

Tips for Creating Your Dream Home by Sara Shragal

Common sense energy saving measures

In designing your dream home, let's be honest, how to save energy and reduce your heating, electricity and other costs probably isn't the first thing that crosses your mind. Yet the times dictate making it a priority, both from a financial standpoint and an environmental one. Going greener may be trendy, but the fact of the matter is it can save you some of the other kind of green and that is important factors in designing and maintaining your dream house.

So, where do you start? When it comes to saving energy, many of the best tips out there are the simplest. For example:

- Dressing in layers – why turn up the thermostat when you can just put on a sweater or sweatshirt?
- Run a humidifier in your house – again, common sense. What feels warmer in the summer, a muggy 70-degree day or a dry 80-degree day?
- Programmable thermostats – this way you can maintain a consistent temperature in your home. Most experts recommend 68 degrees during the day, 64 while you sleep.
- Shading your windows – let the sun shine in during the winter and pull down the shades in the summer to keep out the heat.
- Change the settings in your refrigerator – several resources recommend setting your refrigerator to 36 to 38 degrees and your freezer to zero to five degrees; in addition, when cooking, look through the glass window rather than opening the oven. Your sneak peek could cost you up to 25 degrees in heat, making your oven work harder and driving up your energy costs.
- Close up any rooms you're not using – close the doors and vents in any spare rooms (e.g. if you have a child away at college); by closing the vents and door to one spare room in the house, the Department of Energy estimates you'll cut your heating and cooling bills up to 20 percent.

Beyond the average, common sense solutions above, you can also take some more definitive steps, like replacing your windows with multi-pane windows. Or if new windows aren't in the budget, you can install window plastic around your windows and reduce heat loss up to 50 percent. You can reduce heat loss another 10 percent savings by stopping drafts around your windows and doors with caulking, sealant, and weather stripping.

Some other more bang-for-less-of your buck energy-saving measures include:

- Changing furnace filters regularly; at least once a year.
- Installing a glass door fireplace to keep heat from escaping up the chimney—especially if you forget to close the damper or have difficulty closing it tightly.

- Install low-flow showerheads and faucets, you'll not only decrease the use of your hot water (therefore lessening the amount of work your hot water heater must do every day), but also your water use overall.

While these measures individually might seem rather small, cumulatively they can make quite a difference in how much energy you use. And that can have a very positive impact on your bottom line. The last thing you want this winter is for your dream house to become a nightmare due to high power and heating bills.

Sara Shragal is a staff writer for DirectBuy. For more information or other helpful tips for your home, visit www.directbuycares.com. You can send suggestions for future columns to questions@directbuycares.com.