ducts, they shouldn't be ignored. You can save fuel and money by insulating pipes in unheated areas such as attics or crawl spaces. This would also be a good time to check for water leaks. (A one-eighth-inch crack can leak 250 gallons of water in one day!)

6. Head off heat loss

Up to 50% of heat loss in the human body occurs through the head. (That's why Mom wouldn't let you go outside without a hat when it was cold.) Similarly, a good portion of your home's heat rises straight up, through your ceilings and out or into your attic—and your heating system has to work harder to replace it.

One solution is to insulate ceilings and the walls surrounding attic stairs. You can also install an insulated, weather-stripped hatch cover at the top of the attic stairs. Taking these steps can provide a savings of 16% on your heating costs.

7. Be a house detective

Ever wonder how well your home is sealed against cold and wind? Here's a way to find out with a draft test. Wait for a windy day, and then hold a lit stick of incense next to windows, doors, electrical boxes, plumbing fixtures and other places where cold air can enter your house. If the smoke moves horizontally, you've found an air leak. You can fix it by caulking, sealing or weatherstripping.

And don't forget...

...switching fuels is not an effective solution.

According to the Consumer Energy Council of America (CECA), it makes no economic sense to switch fuels and that homeowner won't save money on fuel costs by switching. The CECA analysis shows the various factors that affect differences in the day-to-day prices of heating fuels, but it also shows that, over the long run, the market brings prices in line with each other. This has been true over the last 25 years, and the analysis shows nothing that would interrupt that trend.