

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

University of Georgia Family & Consumer Sciences • Volume 10 • Number 2 • June 2026



Georgia Healthy Housing
one change many impacts

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*NEAFCS 2025
Award winning newsletter*

Find more information and tips about preparing for emergencies in the UGA Extension [Home Emergency Preparedness Handbook](#).

Tips for Keeping Yourself and Your Home Cooler This Summer

Written by Britney Mayorga, Spalding County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

With the annual average temperature increasing every year, keeping our homes cool in the summer becomes a higher priority. Along with higher temperatures, summer can bring higher utility costs, causing us to pay more attention to how we use energy. We tend to use over 40% of our energy to cool and heat our homes. If we can reduce energy use in the summer, we can save money and reduce our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Here are some tips for reducing home energy use during the summer:

- If your home is unoccupied for more than 4 hours, raising the temperature can save 3-5% on cooling costs for every degree above 72° F. The smaller the difference between the temperatures inside to outside, the lower your bill will be because heat will flow into your home more slowly.
- Avoid setting your thermostat to a colder setting than normal. Lowering the temperature will not cool your home faster, could result in excessive cooling, and is an unnecessary expense.
- Set up fans to draw in cooler air from outside or a cooler part of the home or to blow directly on people. Ceiling fan blades should rotate counterclockwise as you look up at it to push air straight down. You can use more than one fan to create a cross-breeze.
- Consider investing in a programmable thermostat that returns the temperature to normal before you wake up or return home. Maintaining a moderate setting on a programmable thermostat is the most cost-effective practice. Keep in mind that programmable thermostats are not for heat pumps because they may operate inefficiently.
- Clean or replace your air conditioner filters once a month, or as recommended by your HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) company, to save 5% of energy used to run the AC system.
- If room temperatures are uneven, check joints and seams, especially in the attic, crawlspace, or garage, for leaks. Seal any air leaks with mastic sealant or metal tape.
- If you don't use all rooms every day, consider getting a window unit to cool the rooms you spend the most time in. This can save



Image source: Pixabay

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A Comfortable and Energy-Saving Home

*Written by Charles Okpala, Richmond County Family and Consumer Sciences
Extension agent*

Our homes should provide comfort, and at the same time save as much energy as possible. Because each home is different, how people strive to save energy in their homes also differs. Comfort in the home is an individual, collective, and shared responsibility. A comfortable should combine all the components that make it a relaxing sanctuary. For instance, a home must function to provide dedicated space for everyone, an atmosphere and ambiance of warmth, and appropriate lighting that is soft yet calm, especially at night. As a place of rest, the living, dining, and sleeping areas need comfortable feeling, order, and texture. A comfortable home should also reflect one's personality through items that are well organized. Whenever possible, reduce clutter to avoid stress. Remember that we are all different, so there is no perfectly comfortable home. What matters is a truly comfortable home is a place of relaxation without worrying about minor imperfections.

A comfortable home can also achieve energy-saving goals. Some are things one can control; some others cannot be controlled. If you are part of the building of your home, make sure there is proper insulation, especially in the attics and walls, in addition to caulking/weather stripping around doors and windows to prevent air leaks. Installing double- or triple-pane windows and insulated doors to reduce heat transfer, as well as high-efficiency heating-cooling systems operated by smart thermostat, help significantly reduce energy consumption. Even if you are not part of building the home, you can make simple changes like switching to LED bulbs, which use less energy, and using power strips to eliminate "vampire" energy loads from unused electronics. You can also utilize energy star-certified appliances, wash clothes in cold water, and use low-flow showerheads/faucet aerators. Some daily habits, like lowering the heat in the night/ winter, raising the AC in the summer, and taking shorter showers, can help increase home efficiency. Other useful habits can include fixing water leaks, using ceiling fans, closing the curtains, and keeping vents unblocked. Consider long-term investments like replacing older water heaters that become inefficient and add to utility bills over time.

So can a home be comfortable and energy-saving? It is an absolute "yes"! A home that's comfortable and energy-saving can be healthier, more peaceful, and quieter. Properly insulated walls and energy-efficient windows, doors, and HVAC systems will not only help maintain comfort without wasting energy bills, but also keep the home comfortably warm in winter and cool in summer. Advanced systems like ERVs (Energy Recovery Ventilators) can help provide fresh quality air and ensure comfort. Better air quality, consistent temperatures, fewer drafts, and significantly lower utility bills add a great deal of comfort and reduced stress to the home. Putting effort into the maintenance of your home can also optimize not only the comfort but also the energy-saving of your home.



Image source: Canva



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Lead and Consumer Products

Written by Stephanie Benton, Early County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, Janette Burkes, Grady County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, and Teresa Adkins, Decatur County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

Lead is a naturally-occurring toxic metal used in a wide range of products, including paint, gasoline, plumbing pipes, ceramics and cosmetics. It is highly toxic, especially to children and pregnant women. Even at low levels, lead exposure can cause harmful effects to the nervous system. Because of these dangers, lead use in consumer products has been heavily restricted in the United States and globally. However, sources of lead such as old painted toys, children's jewelry, crystal, and some imported items can still pose risks to exposure.

Who is at risk?

Children are at the greatest risk from the harmful effects of lead because their bodies are still developing and can absorb lead more easily than adults. Even small amounts of lead can have serious and lasting consequences.

Sources of lead in consumer products

- Paint, paint chips, and dust found in older homes
- Ceramics, including mugs
- Glassware, especially those with painted designs
- Old or vintage painted items
- Colorful dishware, new or old
- Brass items
- Aluminum pots and pans
- Imported toys and jewelry
- Imported spices, especially cinnamon, paprika and turmeric
- Cosmetics
- Electronics
- Zippers and rivets on clothing
- Infant playpens and plastic toys



Image source: pixabay

Other sources of lead

- Pipes and plumbing materials
- Solder used in electrical components, metalwork, jewelry, musical instruments, stained glass, etc.
- Rubber grips on power tools
- Gasoline
- Batteries
- Ammunition

Prevention and Consumer Awareness

The primary way to prevent lead exposure is to remove sources of lead from your home. Use a home test kit to help you identify items that contain lead. Secondary prevention is blood testing to check for exposure. It is good to screen children under 6 years of age and adults showing symptoms such as; fatigue, headaches, or abdominal pain. Talk to your primary care doctor about lead screening if you or your child have any of these symptoms.



Let's Evacuate: Tips on Planning for Home Emergencies

*Written by Brittany Harrison, Baldwin County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent
Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent*

When the worst happens, a prepared house evacuation plan can save you from missing out on safety and ending up in tragedy. A solid plan makes sure all household members know what to do when fire, flooding, or another disaster strikes.

Your home evacuation plan should have marked escape routes. To ensure that each person can exit safely, every room should include at least two potential exits. Make sure windows and doors are easily accessible and not blocked. It's also important to choose a specific meeting spot outside the house in a secure area where everyone can come together after evacuating, like a mailbox or even a neighbor's home.

Everyone in the home needs to be familiar with the plan for evacuation before it's needed. Practicing drills at least two times per year is essential. Practice what to do in various emergencies, from fires to severe weather, to teach your family how to make practical and safe decisions.

Get an emergency kit together now and place it in an accessible location. Your emergency kit needs to have bottled water, non-perishable food, flashlights, extra batteries, first-aid supplies, prescription meds and important documents. Keep a list of emergency contacts, including family members and emergency services phone numbers, in your emergency kit.

Preparing families for the future requires ongoing planning and practice. Be sure your family is ready to respond to emergencies when they occur, so everyone can stay safe and reduce the risk of harm.

Helping Parents Downsize

Written by Rebecca Long, Elbert County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

There may come a time when your parents need to downsize or declutter. Downsizing can make daily life safer and easier for older adults. Less clutter can help prevent falls, reduce stress, and make a home more manageable.

Helping aging parents downsize can be emotional. To them, it's not just about belongings—it's about memories and a lifetime of experiences. Here are some tips to make downsizing smoother.



- Start the conversation slowly and with care. Focus on what matters most to them: comfort, independence, and staying in control of their space.
- Take it one step at a time. Begin with a small area like a drawer or closet. Sort items into simple groups: keep, donate, or discard. Go at a pace that feels comfortable and not overwhelming.
- Sentimental items can be difficult. Encourage keeping a few favorites, taking photos of special items, or giving meaningful pieces to family members. Selecting a few items from a collection or keeping photos of children's artwork can bring back the same memories as the actual items without taking up as much space.

Image source: Pixabay Most importantly, offer support and respect their choices. Downsizing should feel empowering, not overwhelming. With patience and understanding, downsizing can be a positive step toward a simpler, safer home.



Tips for Keeping Yourself and Your Home Cooler This Summer

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- six times the energy of running central air conditioning.
- Simple changes such as caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows and replacing incandescent bulbs that give off heat with LED bulbs can make your home more energy-efficient.
- Consider energy efficient windows with low-emissivity coatings that block infrared radiation, exterior window shade (closing shutters, external blinds, awing, pergola, porch, shade trees) for the side of the home that gets direct sunlight, or heat reflecting roofs.
- When purchasing new products, look for the Energy Star label to ensure they are energy efficient. Use the [Energy Star Rebate Finder](#) to find rebates and special offers on products based on your zip code.
- Wait until the evening when the temperature is cooler to turn on large appliances (oven, range, dishwasher, clothes washer) because they give off a significant amount of heat.
- Cook outside on the grill instead of turning on the oven.
- Hang laundry outside to dry and save cost of running the dryer and reducing heat and moisture inside.
- Use a dehumidifier! You can also reduce humidity levels by taking shorter and colder showers, wiping excess water from surfaces, and moving indoor plants outside.
- Use exhaust fans when cooking and showering to capture hot air, before it mingles with the home air and contributes to overheating, and turn off within 20 minutes after use.
- Open windows and doors in the early morning to draw in cold air from outside. Once it starts to warm up, shut all windows and doors to seal in the cool air.
- Cover your windows during the day to block the heat from the sun. Curtains, especially blackouts or heat-blocking curtains, are better than blinds because blinds let warm air flow from the window to room.
- Plan to exercise earlier in the day rather than in evening because exercise increases body heat and makes it hard to relax and fall asleep. Avoid outdoor exercise during the hottest parts of the day.
- Drink lots of water. To remind yourself to drink water, carry a bottle everywhere you go. As soon as you do any physical activity, drink even small sips of water.
- Take cold showers or periodically splash water on your face and hands to lower your body temperature. Cover your head or neck with a dampened light towel and to speed up heat loss, place a wet towel on your forehead.
- Wear loose fitting clothing to allow breeze to cool you down.

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Diane Bales ~

Create a message board using an old picture frame. Place some pretty paper in the frame, and use dry-erase markers to write on the glass.

Wash LEGO and other small toys in the dishwasher. Load the toys in a laundry bag and wash on the top rack. Allow them to dry completely on a towel.

Fold and store sheets inside a matching pillowcase to keep the set together.



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(healthyhomes.uga.edu)



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Editor: Dr. Diane W. Bales, Professor and Human Development Extension Specialist