



# Extension News Column

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We've been seeing great information in the newspaper on saving energy by caulking, insulating, and tightening up the house. All of these articles have given us great advice, but what else can you do? Let's take a quick look at what we do inside the house that uses energy. One of the major users of energy is the appliances in the house. By reducing your energy consumption on appliances, you save money. Most families expend about 12% of their energy dollars on cooking. Knowing where those dollars are going will help you make the most of your energy dollars.

The purchase price of an appliance is only one part of the cost. You will also pay to operate the appliance. Two different refrigerators may have a similar capacity and special features, but have very different needs for electricity. Look for the Energy Star symbol on appliances to save from 15 to 40 percent on the operating costs. I checked on the costs of running a new refrigerator as opposed to one that is more than ten years old. In fact, replacing a refrigerator that is more than 10 years old can reduce the energy consumption in half.

The first line of defense is to shut appliances off when you aren't using them. Cut off the television, radio, or light when you leave the room. This time of year we have enough light to enjoy almost round the clock natural light. Take advantage of this—winter will come back again with its short days.

Watch for those appliances that are drawing power even when they are off. Televisions, microwaves, coffeepots, and computers have instant on or clock features that draw power constantly. Plug these appliances into a power strip with an on and off switch. When you finish using your computer, flip the switch. The computer and printer won't draw power. And by the way, if you are replacing your computer, buy a laptop rather than a desktop. The desktop with a monitor uses 10 times as much power as a standard laptop.

So what about those small appliances that we all use in the house? Which are more efficient? Let's start in the kitchen. I'm often asked what is the most efficient appliance to cook a meal. It is easiest to compare the appliance by the cost per hour. I pulled this information from three different energy production companies in the lower 48. For comparison, I took my electric bill added the customer charge and the fuel allowance charge and divided it by the number of kilowatt hours I used last month. These numbers are based on the costs I figured from that bill. These may not be accurate for everyone, but the rough numbers will give you something to compare.

If I'm cooking something in a skillet on top of the stove, is it more efficient to use the stove top or an electric skillet? A small burner is \$.18 per hour, with the large burner at double that amount. An electric skillet takes only 14.4 cents per hour. A microwave oven takes between 24 and 29 cents per hour, depending on the wattage. However, you have to factor in the shorter cooking time in the microwave. A slow cooker costs only 2.4 cents an hour, but remember you will cook in the slow cooker for 6 to 8 hours. If pork chops are on the menu, it would take 14 cents to cook in the slow cooker (for 6 hours) or 18 cents for half an hour on the large burner on the stove.

So what if it is something that goes in the oven? Using the large oven on your stove costs about 43 cents per hour. The microwave is only 29 cents, but consider using a toaster oven at only 11 cents per hour. If I'm going to cook something in the range oven, I make sure I fill it up. Everything for one meal is cooked in the oven to get the most efficient use out of the heat expended.

Here are two quick notes on oven efficiency. Only preheat if you are doing baked goods. If I am making a cake or bread, it is important that the oven be hot when the product goes in. If I'm making meatloaf, I just start the oven and put the meatloaf in immediately. It doesn't need to be preheated. The second thing is quit peeking in the oven! Every time you open the oven, the temperature drops 25 to 50 degrees. That takes more electricity to bring it up to temperature again.

So what does it cost to run other appliances? Here are common appliances and their costs to run them for an hour.

- Blender 8.4 cents per hour
- Coffee pot 11 cents per hour (cheap at any price)
- Dishwasher 43 cents per hour
- Hair dryer 2 cents per hour
- Iron 11 cents per hour
- Toaster 11 cents per hour
- Vacuum 16 cents per hour

Remember that your appliances may cost more or less depending on the wattage that they consume. The numbers here are listed as comparisons to help you plan the best way to complete the jobs you need to do at home. The first step to getting control over your energy dollar is to know where it is being spent.

If you have further questions on the efficiency of appliances, give us a call at Cooperative Extension Service.