

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS

Start the New Year With Energy Savings

Q: Is it possible to cut my energy bill in half?

A: Energy-efficiency programs can achieve those kinds of results. Let's talk about some energy-saving measures you can do now and how you plan for greater savings later.

Dial in Savings

Now: The first place to start is your home thermostat. In most homes, the largest portion of the energy bill goes toward heating and cooling.

Lowering your thermostat by 7 to 10 degrees for eight hours a day can save you up to 10% a year on heating. In the winter, you could aim for 56 F at night and when no one is at home, and 68 F when you're up and around. If you prefer a warmer house, it may mean throwing on a sweater or pair of slippers. This tactic is not as effective for some homes with radiant heat systems.

Later: Adjust your air-conditioning settings next summer. If you have a manual thermostat and don't remember to adjust it, consider buying a smart thermostat, or at least one that's programmable.

Check Fridge/Freezer Temps

Now: Make sure your refrigerator and freezer aren't set to a colder temperature than needed. The fridge should be at 38 F to 40 F, and the freezer compartment should be 5 F. If you have a separate chest freezer, set it to 0 F. Also check your water heater setting. You should aim for a setting of 120 F.



Programming your thermostat, or at least changing with the seasons, is an easy way to lower energy costs.

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Later: Old refrigerators and freezers can use a lot of electricity. If yours was made before 1993, you can save upwards of \$65 a year with a new Energy Star model. If you eliminate a second refrigerator or freezer, you can save even more, especially if they are stored in your garage.

Maximize Your Heat

Now: Look around each room and make sure the vents and radiators aren't blocked by furniture or other objects. If the floors feel cold even when the room is warm, put down area rugs for additional warmth. Open curtains and blinds to let the sunshine in, and close them at night.

Later: Hire an energy auditor or HVAC specialist to test for duct leakage and ensure your system is balanced and running efficiently.

Update Your Lights

Now: The obvious first step is

to make sure lights are turned off when they're not in use. You can do this manually or employ one of many automated strategies. If you're still using incandescent bulbs, you could switch the five most-used bulbs to LEDs and save about \$75 a year. LEDs last much longer and use about one-fourth as much energy. Prices on LED bulbs have decreased in the past few years, and you can save more if you buy them in packs.

Later: Over time, plan to replace all your old incandescent bulbs, and consider smart lighting options that can be programmed to turn off when a room is not in use.

Eliminate Drafts

Now: Look carefully around your home for signs of air

leaks. If you have a gap under an exterior door, you can block it with a towel or, better yet, install some weatherstripping. Make sure windows are sealed with caulk, and you can also seal areas around plumbing and wiring penetrations.

Later: Have an energy auditor do a blower door test, which is the best at finding air leaks.

Taking some of these steps now should provide quick energy savings. To save even more, make a plan that includes the "later" steps shared above. An energy audit can help you determine a more precise plan. Your utility may be able to provide an audit or recommend a qualified local energy auditor. ■



This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more energy tips, go to collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.