

Homes & Real Estate

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Beat the heat in NW homes with these cool strategies

Keeping your home comfortable in the hottest weather without spending a lot of money or wasting energy is easier than you may think.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Can Seattle handle the heat? As our summer heat waves get longer and hotter — likely the result of climate change — we'll soon find out.

However, keeping your home comfortable in the hottest weather without spending a lot of money or wasting energy is easier than you may think.

Every home has different cooling needs, depending on the house itself and the comfort levels of the occupants. Start with low-cost methods to see if they work for your household.

Open and shut

To keep heat out, close shades or curtains on east-facing windows in the morning and west-facing windows in the afternoon. Shut those windows then as well.

Allow heat to leave by opening windows and doors on the sides of the home not hit by the sun, then on all sides in the evenings. For a two-story house, open windows on the shaded side on both levels to create a cool flow of air.

Cooling a home with this cross-ventilation method has traditionally worked well in the Puget Sound area, where we often enjoy cool summer evenings. People who don't do it typically have two main reasons: bugs (the insect kind) and security.

Never risk your home's security for cooling purposes, of course, but usually some windows can be left open without concern while you are home. At night or when you're out, you can use an adjustable window screen, 8 or 10 inches high, and an easy-to-install latch to keep the window from being opened any further. You can find both at hardware and home-improvement stores, or online.

Beat the bugs

Unscreened windows and doors are an open invitation to insects.

Many folks don't have screens for all of their windows, or they use screens that fit poorly or have holes. Then you end up with flies in your home, or those awful little bugs that buzz in your ear when you're trying to sleep.

Simple steps can be taken to avoid these annoyances. Adjustable window screens in various sizes often cost less than \$20. You can repair a small hole in a screen with instant adhesive or epoxy. For

larger holes, try an inexpensive patch kit.

New types of window screens block the sun's heat while keeping out insects, and some screens even have a fine enough mesh to block allergens.

Screen-installation companies will come to your home and make or fit screens for as many windows and doors as you need.

Let it blow

If cross-ventilation doesn't do the trick, you may need a few fans or a room air conditioner.

Steer clear of the cheapest fans. A high-quality oscillating tower-style fan costs more than most other fans — around \$60 — but are usually sturdier and more reliable.

For a room air conditioner, choose an Energy Star-certified model and clean the filter regularly.

Most homes in Western Washington shouldn't require central air conditioning. However, a ductless heat pump that can also provide cooling is an energy-efficient, comfortable choice. Look for Energy Star-rated heat pumps.

Insulate for summer

If you want to improve your home's attic insulation for winter, tackle that project now so you'll also enjoy cooling benefits this summer. Attic insulation keeps a home from getting too hot, and it helps retain cool air.

Consider newer, greener types of attic insulation, such as radiant barrier and reflective insulation.

Indow Windows, a Portland, Ore.-based manufacturer of energy-efficient thermal window inserts, offers a creative green cooling option. Its new tinted window insert, called Shade Grade, allows light in while greatly reducing solar heat.

Various other approaches, from using a ceiling fan to cooking less in the kitchen, can also help keep your home cool. We could have plenty of heat ahead of us this summer, so now's the time to choose at least one new cooling strategy.

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