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young families



Hot Water Costs

Which uses more energy, cooking or heating water? You're energy wise if you know that the water heater comes after the furnace as the second most energy hungry appliance in a typical Minnesota home. Water heating takes about 14 percent of the total home energy, while home heating takes 71 percent and cooking only 4 percent.

You can lower your water heating costs in two ways. First, reduce the amount of hot water you use, and second, alter your water heating system.

There are several ways to reduce the amount of hot water used in your home.

Adjustments for clothes washing:

- Wash only full loads or use adjusted water levels for smaller loads.
- Know that warm water settings deliver half cold and half hot water. If you have your water heater set low (110°-120°) to save energy, your half-and-half mix for warm washing may only be 80° which is too cool to be effective. You will need to use the hot water setting on your washing machine to get water in the warm range. This is particularly important in the winter when our cold tap water is often colder than 55°. Also you will have to use more detergent with a lower setting..
- Use cold water for the laundry rinse cycle. It does the job as well as warm and saves about eight cents on each laundry load with an electric water heater.

Adjustments for dishwashing:

- Try to run your dishwasher no more than once a day and only when fully loaded. When dishes are not heavily soiled use a shorter cycle. For an automatic dishwasher your water heater setting must be at least 140° (medium setting) to be effective.
- Do not run hot water continuously for rinsing when washing dishes by hand.

Adjustments for personal use:

- Take showers instead of tub baths; they usually use less water. Use less water when taking a tub bath.
- When washing hands and face or shaving, place stopper in sink to avoid wasting water. Do not let hot water run continuously.
- Fix leaky faucets. Usually it's just a washer that needs replacing.

Improvements to your water heating system can save you money, and therefore energy. For example, if an improvement such as insulation around your electric water heater costs \$30 and saves you \$15 per year, it will have paid for itself in two years. A gas water heater should not be wrapped in an insulation blanket.

If your hot water pipes run through unheated areas such as basements or crawl spaces, pipe insulation can eliminate heat loss from them. Several types of foam or pipe tape are available at hardware or building supply stores.

To remove sediment and mineral deposits, drain water from the faucet near the bottom of the heater until it runs clear. This should be done about every three months (more often if you have very hard water) to improve the heating efficiency of the water heater.

If you are interested in determining energy usage and annual cost of water heating in your home, request extension folder 388 Hot Water and Your Home Energy Budget from your county Agricultural Extension Service office, listed under county offices in the telephone book.

Heating your home and heating water are the two major users of energy in your home. By making some adjustments in each you will end up saving money for yourself and energy for all of us.

Winter Woes of Houseplants

No matter how you feel about winter, you probably like the season more than your houseplants. For most of them, winter is the time to barely hold their own until spring arrives.

Less light and low indoor humidity cause most houseplants' winter woes. The lowered light causes many plants to become less active and grow more slowly from October through March. To help your plants get through winter they may need to be moved to a sunnier place. Because most plants are less active in the winter, they need less water and little or no fertilizer.

Too much water can cause roots to rot, thus limiting the plant's ability to absorb soil moisture. This can become a vicious circle. The damaged roots can lead to dry, brittle leaves which many people think is a sign of dryness. So they water even more heavily, compounding the problem.

The low humidity in homes in winter also causes plant problems. Group plants together or grow them on a water-filled tray that contains gravel or crushed rock. Be sure the pots themselves are not standing in water. Plants do well at energy-saving temperatures of 65° to 70° during the day and cooler at night. Plants placed near windows may get too cold at night so pulling the shades or draperies is a good idea. Let water come to room temperature before using it to water houseplants.

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For children who cannot have pets in their home, a houseplant can be a fairly good substitute. A plant will not respond like a dog or cat, but can be a good experience in caring for something and learning about life cycles. For instance the preceding information on what happens to houseplants in the winter can be related to what's happening to the plants and trees outside in the winter.



TV Toy Sell

Toy manufacturers have been "working on" your children for weeks via their lavish television promotions of certain toys. Ronald Pitzer, extension family life specialist at the University of Minnesota, says advertisers are skillful in the ways they whet children's appetites for certain toys. They often promote a few toys heavily, making the child feel he or she can't live without them.

If your child clamors for expensive toys shown on television, meet the problem head-on. Listen to what he or she wants. Check the toy out and evaluate its safety, cost, and suitability for your child.

If the toy doesn't measure up, sit down with your child and explain why it won't be one he or she will be receiving. It may be a difficult task, Pitzer says, but it's better than allowing the child to anticipate something that won't ever happen.

It's easier to steer some children towards a gift you may already have on your list. Offer an older child the alternative of saving to buy the toy. This method teaches the value of money, too.

Children's Clothing

Preschool children like their clothing in bright colors and with simple decorations of their favorite things. Different textures are fun for them (if they're not scratchy), and they like clothes that will capture the attention and admiration of others. Parents usually consider things like durability, price, care, fit, and comfort when selecting clothes, either new or used, for their young children.

Because children grow rapidly, they need clothes that will grow with them. However, buying a size that is too large is not a good idea, as the garment may look strange and may even be a safety hazard. Look for these expandable features:

- Waistlines about 1 inch larger than the child's waist measurement or waistlines that are part elastic.
- Raglan or kimono sleeves that allow more width in the shoulder and sleeve.
- Wide hems to allow for lengthening. (If the fabric is durable press, the old hem line will show.)
- Loose and straight hanging dresses without waistlines.
- Adjustable straps with several buttons on the straps for lengthening.
- Two sets of snaps on the waistlines of two-piece pajama outfits.

Also look for features that allow a child to learn to dress himself/herself. This is particularly important for your preschooler who wants to start showing independence. Look for these self-help features:

- Center front openings with zippers or buttons (as few as possible) about the size of a nickle.
- Cuffs and necklines with enough stretch to go on and off easily.
- Fronts that are easy to distinguish from backs.
- Elastic or stretch waists in pants, skirts and underwear.
- Fabrics that give, such as knits.
- Pockets that are easy to reach.

You probably won't be able to find a garment with all the features you want for the price you want to pay. When your child is growing rapidly, you may have to sacrifice some features and durability for a lower price.

Humor in Children

If you have sat through a child's seemingly endless silly story, you know how taxing such "jokes" can be. Humor is important to children, and parents should not expect the same types of jokes and funny stories from their children as they tell. Children's thought processes aren't developed to the point of appreciating the mixing of words, meanings, and gestures upon which adult humor usually depends.

Children enjoy incongruities just as adults do, but their incongruities are on a simpler level. A child laughs when a person falls down because that person has assumed an incongruous position in relation to the floor. The fact that the person may be hurt makes the incongruity no less humorous to the child.

Parents sometimes are shocked at the stories their small children tell. For example, tales of people losing their heads and having them put back on, are grisly to adults, but to their childish inventors they are funny because they have put together ideas or relationships that don't fit. These kinds of stories are normal and appropriate for children in the four-to-six-year age range.

This Issue

This newsletter is published by the Agricultural Extension Service of your University of Minnesota for young families in the Twin Cities area. I would appreciate your suggestions for its content. Call me at 823-5241.

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