



### **Summer and Winter Savings ways to stay cool or warm without blowing the budget**

Presumably, doors were originally fitted inside dwellings to divide areas for the privacy of occupants; and, of course, those on the outer walls were a safety factor. These days, many homes are constructed open-plan, with different rooms separated only by the odd half-wall and practical features such as breakfast bars. This tends to give the illusion of spaciousness, but it can be a problem when it comes to heating or cooling. Trying to regulate internal temperatures with a single appliance seems almost impossible; whilst retaining a comfort level throughout generally means employing more than one unit, each strategically placed and constantly adjusted to suit individual requirements.

Those rustic solid-fuel, open fires may look appealing; but they have a tendency to smoke the house up, and a good portion of the heat disappears up the chimney. This also applies to space heaters like pot-belly stoves set in the middle of a room. Nice design features they may be; but, with most of them you have to sit close and cook, or back a bit and freeze. Personally, I think they are only good for keeping up appearances and not much else. Other forms of heating such as oil-fired or electric are better, and efficiency can be improved with an auxiliary fan or two. They are, however, comparatively expensive to run.

When a home is first purchased or rented, heaters and air conditioners are often already installed; and not, unfortunately, always in the right places. We were lucky, because ours was, and it has served well over the years. It is a split-level unit with the main drive outside and the distributing fan fitted high on an end interior wall. This faces the hallway to the bedrooms, so air can be sent from the lounge/dining area, past the open-plan kitchen, then right through the house. There are also adjustments for directing the air flow up, down and sideways, with options for stopping the oscillation of one or both to service a specific area. The added advantage of the unit being reverse-cycle means it is a heater or a cooler able to cover most contingencies throughout summer and winter. These split-level units are versatile and, compared to other forms of cooling and heating, if used properly, tend to be more economical. Switched off in the breaker box when not needed, from 15-35 watts of power per hour can be saved.

Those rooms that can be closed off are generally thought of as separate when it comes to air conditioning; and, needless to say, if they are unoccupied they don't really need heating or cooling at all - or do they? By opening doors along our hallway while the air is passing, it enters the rooms and raises or lowers the internal temperatures. Once the temperature in the room has equalised with that in the rest of the house, the doors are closed to preserve that level of comfort. As a bonus, even when they are not occupied, each room then acts like a heat or cold pack within the building; and this often means that the air conditioner can be switched off, sometimes for extended periods. Every little helps to keep down energy costs.

Another additional feature in our house is the installation of ceiling fans. These are variable speed and are handy when just a downward breeze will do the job of cooling and circulating the air; but their range of influence is limited. What many don't realise, however, is that the direction of flow can be switched so that air is blown up to the ceiling. Because heat rises, a good portion of the warmed air is trapped overhead and is consequently wasted. In winter, with a ceiling fan reversed, this heat is pushed back down where it is needed.

Maybe we ought to be satisfied to leave it at that; but being budget-conscious, except during periods of extreme temperatures, the air conditioner is used only sparingly. Quite often, as there are only two of us and we are usually both in the same place at the same time, we find that a pedestal fan is quite adequate in summer, whereas a small electric fan heater is sufficient for all but the coldest of winter nights. And should the bedroom be chilly, the little fan heater puts that right in five minutes or so.

There are other factors that can make a difference, and they cost nothing to run. On hot summer days, keeping blinds and curtains closed reduces the amount of heat passing through the windows into the house. Blinds or shade cloth fixed to the outside deflect the sun before it hits the glass. Then there is window tinting and double-glazing. Conversely, during winter, letting the sun in can warm individual rooms considerably. As for exterior doors, whatever the time of year, when the temperature inside is what's wanted, as opposed to that on the outside which isn't, keeping them closed is the sensible way to go.

One last device is a real money saver - clothing. I know of some who prefer to be fully-clothed in summer while sitting in front of an air-cooler. Those same people are likely to swan around the house in winter toggled in tank top and shorts with the heater going full bore. Clearly they have more money than sense, and probably not a great deal of the latter.

As one of our regular visitors, I like to think you are far more discerning and can stay comfortable without totally wrecking the budget. Yes, I'm sure you are.

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