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EcoConsumer

## A plan for the heat can keep you cool

Many of us in the Seattle area don't plan adequately for climbing summer temperatures, and we may miss out on opportunities to go green and save money.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Heat happens, even in Seattle. Unless we're in the throes of it, we tend to forget how toasty it can get here, if only for a few weeks.

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As a result, many of us don't plan adequately for climbing summer temperatures, and we may miss out on hot opportunities to go green and save money.

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**Q:** Since warm weather usually doesn't hang around here for long, isn't the greenest approach to just forgo fans and air conditioning, and tough it out?

**A:** That may work for a few people, but in most households at least one person needs relief from the heat. You certainly don't want the house to get so hot people can't sleep. To be eco-cool this summer, you need a strategy.

**Q:** What's the first step?

**A:** Re-evaluate your home's cooling needs every year, based on the temperature requirements and habits of everyone in your household. Consider which rooms people spend time in during the summer, and at what time of day.

Most of us already own fans or maybe even a room air conditioner, and we haul them out in late June or early July every year. Then we often just place the fans helter-skelter, running them on high most days for the next two months.

But once you have reviewed your needs, you can more thoughtfully decide where you will place your fans and how they can work together with natural ventilation, ceiling fans or a room air conditioner. As a realistic green goal, try to operate your electricity-powered cooling devices as little as possible while still staying comfortable.

**Q:** How do fans and air conditioners compare?

**A:** From an environmental perspective, fans run circles around air conditioners. Even an efficient window air conditioner typically consumes more energy than four fans. But because of that power, an air conditioner may provide a comfort level unattainable with fans.

**Q:** We've decided we want a room air conditioner. What do we need to know?

**A:** Choose a unit that meets the federal government's Energy Star efficiency guidelines ([seati.ms/le0hGU](http://seati.ms/le0hGU)). The Energy Star program also provides useful calculations ([seati.ms/lmbBfn](http://seati.ms/lmbBfn)) to help you choose the most efficient air conditioner based on your room size and cooling needs.

Consumer Reports offers loads of great AC-buying tips at [seati.ms/k4PVZM](http://seati.ms/k4PVZM). You need a subscription to see the online Consumer Reports ratings for specific models, or you can access those ratings online for free through several area libraries. When shopping for an air conditioner, pay special attention to its Energy Efficiency Ratio, or EER.

**Q:** What can I do to keep my home cool besides using fans and air conditioning?

**A:** One of the most successful "passive cooling" techniques here in the Puget Sound region is to seal up your home during the day, closing windows and shutting the blinds to keep out the sun and heat. Direct sun can boost the temperature of a room more than 10 degrees.

In the evening, open selected windows so that the cooler nighttime air flows through your home. Experiment for best results, and consider using a window fan or ceiling fan to augment this system.

Reduce heat generated in your home by using appliances less, or running them at night. Replace hot-burning light bulbs such as incandescent or halogen bulbs with cooler-burning, energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).

Some long-term solutions improve energy efficiency in the winter as well as the summer. Add insulation in the attic and plant deciduous trees, which shade your home during the summer and drop their leaves to let the sun warm your house in the winter.

If all else fails, move out. Since Seattle usually has such brief periods of truly torrid weather, that's not such a far-fetched solution. Sleep outside, or in the basement. And if you want to take advantage of nature's own air conditioning, Mount Rainier is always cool this time of year.

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