

HOME SWEET GREEN HOME



There are smart ways budget-conscious consumers can make their houses more energy-efficient. **Here's how.**

AMERICANS SWEATED OVER ultrahigh prices at the gas pump and a series of natural disasters this summer. Although there's not much we can do to affect the cost of fuel or the twists and turns in the weather, we can control the amount of energy we use in our homes and—in the process—lower heating bills and do our part to protect the climate.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that houses and office buildings are responsible for 39% of the country's energy consumption and roughly the same percentage of greenhouse gas emissions. At the individual level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says the typical household spends more than \$2,200 a year on energy. Thanks to the EPA's ENERGY STAR® program, consumers have the opportunity to make decisions and

improvements that will directly impact their wallets.

The program, launched in 1992 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through increased energy efficiency, today boasts nearly 20,000 partner companies, and their efforts are paying big dividends. In 2010, through the use of ENERGY STAR products—lighting, electronics, appliances—as well as ENERGY STAR–recommended home and business improvements, such as sealing, insulating, and smart heating and cooling, Americans saved \$18 billion on energy bills and reduced greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of 33 million vehicles.

Unique and Timely

“Money is the top concern for consumers,” says Jill Vohr, EPA team lead, ENERGY STAR Product Marketing, “but so is comfort. These days, people are staying in their homes longer

so they are investing more in improvements and realizing the benefits. This, along with concern about budgets, has raised consciousness around energy efficiency. ENERGY STAR is one of the few ways a homeowner can save money and improve their home while also helping the environment.

“In most cases, ENERGY STAR products cost no more than other products,” Vohr points out, and “save money in the long run.” More good news: Starting this year, the EPA now requires that all new ENERGY STAR–qualified products be third-party–certified and subject to annual off-the-shelf verification. Looking for the label is the best way to ensure you're getting an energy-efficient product.

ClimateMaster—the world's largest manufacturer of geothermal heat pumps—is an ENERGY STAR partner that taps the energy stored in the



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ground beneath a home to provide heating, cooling, and hot water. Geothermal is an efficient process, offering the lowest carbon footprint of any heating/cooling technology. And while upfront costs are high, they are quickly recovered.

“Geothermal is more expensive than traditional systems,” says John Bailey, senior vice president of sales and marketing at ClimateMaster. “It has a higher initial cost—probably 30% to 40% more than other heating and cooling systems—because you’re drilling in the ground and everything’s dependent on ground conditions. In many parts of the U.S., though, there’s a three- to five-year payback. After that, geothermal lowers most homeowners’ energy bills by 50% or more.”

According to Bailey, U.S. sales of geothermal systems are up more than 25% this year. “The number-one reason homeowners go geothermal is savings. The second is that it’s environmentally friendly. Third is that most consumers want to become less dependent on fossil fuels. That’s an issue

America as a nation must face.”

Lowe’s Companies Inc., another EPA partner and a distributor of ENERGY STAR-qualified products, operates more than 1,750 home improvement stores in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. In addition to being a one-stop destination for energy-saving products, Lowe’s provides online tools to help customers make their homes more energy-efficient.

According to the EPA, Lowe’s sold enough ENERGY STAR-qualified products to save customers more than \$210 million on their energy bills in 2010. Earlier this year, Lowe’s won the ENERGY STAR Sustained Excellence Award in Retail—for the second consecutive year—in recognition of its longstanding leadership as a retailer of energy-efficient products.

“We’re very proud of the awards—they carry credibility,” says Bob Gfeller, executive vice president of merchandis-

ing at Lowe’s, “but we’re more proud of our partnership with ENERGY STAR. The program helps consumers find the money-saving solution that’s right for them.”

As Lowe’s and others point out, homeowners needn’t spring for large-scale home improvement projects to save energy and money. Many minor, relatively inexpensive measures can reap considerable long-term savings for both homeowners and the environment.

A quick click to Lowe.com/EfficientHome provides homeowners with how-to guides with shopping lists and instructions on reducing energy consumption. Lowe.com also includes a light bulb buying guide, an insulation calculator, how-to videos, a home audit tool, and an “Ask the Experts” page.

The ENERGY STAR website, energystar.gov, offers many ideas on practical solutions to save energy, including effectively programming your thermostat, power managing electrical devices, and even choosing the most energy-efficient lighting. The EPA also offers a free online tool called the Home Energy Yardstick for homeowners to compare their energy use with that of similar homes around the country. The website even offers a listing of rebates on qualified products available to consumers.

“People naturally start with the complicated projects,” says Lowe’s Gfeller. “But there are simple things anyone can do that don’t cost a lot of money.” ●

\$2,200

The annual energy bill for a typical single home.

40%

The amount of energy costs spent on lighting, appliances, electronics, and other household items.

SOURCE: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, ENERGY STAR Program

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saving more than
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