



Three Habits of the Energy Efficient

Changing a few everyday routines can knock down your AC bill.



USE THE SHADES

Close window treatments over

sunny south- and west-facing windows during the day. You'll block solar heat gain for a 3% to 5% savings.



KEEP THE AIR FLOWING

To allow air to move freely, leave your doors and vents open, even in little-used rooms. Also, be sure you don't put furniture or other items in front or on top of vents. You could save up to 10%.



OPEN WINDOWS STRATEGICALLY

Sometimes, opening windows on a cool night can shave up to 3% off that month's bill. But if it's humid, your system will have to work hard to remove all that moisture tomorrow, actually increasing your cost. Gord Cooke, a building-efficiency consultant in Denver, says, "Don't let outdoor air inside unless the humidity is below 60%."

Cut Your Cooling Costs

With electric rates predicted to climb 10% by summer, cranking up your air conditioner could cost you big this year. But that doesn't have to mean living in a sweat lodge. Below, a few simple steps to trim your bill 30% or more. —JOSH GARSKOF

SAVE UP TO

10%

CLEAR THE CONDENSER: Prune back shrubs and ground covers at least a foot away from your outdoor air-conditioning equipment, says Charles Cormany of Beanstalk Energy, a Sonoma, Calif., residential energy efficiency contractor. Then use a blower to remove leaves and debris from in and around the case for maximum airflow.

GET A CHECKUP: Have a technician service your central-air system every year or two. For \$100 or \$200, he'll charge the refrigerant, adjust the settings to maximize efficiency, and check the insulation on the coolant pipes, says David Kyle, owner of an AC service and installation company in Lorton, Va.

SAVE UP TO

20%

REPLACE FILTERS: Install new filters at least twice a year, says Cormany. "Forget fancy, antimicrobial filters," he says. "Go for the cheapest." They should cost less than \$10 each. For window units, hand-wash and dry filters monthly.

PLANT A TREE: You'll pay \$200 to \$500 to have a landscaper or nursery plant a 10-foot tree on the south or west side of your home (going leafless in winter lets you benefit from solar heat).

TIGHTEN DUCTS: Hire an energy efficiency contractor to seal and insulate attic ducts, says Max Sherman of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. You'll spend \$500 to \$2,000.

SAVE UP TO

30%

INSTALL CEILING FANS: Not surprisingly, a breeze makes your home feel cooler. For about \$200 to \$600 each (including installation) you can hang ceiling fans in the rooms where you spend the most time, allowing you to turn down the AC by two degrees without any loss of comfort.

UPGRADE: If your AC is more than 10 years old and you're in a hot climate, replacement will pay for itself quickly. Expect to spend \$2,000 to \$10,000 for a new central-air system, says Kyle. Upgrading window units typically costs \$100 to \$300. Beware: A high-BTU unit can jack up operating costs, with less effective results. Stick with about 20 BTUs per square foot.