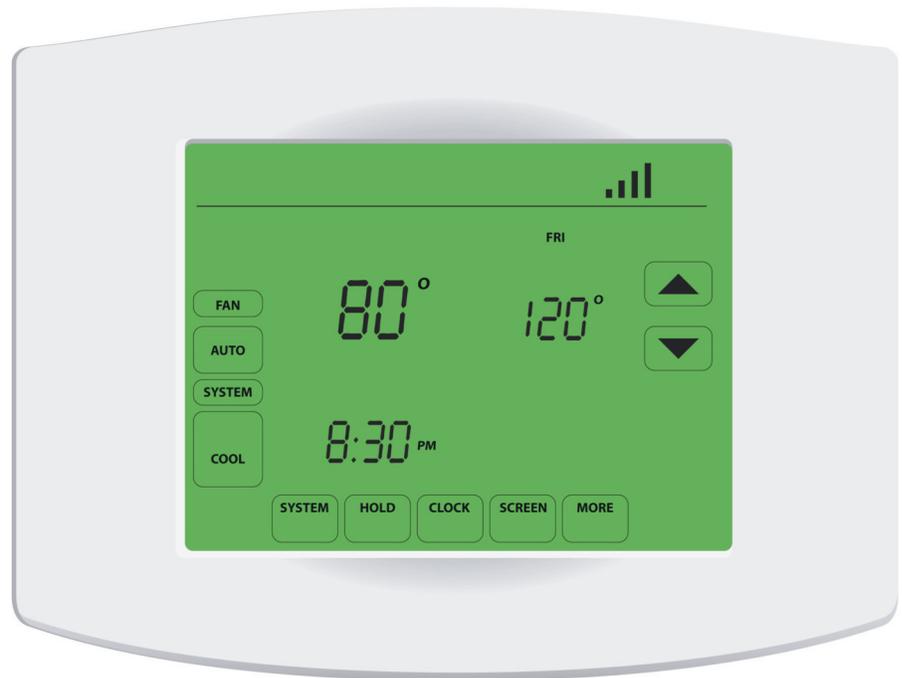




# Save Money with an Energy-Efficient Home

If the temperatures don't do it this summer, seeing your utility bills after a few warm weeks may make your blood boil. Here are some pointers for making sure your energy budget doesn't overheat:

- **Get an energy audit.** Many local utility companies provide free or low-cost energy inspections for your home that could pinpoint potential problems. Pay special attention to the auditor's assessment of your insulation, since improper thickness or distribution could result in a lot in lost energy — and money.
- **Check your air conditioning system before you need it.** At minimum, turn on your air conditioner to make sure it is going to work when the mercury rises. A better option is to have a qualified professional inspect and clean your system to determine if you are losing money because of leaks or dirty filters. It's important to change your air filters on the recommended schedule (typically 30-60 days of use).
- **Your air conditioner needs to stay cool too.** Like you, your AC unit works more efficiently when it doesn't have to battle soaring temperatures. Either move your



- unit into an area that gets a lot of natural shade or provide some shade with a sunscreen or trees.
- **Get a programmable thermostat (if you don't have one).** Programming your thermostat to match your schedule will greatly increase your energy efficiency — and could save you hundreds of dollars a year. Set the temperature to 82-84 degrees Fahrenheit when you will be away. When you are at home, set it at as high as you can without feeling uncomfortable (78 degrees is a good starting point).
- **Be conscious of heat-producing activities.** Stoves, clothes dryers, computers, and light bulbs all generate heat. Only use these items when necessary on hot days or schedule their use for when it's cooler outside. Keep in mind that many areas have elevated rates for electricity at peak usage times.
- **Make windows and doors money savers — not money wasters.** Inspect the caulking and weather stripping around windows and doors for signs of deterioration that could lead to

air leaks. In addition, adding solar window film or sunscreens to windows may reduce how much light is getting in. Planting trees on the south or west side of your home can also reduce the sun's impact on your windows. If you're due for a window replacement, look for products with the Energy Star certification.

- **Use fans.** Install ceiling fans or purchase a standing fan to help keep your home cool. When you're not in a room, turn the fan off (unless it impacts air circulation in adjacent rooms).
- **Reduce the area you are cooling.** If you have a window air conditioning unit, put it in the room where you spend the majority of your time. Keep the doors to that room closed to maximize the air conditioner's impact. With central air, close vents and/or close the door to rooms that aren't in use or don't need to be cooled.
- **Unplug that extra fridge.** Refrigerators use more energy to keep food and drinks cool in the summer, so having two or more running at once uses more energy. A full fridge is actually more energy efficient because it decreases the amount of air that has to be re-cooled after the door is open.

For more ideas on how to save money during the summer (or any other time of the year), contact LifeMatters.



## Prepping for a Home Sale

Improving your house's energy efficiency will not only save you money, but make your house more marketable. Here are some other tips to get your house ready for a potential sale:

1. Clean your house, inside and out. Keep the house ready to be shown at all times.
2. If a room needs repainting, get it done. Use white or another neutral paint color.
3. Get rid of old furniture or carpeting, especially if it has picked up cooking or pet scents.
4. Make sure your home is well lit to create a feeling of warmth and spaciousness. If a showing is during the day, leave blinds open to flood the rooms with natural light.
5. Highlight available storage space by clearing out closets and utility areas.
6. Pack up photos and personal knickknacks and get all those magnets off the refrigerator. Getting rid of clutter will make it easier for buyers to envision themselves in your home.
7. Consider leaving behind a non-essential personal possession (such as a cabinet or bookcase) if a buyer expresses interest in it.
8. Keep patio furniture and other personal property that will illustrate how fun a space could be in place until it has to be moved.
9. Listen to your realtor. Implement as many of his or her suggestions as possible.

“Once you really accept that spending money doesn't equal happiness, you have half the battle won.”

~ Ernest Callenbach