



For Efficiency, Maintain Your Heating System

Just like your automobile, your heating system needs maintenance to perform properly. University of Georgia experts say lowering your winter energy bill can be as easy as replacing an air filter.

Your heating and cooling system is the single greatest energy consumer in your home. But you can reduce the cost of running the system.

Replace system

UGA Cooperative Extension offers tips on reducing home energy costs. If your heating unit is 15 to 25 years old or more, it's probably not very energy-efficient. Even if it still works well, you could greatly benefit by replacing it with a new, energy-efficient model.

If the price of a new system turns you off, UGA experts say to keep in mind that the energy savings should pay for the unit in only a few years. If you finance your new unit, the monthly energy savings may exceed the monthly payment.

Inspect and maintain system

Most heating systems have three parts: (1) the heating unit, (2) the duct or distribution system and (3) the thermostat. Homeowners can save on their heating energy bills by inspecting each of these parts.

All machines work more efficiently and safely if you regularly inspect and maintain them. Forced-air systems include air filters you should change or clean regularly. Filters remove dust and debris before they reach the air blower and heat-exchange coils. Dirt on heating coils reduces the system's efficiency.

Set thermostat lower

UGA experts say your thermostat can be an energy-saving tool, too. One of the easiest ways to save energy is to set your thermostat at a lower temperature in winter so the system runs less often. When the system is constantly cutting on and off, it's wasting energy.

In the winter, UGA experts recommend a setting of 68 degrees during the day and 50 to 60 degrees at night and when everyone is away. Another way to use your thermostat to your advantage is to replace it. If your thermostat is an older model — one you set to maintain a constant temperature — it should be replaced.

The best thermostat is one designed to adjust temperatures depending on the time. Digital or clock thermostats can be set to lower the temperature when you're away and raise it just before you arrive home. Or set it to turn the heat down every night at 11 and bring it back up by 6 a.m.

Check duct system

Finally, check out the duct or distribution system. More than 90 percent of U.S. home heating systems are forced-air systems. These systems use air ducts to move warm air around the house.

UGA experts say if a duct system leaks, it can waste a lot of energy. Inspect the duct systems and make any necessary repairs. If you find leaks, especially where air enters rooms, repair them with caulking.

Your heating system is probably not the only energy-wasting machine in your home. The best way to know your home's energy efficiency is to schedule a home energy audit. Contact your local utility company to see if they offer a home energy audit or can provide energy-saving information for houses like yours.

Source: Lisa Ann Kelley, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension