

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

University of Georgia Family & Consumer Sciences • Volume 6 • Number 2 • June 2022



5 Ways to Lower Cooling Costs

Written by Candace Tucker, FACS Agent, UGA Extension — Coweta County



Georgia Healthy Housing
one change many impacts

Inside this issue:

- 5 Ways to Lower Cooling Costs
- Fun and Safe Indoor Activities with Children
- Selecting a Fire Extinguisher for Your Kitchen
- Reducing Summer Mold
- Ways to Keep the Cool Air Indoors this Summer
- Healthy Home Hacks

As the summer heat rises, so will your electric bill. This comes as no surprise as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has found that the average household spends more than \$2,200 a year on energy bills, with nearly half going towards heating and cooling costs. Luckily, there are changes you can make to lower your cooling and overall energy costs.

Maintain your cooling equipment. Routine maintenance is necessary to ensure the cooling system operates efficiently. Check the air filter every month and replace it every three months, or if it is dirty. The air filter helps prevent dust and dirt from accumulating in your system which can cause it to use more energy and possible early system failure. For all other maintenance, contact a qualified technician to check over your cooling system in the spring.

Install a programmable thermostat that fits your lifestyle. There are three different models of programmable thermostats to choose from — 7-day, 5+2, and 5-1-1. To determine the best one for you, think about your schedule and how often you are away from home. 7-day models offer flexibility if your schedule changes each day. 5+2 models stay on the same schedule every weekday and have a separate schedule for the weekends. 5-1-1 models stay on the same schedule Monday through Friday and have separate schedules on Saturdays and Sundays.

If you have a manual thermostat, you can adjust the temperatures daily before you leave the house and when you go to sleep at night.

Typically, adjusting temperatures 5 - 8 degrees up in summer can help save energy if you are going to be away from home for several hours. The goal is the same no matter which thermostat you use - that is to keep your thermostat set at energy-saving temperatures for long periods, such as during the day when no one is home and at bedtime.

Seal the cooling ducts. Ducts are found throughout your home as they are used to distribute conditioned air from your cooling system. High energy bills can result from air loss due to duct leaks, holes, or poorly connected ducts. If possible, seal any visible leaks by using a mastic sealant or metal (foil) tape and insulating ducts you have access to such as the attic, basement, or garage. Duct tape is not a sustainable sealing method and should be avoided. Also, take time to inspect your registers and vents for any leaks and disconnected ductwork. For more extensive ductwork repair, hire a professional contractor.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

continued on p. 5

Fun and Safe Indoor Activities with Children

Written by Teresa Adkins, , 4-H/FACS Agent, UGA Extension – Decatur County

“It’s too hot outside”, “I’m bored”, “There’s nothing to do”. Do you hear these words from your children? There is no need to panic because there are many great ways to beat the heat and boredom without costing a fortune or taking a lot of preparation time. Plus, they can all be accomplished indoors out of the heat. Many of these suggestions can help build skills that will prepare your child for life.

These activities are divided into four categories: Intellectual, Creative, Practical, and Physical. There are a lot of crossovers between the categories that help develop creative thinking and motor skills. Of course, not all the activities mentioned below are appropriate and safe for every age level. Gauge the child’s ability level before starting and always make sure there is adult supervision present.

Creative – We know that keeping art supplies on hand is essential for sparking that creative flame within children. When purchasing art supplies, make sure that all materials are non-toxic, formaldehyde free, and are not choking hazards. Water based paints and markers are generally safer, but always read the label. Children love making play dough and slime from cornstarch, non-toxic glue, salt, and other kitchen staples. Interested in edible paint? Sugar, water, and food coloring can be mixed to make a syrupy paint for bread slices, cookies, or pancakes. Sweet and easy! Just make sure to use clean brushes if the paint product will be eaten – and it will be! Making gift items is another creative option, especially for older children. Personalized bookmarks, beaded bracelets, or key chains make practical and thoughtful gifts for most anyone. Stress the importance of hand washing after handling art supplies. Keep beads, scissors, paints, crayons, markers, and other materials out of the reach of younger children.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Practical – Summer break is the perfect time for children to learn practical skills that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. Learning to cook simple meals or to assemble no-cook snacks gives a young person a sense of accomplishment and can be a great asset to busy adults. There are many recipe ideas online, or you can contact your county Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent for ideas. Of course, sharp objects like knives and hot flames should be avoided, and adult supervision is necessary. Teaching skills like sewing on a button, ironing, sweeping, or making a bed are very appropriate skills, depending on the age of the child. All children can benefit from learning about handwashing, cleanliness, and tidiness.

Intellectual – When thinking of safe, entertaining ways to keep learning active during vacation months, reading is usually our first thought. Library reading programs and visits are a great possibility for many families. Puzzles are great for all ages to improve short-term memory, visual-spatial reasoning, and problem-solving skills. Make solving simple puzzles more challenging by hiding pieces around the house; once found have the child place the piece in its appropriate place on the puzzle. The same process can be used with spelling stones. Unsure what that is? Gather some rocks and have the kids paint one lowercase letter per rock. Then hide the rocks around the house and give the kids a word to spell. They search for the appropriate rocks that make up the word. This goes right along with indoor scavenger hunts. There is no end to the adaptations to this seek and find game. It can be a riddle hunt, color hunt, or even a version using darkened rooms and a flashlight to find the clues. And there is always good old-fashioned charades. Use kid friendly topics like “an animal giving itself a bath”.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Physical - Energy levels seem to skyrocket during summer months. With just a few inexpensive items like painter’s tape, balloons, and cotton balls, some of that excess energy can be tamed. However, when thinking about physical movement inside, always avoid potential fall hazards like furniture, slippery floors, stairs, glass, and clutter. Painter’s

continued on p. 6

Selecting a Fire Extinguisher for Your Kitchen

Written by Ashleigh Childs, FACS Agent, UGA Extension – Thomas County

Your kitchen may have all of the appliances and gadgets that you need: a beautiful stand mixer, decorative tea towels, matching china, and your great grandmother's signature casserole dish. However, in selecting the necessary tools for your kitchen, how much time (if any) was spent on selecting a fire extinguisher? You probably didn't include a home fire extinguisher on your gift registry when you got married, but it is critical to keeping your family and possessions safe. According to the National Fire Protection Association, 62% of home fires start in the kitchen and are correlated with cooking on stovetops or ovens. You can reduce the risk by making sure to keep anything that can catch fire away from the stovetop, checking to make sure everything is turned off when you finish cooking, keeping your oven and stovetop free from grease and dust, and NEVER leaving the kitchen while cooking.

In case of a fire, it is important to be able to quickly identify the source of the fire, as there are several primary types of extinguishers that are each designed to put out different kinds of fires.

- Class A fires are fueled by ordinary combustibles such as paper, cloth, wood, rubber, plastics, and upholstery. These are solid combustibles that are not metals (Class A fires generally leave an Ash.)
- Class B fires are fueled by flammable liquids, such as oil, gasoline, oil-based paint or grease. This classification also includes flammable gases. (Class B fires generally involve materials that **Boil** or **Bubble**.)
- Class C fires are ignited by malfunctions of electrical equipment, such as household appliances and televisions. (Class C fires generally deal with electrical **C**urrent.)

It is important to select the correct type of fire extinguisher. Using the wrong fire extinguisher may cause the fire to spread. Most home improvement stores carry multipurpose fire extinguishers for the home that cover Class A through Class C fires. These multipurpose extinguishers are identified as "ABC." When selecting the correct size fire extinguisher, choose one that is large enough to put out a small fire but not so heavy that it is difficult to handle or use. To use your fire extinguisher, remember the word **PASS**:

- **P**ull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you and release the locking mechanism.
- **A**im low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
- **S**queeze the lever slowly and evenly.
- **S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Regular maintenance of your fire extinguisher is important in keeping you safe. It is recommended to take your fire extinguisher to be serviced and refilled annually or, at a minimum, 6 years after purchase.

The kitchen fire extinguisher should be placed where it can be accessed quickly (within 30 feet of the stove) in the case of an emergency. The heat of the moment is not the time to learn how to use your fire extinguisher! Remember to read the instructions regularly and familiarize yourself with the parts and operation so you know how to use it before a fire starts. Check with your local fire department or fire equipment distributor to see if they offer a hands-on fire extinguisher training. For additional information, visit [the National Fire Protection Association website](https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Staying-safe/Safety-equipment/Fire-extinguishers).

Sources:

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Staying-safe/Safety-equipment/Fire-extinguishers>

<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/extinguishers.html>

https://www.esfi.org/home-cooking-fire-prevention-tips/?gclid=EAIaIObChMild3MtbX29wIVWcLCBB3YDw-3EAAAYASAAEgIVO_D_BwE

<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/wm6002>

https://www.prospertx.gov/wp-content/uploads/The-ABCs-of-Fire-Extinguishers.pdf_-2.pdf

<https://resources.impactfireservices.com/key-places-keep-fire-extinguishers-in-your-home>



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Reducing Summer Mold

Written by Jackie E. Ogden, FACS Agent, UGA Extension – Chatham County

During the summer our homes can provide a perfect environment for molds to grow. Molds are fungi that reproduce by releasing spores into the air. The spores are a natural part of the environment that settle on surfaces inside homes. You can prevent spores from growing on surfaces by monitoring the humidity in your home. To reproduce, mold spores require a food source such as organic matter, moisture, the appropriate temperature, and oxygen. Food for molds comes from dirt, carpet fibers, paper, wood, etc. This combined with moisture contribute to mold growth. The moisture may come from a water leak, high humidity, or flooding.

If you smell a musty, earthy odor or see excess moisture there is the potential for mold growth. In the summertime the humidity can be very high in many parts of the country, including the southeast US. The best way to prevent mold growth is to control moisture & humidity levels in your home. You can measure the relative humidity in your home by using an inexpensive moisture or humidity meter usually available where hardware is sold. Locating and fixing the causes of excess moisture in your home is the best way to prevent mold growth. *The UGA Mold and Moisture Checklist* is a helpful UGA Extension research-based publication that provides tips to identify moisture problem areas in your home.

Below are some best practices for controlling moisture in your home this summer.

- Keep indoor humidity below 60% relative humidity, ideally between 30-50%.
- Repair leaky pipes and faucets.
- Turn on the exhaust fans when bathing and cooking.
- Maintain the air conditioning system and check for equipment flaws (oversized unit, duct leaks, dirty coils, condensation, etc.)
- Clean out gutters, and check for building, roof and window leaks.
- Make sure water drains away from the foundation around the house.

Temperature can impact the amount of moisture in the air so examine the amount of insulation in the home. You can decrease the flow of moisture in and out of your home by sealing air leaks around windows, doors, air register grilles, plumbing fixtures, and electrical outlets. Air circulation and ventilation affect the amount of moisture in your home. Installing heating and cooling system vents and ceiling fans can improve circulation. Avoid closing off rooms unless there are return air grilles to allow air flow between spaces.

Below are some recommendations to control household humidity.

- Decrease bathing time and reduce water temperature to minimize steam.
- Turn on exhaust fans when cooking or bathing.
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.
- Vent appliances such as the clothes dryer and range hood to the outdoors.
- Use a dehumidifier, and make sure you clean it regularly.
- Use a well maintained, right-sized air conditioner on the “auto fan” setting. If the fan runs constantly, moisture will be returned into the home.



(Image Source: Pixabay)



(Image Source: Pixabay)

To learn more about reducing mold problems and keeping your home healthy, visit www.healthyhomes.uga.edu.

Ways to Keep the Cool Air Indoors this Summer

Written by Becca Stackhouse Morson, FACS Agent, UGA Extension - Crisp County

It is that time of year for family BBQs, beach trips, swimming, and other outdoor adventures. There are times when the harsh summer sun isn't quite so fun and going inside is a cool relief. But what if cool air escapes the house? Here are a few quick tips to help keep the cool air inside where it belongs.

- Close the window blinds or shutters. Keeping the blinds closed on the north and west facing windows will keep your home significantly cooler.
- Adjust ceiling fans to spin counterclockwise. This simple adjustment will help you feel cooler by creating a downdraft. Since fans don't cool the air, you want to save energy by turning the fan off when you leave the room.
- Keep outside doors closed and seal the gaps. Sealing around



(Image Source: Pixabay)

5 Ways to Lower Cooling Costs (continued from p. 1)



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Insulate and seal the exterior of your home. This includes your home's outer walls, ceiling, windows, and floor. There are several common types of insulation—fiberglass (in both batt and blown forms), cellulose, rigid foam board, and spray foam. Reflective insulation (or radiant barrier) is another insulating product that can help save energy in hot, sunny climates. When correctly installed with air sealing, each type of insulation should lower energy bills during the hottest times of the year. Before you install insulation, be sure to look for and seal air leaks because it performs best when air is not moving through or around it. Many air leaks and drafts are easy to find because you can feel them—like those around windows and doors. However, holes hidden in attics, basements, and crawlspaces are usually bigger problems. Sealing these leaks with caulk, spray foam, or weather stripping will have a great impact on reducing utility bills.

Invest in a new cooling system. If your HVAC system is more than 10 years old, then it should be evaluated by a professional or replaced. If you choose to replace your unit, look for ENERGY STAR certified equipment to be properly installed by a professional. Improper installation of your cooling equipment can reduce the system's efficiency by 30 percent.

For additional information on how to save energy, visit [energy.gov](https://www.energy.gov) and [energystar.gov](https://www.energystar.gov).

Sources:

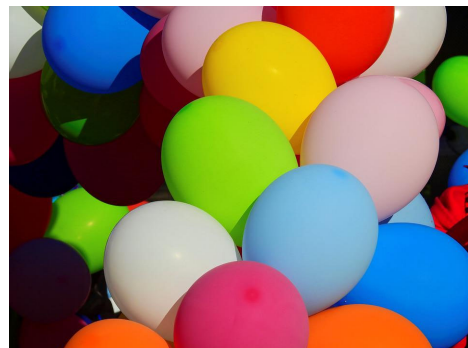
https://www.energystar.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/HeatingCoolingGuide%20FINAL_9-4-09_0.pdf
https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/ES-HomeHeatingandCooling_081221.pdf

Fun and Safe Indoor Activities with Children

(continued from p. 2)

tape comes in different colors and is safe for most wall and floor coverings. It is great for marking a hopscotch court or lines for long jumps. Using painter's tape in a hallway to create an over-under maze is exciting and challenging for almost all ages. The possibilities are endless. Balloons are also good for promoting physical movement. Imagine balloon tennis, balloon volleyball, balloon basketball...and the list continues. Just make sure to discard the popped balloon pieces. Consider using cotton balls for hilarious physical fun. Have a cotton ball crawl by holding cotton balls in a spoon and crawling to another room to deposit them. Adapt any of these ideas to fit your children and circumstances.

Always supervise, supervise, supervise! Not only does it help keep children safe, but it also strengthens relationships and builds memories to last a lifetime.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist

~ Diane Bales, UGA Extension Human Development Specialist

Remove minor scratches on furniture by rubbing the scratches with a small amount of non-gel toothpaste. Rub in a circular motion then buff it.

Remove oil-based stains from clothing and upholstery with equal parts of baby powder and dish soap

Microfiber products are made of small fibers that can trap dusts and absorb spills. To protect them, do not use fabric softener on them.

Dust blinds with tongs wrapped in dish towels. Secure the towels with rubber bands and swish away.

Use a straw to keep necklaces from getting tangled when you store them. Thread one side of the necklace through the straw and fasten the clasp.

Organize charging cords in paper towel tubes to keep them tangle-free. Use bread bag tabs or colored tape to label cords.

Use clear nail polish to make labels on bottles waterproof. This works well to protect labels written in Sharpie or other permanent markers.



Co-editors:

Dr. Pamela R. Turner, Housing and Indoor Environment Extension Specialist
Dr. Diane W. Bales, Human Development Extension Specialist

This newsletter is produced by UGA Extension and supported in part by the U.S Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes under the Healthy Homes Partnership Grant.

