

High-Tech thermostats offer potential savings

Keeping your home hot or cold—depending on the season—accounts for a big chunk of your annual budget. In fact, the average U.S. homeowner spends \$2,500 a year on home energy with 56 percent, or \$1,400, going toward heating and cooling costs.

Not surprisingly, savings can add up in a hurry when heating and cooling systems are tweaked for maximum efficiency. You can easily trim your energy bills in winter by setting the thermostat at 68°F while you're awake and back a few degrees when to go to sleep or are away from home.

Even better, turning your thermostat back 10° to 15° for eight hours can save about 5 percent to 15 percent a year on your heating bill—about 1 percent for each degree. Savings may be even greater for homes in milder climates.

The location of your thermostat can greatly affect its performance and efficiency. Place thermostats away from direct sunlight, drafts, doorways, skylights, and windows.

Read the manufacturer's instructions to prevent "ghost readings" or unnecessary furnace or air conditioner cycling.

Installing a programmable thermostat can take the thought out of saving energy. Your heating and cooling system will ramp up or switch off according to a preset time of day or even day of the week. Most models let you can manually override the schedule without affecting the rest of the daily or weekly program.

Programmable thermostats are generally not recommended for heat pumps. In cooling mode, a heat pump operates like an air conditioner, so turning up the thermostat will save energy and money. But when a heat pump works in its heating mode, setting back the thermostat can cause the unit to operate inefficiently, thereby canceling out any savings achieved by lowering the temperature. Maintaining a moderate setting is the most cost-effective practice.

To automatically manage electric resistance systems, such as electric baseboard heating, steam heating, or radiant floor heating, you will need to purchase a programmable thermostat specifically designed for the task. Of course, when shopping for a programmable thermostat, always look for the ENERGY STAR® label.

More information on what may be right for your home can be found at energystar.gov.



Programmable thermostat
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