



CONSUMER \$ENSE

NOVEMBER 2008

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

Home Energy Saving Info

Energy Tax Credits for 2009

On October 3, 2008, President Bush signed into law the "Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008" which included an extension of the residential tax credits (which had been in effect in 2006 and 2007) for energy efficient improvements. The previous tax credit expired at the end of 2007. The extension is for improvements made January 1–December 31, 2009.

Improvements made in 2008 are not eligible for a tax credit. For specific information on products and amounts eligible for tax credits, go to http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_tax_credits#s2

If you are planning for home energy saving improvements, you may want to wait until January, in order to receive the tax credit.

According to the Home Energy Saver on-line audit, the average energy cost in the Tulsa area is \$1,724. To do everything you can to lower your

energy costs that will pay you back, consider visiting the web site and spending some time answering questions about your home. The home energy audit provided will calculate the savings you can incur by making changes. It includes the number of years it takes to receive a return on the investment.

By making energy efficient enhancements and lowering your energy consumption you may reduce your energy costs by up to 30%.

You may think that insulating should be the first step in making your home more energy-efficient. Air leaks through the ceiling, walls, foundation and other areas typically are the greatest sources of heat and cooling losses in a home. So, controlling air leaks is the best way to extend the life of your home as well as to conserve energy, save money and increase your home's comfort. The bottom line is this: If you don't tighten up your home first, money spent on insulation may be wasted.

By: Charlotte Richert, OSU Extension Family & Consumer Sciences Educator

Sources:

www.chooseenergy.com; www.energystar.gov; www.hes3.lbl.gov

Eight Essentials to Green Cleaning

By: Charlotte Richert, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator

Making your own cleaning supplies gives a whole new meaning to "green" cleaning. Not only are the following eight items easy on the environment, they are also easy on the pocket book. These days, we are all looking for ways to save some green, and making your own cleaners is easy.

Baking soda: provides grit for scrubbing and reacts with water, vinegar or lemon by fizzing, which speeds up cleaning times

Borax: disinfects, bleaches and deodorizes; very handy in laundry mixes

Distilled white vinegar: disinfects and breaks up dirt; choose white vinegar over apple cider or red vinegars, as these might stain surfaces

Hydrogen Peroxide: disinfects and bleaches

Lemons: cut grease; bottled lemon juice also works well, although you might need to use a bit more to get the same results. Put the rinds in the compost pile.

Olive oil: picks up dirt and polishes wood; cheaper grades work well

Vegetable based (liquid castile) soap: non-petroleum all-purpose cleaners

Washing soda: stain remover, general cleaner, helps unblock pipes; should be handled with gloves due to its caustic nature. Washing soda is usually found in the laundry aisle of grocery and drug stores.

Don't forget to pick up an empty spray bottle at the hardware store, and keep those old rags and used toothbrushes for wiping up and scrubbing. Always label cleaners.

Source: <http://www.thegreenguide.com>

Vinegar can be used to clean mold and mildew

Vinegar is a mainstay of traditional cleaners and effective against mold. Use the 5 percent white distilled solution so as not to stain fabric, and use it "straight up": just add it directly into a spray bottle. Don't rinse. Vinegar is the cheapest available method of killing mold, besides direct sunlight.

The trick with this sprays is not to rinse so the ingredients have time to do their work. In a few days, vacuum and clean up the dead mold with some soap and water. Empty the vacuum.

Home Heating System Maintenance Recommendations

In winter, a heating system can be considered the heart of the home. Your comfort depends on its efficient operation. To reduce fuel bills and save discomfort as well as the expense of equipment breakdown, have your heating system checked and maintained prior to the heating season.

If you have a gas furnace, have a maintenance contractor clean the furnace flue outlets, check belts for tension and wear, oil the motor and bearings (if not sealed), change or clean filters and check filter and safety devices. In addition, check the pilot light for a clear blue flame and have the sensing unit cleaned.

Electric furnaces require little maintenance. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

Make sure your thermostats are working properly. Keep in mind if you have a programmable thermostat you can reduce heating costs by 20 percent by lowering your homes thermostat by 5 degrees at night and 10 degrees during the day if no one is home.

Inspect, clean or replace the filter in your furnace or heat pump once a month. A dirty filter will increase energy costs and damage equipment, leading to early failure.

In winter, if you have a ceiling fan, reverse the motor and run at low speed in a clockwise motion. This will produce a gentle updraft which forces warm air near the ceiling into occupied space.

Landscape to Save Energy

By: Sue Gray, OSU Extension Horticulturist

Well-placed trees and shrubs provide year-round savings on household electric and gas bills.

Start by learning which compass direction your home faces. Along the North side of a home, plant rows of low-growing evergreen shrubs. These can be broad-leafed evergreens, such as boxwood, yaupon holly and azaleas or narrow-leafed evergreens such as dwarf mugho pines.

A hedge of these plants stops the flow of wind directly in front of the house as well as providing a small insulating effect.

Further out in a north-facing front yard consider planting taller evergreens to provide more of a wind break. Taller growing hollies, such as foster holly are not only beautiful, but they help slow down the wind and provide food and habitat for birds. Taller pines, such as scotch, Austrian and loblolly pine also provide year-round green in a sometimes brown Oklahoma winter. Fall is an excellent time to plant these trees.

On the South and West sides of your home, think about shade. A tall shade tree on the southwest corner is an excellent long-term investment in your home. Plant it far enough from the house to keep roots from causing foundation problems in the future.

An arching, vase-shaped tree is the best shape to cast a broad shadow on the home in the afternoon. It provides cooling in the summer, while allowing the winter sun to shine through after foliage drops in November. Do not plant tall evergreens on the south side of homes as they'll cast a shadow in winter, blocking out any possibility of warmth from the sun.

Very large shade trees, such as oaks, should be at least twenty feet from the foundation of the building.

Wood Heating System Maintenance

Have your fireplace or woodstove chimney inspected and cleaned by a professional every winter. Creosote, a chemical substance that forms when wood burns, builds up in chimneys and can cause a chimney fire if it is not properly cleaned. With an open fireplace make sure a fireplace screen is in use at all times when burning wood. Remember to burn only wood, not paper or coal. These materials can float out of your chimney and ignite your roof. With wood stoves, make sure it is placed on an approved fire-resistant surface to protect the floor of your home from heat and hot coals.

Finally, don't forget to check smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Keep a multi-purpose dry chemical extinguisher, suitable for use on class A, B or C fires on hand. Test your smoke detectors often to be sure they work and replace batteries before the weather gets cold. Have at least one detector in the bedroom areas and another in the kitchen.

By Bruce Peverley, OSU Extension Agriculture Educator

Small shade trees, such as Chinese Pistache and Redbud could be about ten to fifteen feet from the foundation. Other excellent choices for rapid shade include red maples, thornless honeylocust and certain selections of ash trees.

Remember last year's ice storm? Avoid trees that grow limbs all from one part of the trunk, such as Bradford Pear. Not only do all the tight limbs cast winter shadows, but they easily break in ice and wind storms.

One of our most ice-resistant shade trees is the bald cypress. It has a pyramid shape, so a more narrow shadow is cast, but it is very fast-growing and tolerates heavy, wet soils.

For more tree selection ideas check our Master Gardener website at www.tulsamastergardeners.org or call our Master Gardener hotline, weekdays, from 9 to 4 p.m. at 746-3701.

OSU EXTENSION SERVICE, TULSA COUNTY
4116 E. 15TH STREET
TULSA, OK 74112
(918) 746-3700
MORE INFORMATION:
www.oces.tulsacounty.org