

How to Maximize Heating & Cooling Efficiency

In addition to running your heating and cooling system judiciously, there are some simple things you can do to save energy while still keeping your home warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. Following are some general tips.

- * Let it flow. Leaving doors open between rooms allows heated or cooled air to flow freely throughout the house. If you have more than one thermostat, however, treat areas serviced by each thermostat as distinct entities and shut doors between them.
- * Get the air where it's needed. If there's a room in your house that isn't being used, such as a guest room, don't pay to heat and cool that space. Simply shut the registers or turn off the radiator in that room, and then close the door to keep your heated or cooled air in the more accessed parts of your home. However, never close registers if you have a heat pump (this will make it work harder) or shut off a room that contains a thermostat as this will provide inaccurate temperature readings for the rest of the house.
- * Rearrange your furniture. Take inventory of each room: Are large pieces of furniture or drapery blocking off registers and keeping heated and cooled air from circulating throughout the rest of the space? Consider moving anything obstructing your airflow.
- * Dust, dust, dust. Dusty registers, radiators, or baseboard heaters mean inefficiency. Be sure to clean these areas regularly using a vacuum and brush nozzle.
- * Don't overexhaust. If you leave your exhaust fan on indefinitely in your bathroom or kitchen, you won't only expel the air in that immediate area but you will also begin sucking out expensively heated or cooled air from the rest of the house.
- * Think about humidity. Heating and cooling isn't just about the number on a thermometer. Relative humidity affects comfort, too. Keeping humidity higher in the winter (up to about 60% is good) allows you to run your thermostat at a lower temperature. In the summer, less humidity makes the air feel cooler. If you find your air has too much or too little humidity, consider using a room-model or furnace-attached humidifier or a dehumidifier.
- * Get a windbreaker. No, not a jacket but a windbreak such as trees, shrubs, and vines planted around your house that can deflect cold winds in the winter and hot winds in the summer. To help protect your home in winter, install large plants on the east and north sides of your house. In the summer, windbreaks on the western and southern exposures will help keep you cool.

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