

Time to think about winter...

A third of our heating in the UK is wasted – we heat buildings and rooms we don't use, and our buildings leak. Turning your heating down by one degree is estimated to save you 8% of your bill, so worth doing on all fronts. Most of us won't even notice one degree...

'Insulation before installation' is the mantra – get the cheap and easy wins done first. Here are some suggestions. Any companies mentioned are examples, not direct recommendations.

1. Sit down with everyone (however young) in your house to discuss last year's energy bills. Aim to cut 10% at least; take monthly readings and compare to a year before.
2. Identify accurately where you are losing heat. Bristol's C.H.E.E.S.E. Project offers thermal imaging surveys and has great customer reviews. Stopping draughts can save up to a third of your heating energy, so very small changes can save you lots.
3. The Centre for Sustainable Energy has many insulation fact sheets (www.cse.org.uk/resources) and an advice section on its website (www.cse.org.uk/advice).
4. Period homes are a particular challenge but specialist insulation companies exist. A number of companies draughtproof sash windows, such as Ventrolla. Mitchell & Dickinson also offer specialist secondary glazing.
5. Two-thirds of us don't understand our heating controls, apparently. Make sure you and the people you live with do: www.cse.org.uk/downloads/advice-leaflets/energy-advice/insulation-and-heating/advice_leaflet_central_heating_controls.pdf
6. When did you last have your radiators flushed out? Plumbers say that most are gunked up with rust that restricts water-flow and makes your heating inefficient – even if you've just installed an efficient new boiler.
7. Put reflective liner down the back of your radiators, particularly if they're on outside walls.
8. Adding EndoTherm may make radiators more efficient, say both the manufacturer and the Energy Saving Trust.
9. Keep a duvet on the sofa, draw curtains at dusk, invest in thermal socks and big jumpers!
10. Much of your heating will be hot water. Get a water-saving shower head (you can just unscrew the old one and screw in the new); keep washing machine temperatures down to 30 degrees unless clothes are really dirty.
11. Try to shift your electricity and gas consumption away from the winter-peak hours of 4–8pm from December to March, to reduce the demand for new power stations. Dishwashers and washing machines can be programmed for the middle of the night (as long as they won't disturb your neighbours!).
12. Solar thermal (rather than photovoltaic) is a great option if you have a hot water tank (for example, see www.worcester-bosch.co.uk/products/solar). A Government scheme offers cash payments if you install or have already installed an eligible renewable heating technology at home: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/grants-loans/renewables/renewable-heat-incentive
13. When deciding whether to replace a gas boiler make sure you do the whole-cost accounting – which includes servicing, maintenance and the fuel. There are some very cheap night-time electricity rates at the moment (aimed mainly at electric-vehicle drivers – e.g. 5p/kWh from Octopus) but how you use your heating will determine whether you save money or spend more.
14. Green Energy UK offers 100% biomethane and some of Bristol Energy Company's gas is biomethane. Other companies may also offer biogas.
15. If you are going electric, then ground-source (www.kensaheatpumps.com) or air-source heat pumps (www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/renewable-energy/heat/air-source-heat-pumps) are available – or efficient night storage heaters, such as those by Dimplex. There are some very cheap night-time rates at the moment, but again, whether you save money or spend more will depend on how you use your heating.
16. Transfer what you learn to your working environment and the community buildings you use. And complain when it is too hot!
17. People are telling us that they can save 50% or more on their bills by using 'smart thermostats'. Suppliers include Honeywell and Nest.
18. A 'heat battery' can store heat from a range of different sources to supply hot water and space heating. Heat batteries take up less space than a hot water tank and can store heat for longer. Sunamp seems to be the leading company.