

7 Home Improvements that will save you money this winter

1. Start with an energy audit. During an energy audit, a qualified professional will come to your home and help you figure out where you may be wasting energy. Many local power companies offer energy audits to their customers for free or for a minimal charge.

Even if your power company doesn't offer such a service, it's worth it to pay a qualified contractor for an in-depth energy audit. The money you'll save in the long run by pinpointing and fixing energy issues now will outweigh the cost of an audit.

2. Grab some caulk and expanding foam. Energy Impact Illinois notes that air leaks can account for 15 to 35 percent of the overall energy used to heat and cool the average home. Unless you live in a very old home, it's likely your leaks aren't coming from a lack of wall insulation. Instead, you're probably experiencing air leaks from a variety of minuscule holes.

Anywhere there's a hole in your wall or ceiling - around air vents, electrical outlets, switches, windows, doors, etc. - there's likely to be some air leakage. Luckily, you can seal most leaks yourself using caulk and expanding foam, which are inexpensive and easy to use on your own.

3. Tune up your heating system. Now is the time to get your heating system checked out. Yes, it's an extra cost, but you'll save money all winter if your furnace system runs as efficiently as possible. Make an appointment now to have a local professional tune up your heating system.

4. Add extra insulation. Unless you live in an older home, chances are the walls in your house are fairly well insulated with fiberglass batt insulation. If not, you'll want to look at insulating your home's walls sufficiently.

Even brand new homes often lack sufficient insulation in the attic. Since heat travels up, this presents a huge problem in the winter. According to Energy Star, you don't have enough attic insulation if you can easily see the floor joists in your attic.

5. Install cellular shades. Replacing windows is a fabulous way to save money on energy costs, but it's also cost-prohibitive. If you notice your windows are letting in too much cold air, you can remedy the situation with a cheaper solution - cellular shades.

These functional, stylish window treatments help keep heat in during the winter and out during the summer. If you can't afford to replace all your window treatments with high-efficiency cellular shades, consider just replacing windows that let in the most cold air - often on the north or east sides of your home.

6. Invest in a new thermostat. Programmable thermostats are a great way to save money by ensuring that your home is the right temperature at all times. With programmable thermostats, you can set your heat (or air-conditioning) to optimal temperatures, depending on the time of day and day of the week.

Many of the latest programmable thermostats offer wireless controls and smartphone apps that let you change your heating and cooling settings remotely. Others, like the Nest Learning Thermostat, program themselves by learning your family's daily routine.

7. Close vents and shut doors. This is probably the simplest but most often-missed step: Shut off rooms you aren't using! If you rarely spend time in your formal dining room or guest bedroom, for instance, shut the vents in those rooms, and keep the doors shut. This keeps the heated air concentrated in spaces your family actually uses, which saves you money automatically.

Homestead Handyman Service

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