

## **Keeping Cool While Staying Green**

### **By Tanis Roelofs**

As our temperatures approach record highs this summer, keeping cool becomes a priority. Here are some simple ways to help you stay cool and lower your energy bills.

#### **Energy**

Use a programmable thermostat with your air conditioner to adjust to a warmer setting at night or when no one is home. Don't place appliances that generate heat near your thermostat as they will cause your air conditioner to run longer. Look for the Energy Star® label. If your air conditioner is old, the new energy efficient models can save you up to 50 percent on your cooling bills.

Caulk and weather-strip leaky spots around the house to keep cool air in during the summer. Add insulation around air conditioning ducts when they are located in un-air conditioned spaces such as attics, crawl spaces and garages. It is a good idea to invest in insulation around the house. It will keep your home cooler in the summer and the heat inside longer in the winter as well. Look for tips at your local hardware store or hire a professional to perform an energy audit. Check your fireplace damper. Is it tightly closed?

Running a box fan or ceiling fan is a much greener way to help circulate air in occupied rooms. For dorm or apartment rooms with a window air conditioning unit, put a fan in front of the unit to better circulate the cool air.

#### **Windows**

In which rooms do you spend most of the day? What direction does this room face and does it have large picture windows or windows that allow a lot of sunshine? Many people do not realize how much heat is created by sun exposure. If you purchase or create your own thick shades, you will be very surprised by the decrease in temperature. Thick fabric shades are key. Thin adjustable plastic shades do nearly nothing in the way of preventing heat from entering.

Sunny windows can make your air conditioner work two to three times harder. Install light colored window shades, drapes or blinds to reflect heat away from the house. Close curtains on south and west facing windows during the day. If you are ready to replace your windows, consider double-pane windows with selective coatings. Always look for the Energy Star® label.

#### **Avoid cooking**

Who wants to turn on the oven in the summer anyway? To save money on electricity in the summer months, try to avoid turning on the big energy zappers like the stove, oven, dishwasher and other appliances, running them as little as possible. During these months, try eating more fruit, salad, cheese and sandwiches and grill as often as

possible. When you do cook, do it early in the morning and use a slow cooker when possible. Using an energy efficient toaster oven or microwave for quick heating tasks, rather than the oven or stove also helps to reduce energy usage.

### **Turn off the television and pick up a book.**

In this day of on-demand movies and video games, it is a challenge to get youngsters to step away from the computer or television, especially in the summer when it is hot outside and boredom sets in quickly. Encourage children to turn off the TV and pick up a book or a sketch pad for a few hours. It can help slash electricity bills. Visit the library at least once a week to stock up on books and keep the house stocked with paper, crayons, colored pencils, chalk and sketch pads as well as scrap material, sewing needles, embroidery floss and yarn so children have no excuse for boredom during television-off hours. During the early morning and early evening hours encourage children to go to the park, hunt for bugs, walk the dogs or swim in the pool to keep their mind and bodies alert.

Keep cool, save money, be green.