

SUSTAINABLE LIVING GUIDE: 60. FOURTEEN TIPS FOR USING LESS HEAT THIS SEASON¹

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It feels like it got chilly over night! The temperature's dropping here in the northern hemisphere, and for a lot of us that means dialing up the thermostat to take that chill out of the air. Whether you have electric or gas heat, warming your home isn't so hot for the environment. The majority of our electricity here in the U.S. comes from dirty coal. Natural gas drilling often uses a dangerous method called hydraulic fracturing or "fracking," which contaminates water in the areas around drilling sites. Never fear! There are lots of ways that you can reduce your heating bill without setting hand on the thermostat.

1. Get a Draft Dodger

Nope, I'm not talking about avoiding military service. Draft dodgers are filled fabric tubes that you wedge under the door to keep out cold air. Normally filled with sand or small beans, they do a great job of adding a little extra insulation around doors or windows. You can purchase draft dodgers online, and if you're feeling crafty it's quite easy to whip up your own!

2. Make the Most of the Sunlight

If possible, keep your blinds open during the day and close them at night. This does double duty. In the daytime, sunlight will warm your home naturally, and at night your blinds will help keep heat from escaping through your windows.

3. Trim the Tree

Not the Christmas tree! If you've got plants blocking the windows on the side of your house that gets the most sun, prune them back. This will help you take advantage of sunlight during the day (see #2).

4. Cover the Floor

You know how unpleasant it is to step out of bed onto a cold floor. That chilly tile is a sign that heat is escaping. Area rugs can go a long way toward keeping your house warm, especially if your basement or crawl space isn't as insulated as you wish it were. When temperatures start warming up, you can just roll up unwanted rugs and stash them in the attic or under the bed until you need them again!

5. Bundle Up at Bedtime

It's hard to fall asleep if you're lying in bed shivering. Once you doze off, though, your body tends to tolerate cold rather well. If you can, turn the heat down at bedtime, and just toss some

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extra blankets on your bed to warm you up while you fall asleep. If you've got a thermostat on a timer, you can even set it to start warming the house 30 minutes or so before you're planning to get up, so you don't have to hop out of bed into a chilly room.

6. Don't Warm an Empty House

Heading out for the day? Turn down the heat before you go! There's no sense running the heater if no one's there to benefit from it. This is another case where a programmable thermostat can help a lot. Just set it to warm back up before you're planning to get home. If you have pets, keep them in mind! Don't turn off the heat off completely. Different animals can tolerate different levels of cold, so ask your vet before taking things to extremes.

7. Get Snuggly!

When it gets chilly, our two cats love to get under the covers at bedtime. They're on to something! Body heat is free, so take advantage.

8. Insulate Where You Can

If you've got some spare cash in your budget adding insulation to your attic or crawlspace can make a huge difference. You can also look into replacing old, inefficient windows with newer ones. For lower budgets, pick up a caulk gun at the hardware store and seal any areas that are letting heat escape.

9. Layer Up

Mom had some good advice when she said, "If you're cold, put on a sweater!" Wear warmer clothes in your house, and you won't get cold as easily. This sounds like an obvious tip, but it can make a huge difference.

10. Drink Up

Fall and winter are all about spiced hot cider and delicious teas. If you're chilly, you can warm your hands and your body with a hot beverage. Red wine can also warm your body, but you want to be careful not to use the cold as an excuse to overindulge!

11. Stay Active

Exercise is another one that does double duty. When you get moving, you can warm your body from the inside out, and that can last for a while even after you've settled down. Muscle helps generate heat, so weight-bearing exercise can actually help your body become more tolerant to cooler temperatures.

12. Reverse Those Fans

It might seem counter-intuitive to run the fans when it's chilly in the house. Most fans have a switch on the side that lets you reverse the direction. Flip the switch so the blades turn clockwise, and it will help push warm air down.

13. Throw a Party

This is a great time of year to host a get-together. Next time you're having a large group of people over, turn down the thermostat. All of those bodies will warm things up in no time!

14. Eat for Warmth

Cold weather makes us crave soups and stews, and this is a situation where it's great to give in! A piping hot meal warms you from the inside out.