

Dear Eco-Ed:

Winter is finally upon us. My house was freezing this weekend and no matter how high I set my thermostat it was still drafty and cold! With the economy in the slumps, I prefer to spend as little money as possible to get the warmth! Should I go out and just buy a few space heaters? HELP!

- Not Fond of Winter

Dear Not Fond of Winter:

Space heaters or electric heaters may be good if you use it in a workshop, a room not often used, or a room that does not have direct heat flow from a centralized heating system. However, I would not recommend it as a whole-house solution, as they are VERY expensive and may be dangerous to operate.

Here are ten tips that will help warm up your whole house without spending a lot of money:

1. Know where the cold air is coming into your home. Some problem areas are easy to identify, such as windows, doors, basements, etc. Do not forget to check your attic access area, if applicable.
2. For windows and doors that are leaking cold air into your home, seal with a caulking or weather stripping products. You can go to your nearby Home Improvement store for help choosing the right product for your specific needs.
3. If you have screens on single pane windows, lower your storm windows. If not, you can also consider using shrink-wrap to seal windows during winter.
4. Something that most people do not do during winter.... lock your windows! This is not just a security measure; it will help to keep some of the cold air out.
5. Open up curtains and blinds during the day on east-, south and west-facing windows to let the sun in to warm up the room naturally. Remember to close them again after dark to keep the heat in and cold out.
6. Remove any items obstructing your heating registers from moving warm air into the rooms. If you have radiators, get some heat-resistant reflectors and slide them between the radiators and the walls to send warmth into the room.
7. Do you have rooms in your house that are not used often? Turn off the heating units in those rooms, and then shut the doors to keep warm air moving only in areas that you use.

8. Remember to take out air conditioning units from your windows if applicable. Even if you think they are a pain to take out and then put back in during the summer. This will help you in keeping the warmth in and the cold out!

9. Especially when it is cold out, a warm roaring fire sounds great! Unfortunately, most fireplaces draw the warm air out from the rest of the house and let cold air in! So minimize your use of your fireless. In addition, remember to shut the damper after each use.

10. Did you know that it is difficult to warm up interior air that is too dry? Try to maintain your home's relative humidity between 50 and 60 percent to help you with heating your home.

One thing to keep in mind, cold is simply the symptom of issues around your house.

Discovering the root causes and resolving them is to key in keeping you and your family nice and toasty through the winter months. Finally, if after you go through these ten tips and it is still cold or drafty, you should consider hiring a professional to conduct a whole house energy audit to identify and pinpoint the root causes for you. They may even be able to fix some of the root causes as well!