



Extension News Column

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Reducing Energy Use—Large Appliances

We've tightened up the house, turned down the thermostat, and are absolutely sure that we have done all we can to reduce our energy consumption. Some of the big energy users exist right in the house and we can't imagine doing without them. Appliances such as the refrigerator and laundry equipment can be real energy hogs. We have to learn how to minimize this energy draw.

First, if you are buying new appliances, look for the Energy Star label. This label ensures that these appliances are using the lowest amount of energy possible. In fact, if your large appliances are over 10 years old, it probably makes sense to buy new more efficient appliances. Several years ago, I replaced a chest type freezer and saw a significant decrease in my electric bill the next month.

Do your homework before you buy. All those extra features not only cost additional money in the purchase price, but also cost more in operating costs. If you don't entertain a lot, there's probably no need for a special cycle on your refrigerator that makes ice in half the time. Purchasing this feature will add to the original price of the appliance, and will add to the operating costs. But most of us have existing appliances that we want to operate as efficiently as possible.

Let's take a look at how to minimize the energy consumption while using our existing equipment.

Refrigerator

- Check the door seals on your refrigerator or freezer. Shut a dollar bill in the door and see if it holds firmly in place. If not, replace them. Or put a flashlight in the refrigerator and shut the door. With the door closed and the room dark, look for light.
- Adjust the thermostat. Use a refrigerator thermometer to check temperatures. The refrigerator should be between 36 and 38 degrees. If it is colder, turn it up. This also saves you money because produce can be wasted if frozen.
- Manage your food and storage space. To keep the refrigerator from working too hard, let food cool and cover it before placing in the refrigerator. Keep the freezer full, as it operates more efficiently. If you have lots of empty space, fill containers with water and freeze. We can always use extra ice and the freezer will turn on less often.

Dishwasher

- Avoid handwashing. Modern dishwashers use less water and less energy than doing the dishes by hand.
- Scrape, don't rinse. Many people pre-rinse dishes before loading them in the dishwasher. Most of the dishwashers built in the last 5 years are very efficient and don't need this step. If you feel you must rinse the dishes first, use cold water.
- Wash only full loads. The dishwasher uses the same amount of water whether it is full or half full, so wait until you have a full load. If that requires waiting a day or two, use the rinse and hold feature that only uses 1 to 2 gallons of water.
- Turn the water temperature down. Most dishwashers that were manufactured since 1990 have a heater to heat water, so reduce the water heater temperature.
- Use the no-heat or air-dry cycle. The dishes are hot when the wash cycle is finished, so it isn't necessary to use the heating element to dry the dishes.

Laundry

- Don't overload or underload your washer or dryer. Match the size of the load to the water level.
- If your clothes are lightly soiled, use a cold-water wash. Be sure to change to a liquid detergent, because a powdered detergent won't dissolve at cold-water temperatures. The more soiled the clothing, the warmer the water should be. However, always use a cold water rinse.
- When drying, use the auto dry rather than the timer to avoid wasting energy. In addition, over drying adds static electricity and shortens the life of clothes.
- Dry like items together to save on drying time. Or dry one load after another to take advantage of residual heat.

Appliances make our life easier, just be sure to use them efficiently.