

Saving Some Greenbacks & the Planet this Winter

Going green can certainly save you green. While still in the clutches of cold temperatures this winter, you can make a few adjustments and save on your heating bill and reduce your carbon footprint at the same time. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, you could save as much as 20-30 percent on your energy bills by making some energy efficiency improvements. The added bonus is you'll also be helping your planet.

Consider making these simple adjustments around your home:

- Turn thermostat down several degrees—for every degree you lower you heat in the 60-70 degree range, you'll save up to 5 percent. Health permitting, set your thermostat at 68 degrees or lower during the day and set it back to 55 degrees at night or when you are leaving for an extended period. Wear a sweater and dress in layers. Using a programmable thermostat makes it easy to set these parameters.
- Keep your furnace clean—it will work most efficiently when you change disposable filters monthly. Even better is using a reusable filter which can be cleaned monthly. Also, vacuum the vents and registers to promote good airflow. (I'm dragging out the sweeper this afternoon)
- Keep your water heater in good condition and set the temperature between 115-120 degrees (check your owner's manual in your dishwasher to be sure you don't have to have it set higher). Insulate the first 5 feet of pipe coming out of the top of your water heater, or until it goes into the wall, if it is shorter.
- Weatherize your windows and check for leaks around your doors (I have several leaks to fix).
- Shut the doors to rooms you don't use on a regular basis.
- Use the burner that fits the pan you are using. If the circumference of the flames or heat is greater than the pot, then you are leaking unused heat into the air (okay, sometimes I put a saucepan on the big burner because it is closer to me...oops!)
- Put a lid over a saucepan to contain heat and warm food fast—especially when bringing a pot of water to boil
- Don't peek into the oven as you are cooking (guilty, again!)
- Defrost foods in the fridge before cooking, then reduce your cooking time (I never thought of that)
- Make it a habit to turn off the lights when you're not in a room (no body, no bulb)
- Purchase Energy Star, energy efficient appliances when you are in the market.

Also, as many as 30 million low-income families in the U.S. are eligible for home weatherization help. Visit www.eere.energy.gov/weatherization to learn more.

There are lots more things you can do—some a little more involved than others. Just get online, hit the library or call you energy company for more info.

Feeling a little philosophical this week (must be the cold), I leave you with this quote from Edmund Burke: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." That is the thought that keeps me going—how about you?

(Sources: New American Dream; U.S. Dept. of Energy; Turn the Tide.org)

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