



The Heat Is On To Lower Energy Bills

University of Georgia experts say that good air conditioner maintenance in hot weather can save you both discomfort and money. If your air conditioner isn't running efficiently, you, and your wallet, suffer.

Use these tips to keep your system running its best:

- Shade your room air conditioner from direct sun. This will reduce its workload.
- Clean the filters every month and replace them as necessary. This will save energy and reduce dust and pollen in the air.
- Don't leave your room air conditioner turned to the coolest setting when you're away from home. Set the controls to a warmer setting to reduce operating costs.
- Because dust can foil efficiency, vacuum air vents regularly. And don't block them with furniture, carpet or curtains.
- Leaky ducts are prime sources of energy waste. Hire a professional to seal and insulate ducts.
- If your home has crawl space under it, open the foundation vents in the spring to promote air flow. Close them in the winter.
- Prune shrubs that may block air flow to your air conditioner.
- Install ceiling fans. The air circulation spreads cool air in the summer and boosts heating efficiency in the winter.

If you are buying a new air-conditioning system, UGA experts say select the most energy-efficient equipment that meets your needs and fits your budget. The more efficient a product, the less it costs to run. It also reduces air pollution and helps conserve natural resources.

Manufacturers use standard U.S. Department of Energy tests to prove their products' efficiency. The EnergyGuide materials from the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection report the test results.

Before you buy, use an energy audit to help pinpoint your needs. Audits help detect energy waste and gauge your current system's efficiency. Do-it-yourself kits are available.

Find out about special offers. Ask your local utility or salesperson about cash rebates, low interest loans or other incentives for buying energy-efficient products. You may qualify.

If you're buying a home, ask your lender if an Energy-Efficient Mortgage is available. EEMs allow home buyers to qualify for a larger mortgage. Lenders use the lower monthly bills you'd pay in an energy-efficient house to offset a higher mortgage payment.