



COZY UP TO COLD WEATHER BY PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR FALL AND WINTER

It should not be too long until Oklahomans feel that distinct crispness in the air, which points to the arrival of college football season, otherwise known as fall. As conscientious consumers, homeowners can help ensure their homes are snug and warm this winter.

In Oklahoma, consumers spend about half of their energy dollars on heating and cooling. Concentrating efforts on increasing efficiency will go a long way toward saving big energy dollars. A drafty home wastes energy, said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist. “Things to consider include controlling the thermostat, sealing air leaks, having adequate insulation, having the HVAC system serviced and making certain that ductwork is not leaking,” Peek said.

The easiest thing to do is control the temperature with the thermostat. Set it up a little higher in the morning while you are getting ready for work or school, then have it automatically reset to a cooler temperature while everyone is gone for the day. Consumers can switch it manually, or you can consider getting a programmable thermostat, which is a tool homeowners can use to regulate energy use in their homes.

“A programmable thermostat can be a little bit of an investment initially but can save you money each year on your heating and cooling bills,” she said. “Whether you control the temperature manually or with a programmable unit, set the thermostat at a comfortable temperature when you’re awake at home, then set it to turn back 10 to 15 degrees when you go to work or to bed.”

Next, seal the air leaks in your home. Making sure there are not any air leaks in the home is so important for energy savings. “Use caulk and foaming insulation to seal cracks and openings in your home. Weather stripping can be used around windows and doors,” Peek said. “While drafty windows and doors often come to mind, did you know you can lose valuable energy via cut-throughs for pipes, gaps around chimneys and recessed lighting, as well as unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets? Expansion foam can be used in holes where pipes go through walls to cut down on lost air.”



One potential air leak area is the fireplace. Many people enjoy curling up to a blazing fire in the fireplace, but homeowners may be losing energy. Keep the fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning to avoid warm air escaping up the chimney. Also, using tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system that blows warmed air back into the room can help cut energy costs.

Make certain your home has adequate insulation. Start in the attic. If you can see the rafters, you need to add more insulation. Insulation can shift and settle over time, so it is important to make certain you have enough. Consider having your HVAC system serviced before it turns cold. It will help maintain the system’s efficiency and help prolong the lifespan. Once your heating system has been checked out, it will be time to get your ducts in a row.

“Most people probably don’t think twice about the ductwork to their heating and cooling systems. It’s tucked away in the attic or under the floor, forgotten,” Peek said. “Homeowners don’t realize they can easily lose the conditioned air that moves through the duct system. Make sure the ducts are properly sealed and insulated to help conserve energy.”

Homeowners and renters can enjoy another energy saving tip: open the curtains on south-facing windows during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat your home. Be sure to close the curtains at night.

Finally, even though it is still a bit early to talk about Christmas lights – for some people anyway – use LED holiday light strings because they are more energy efficient. “Many people will appreciate being able to save a little money on the utility bill during the holidays,” Peek said. “Just look for manufacturers and brands of ENERGY STAR-certified light strings.”

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