

Hot Tips for a Cool Summer

With almost 45 percent of a homeowner's utility bill going toward heating and cooling, I'm sharing with you ways you can stay cool and save some money this summer. Also, keeping cool with our current 100-plus degree temperatures is imperative and could be life saving.

One major prevention recommendation is to stay indoors where it is air-conditioned. I love my air conditioner; however, with the heat wave we are experiencing, I thought having the option of being able to use either my air conditioner (AC), evaporative cooler (swamp cooler), or both, would be prudent. Therefore, I recently spent an afternoon working with my father, Ron Milbrandt, hooking up my evaporative cooler, which uses 75 percent less electricity than an air conditioner. My father prefers the use of an evaporative cooler because it will not only save me money—it is also more ecological.

De-winterizing my evaporative cooler, cleaning out the pads, and checking out the pump, water, and equipment was quite the chore. Luckily, my father knew what to do. Whether you have a professional do this for you or work with someone who knows how to do this, I'd recommend not doing this on your own unless you know what you are doing.

Another way to cool the home is to choose a lighter colored roof or roof coating. In fact, I purchased a special white paint (as recommended by an AC installer) for my roof. This will reflect sunlight rather than absorbing it; although, I still need the paint applied. My roof is currently a light brown, and after being on top of my roof when working on my evaporative cooler, I realized indeed how hot it gets up there.

You can also plant trees to help cool your home. Deciduous trees are worth considering because they lose their leaves in the winter and let sunlight in; however, in the summer, the leaves create welcome shade. Don't forget to also shade your air conditioner (but don't block the airflow). A unit operating in the shade uses less electricity.

Ken Card with Advanced Home Inspections has some other ideas on ways to keep cool this summer. To keep your home cool in the summer, close the blinds and shades during the day to try to keep the cool air in and the hot sun out.

"Clean your air conditioner's filter and condenser coils every month and schedule an annual check-up with an air conditioner repair service for your AC system," said Card. "Well-maintained systems operate better and use less energy."

Card also recommends installing ceiling fans in the rooms you use most often. "In the summer, the breeze will cool you, and in the winter, they'll circulate rising warm air." He also suggests you raise your thermostat by a few degrees.

He added you may want to consider installing a whole house fan or evaporative cooler. "Attics trap fierce amounts of heat; a well-placed and well-sized whole-house fan pulls air through open windows on the bottom floors and exhausts it through the roof, lowering the inside temperature and reducing energy use by as much as a third when compared with an air conditioner." Card said this could cost between \$150 and \$400. "An evaporative cooler pulls air over pads soaked in cold water and uses a quarter the energy of refrigerated air, but they're useful only in low-humidity areas." Thankfully, our area is generally considered a good area for the use of evaporative coolers. Card said this could cost \$200 to \$600.

Sometimes it is just too hot to cool the house down. On these days, Card recommends you go somewhere that has air conditioning and sit or walk around. "Do some people watching. Some of them can be quite interesting; in fact, downright funny. Go to the senior center. Visit a friend with air conditioning. In other words, let someone else cool you."

Electric fans may also provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath, or move to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.

In addition, if you don't have a way to cool your home, avoid the upper floors of your home when it is hot since heat naturally rises. Another tip for those who have a garage under the living area of their home is to leave your hot car outside to cool off before putting it in the garage.

Other ideas to consider for cooling your home include using your microwave instead of your oven, plugging your home electronics (TV's, VCR's, computers, etc.) into power strips and turning them off when not in use, turning off unused lights, caulking and weather stripping where needed, upgrading an old air conditioner to a more efficient one, closing unused vents, upgrading attic insulation and windows, and washing only full loads of dishes and clothes.

I've shared ways to help keep your home cool and enjoy your summer for less. There are a multitude of websites that offer advice on how to keep *you* cool. I found this website helpful: <http://www.wikihow.com/Cool-Yourself-Without-Air-Conditioning>. Enjoy the remainder of our summer season—and be cool!

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