

Homes & Real Estate

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How to keep heat from escaping out the window | EcoConsumer

Heat will escape from your house any way that it can. And with cooler weather just a couple of months away, it's time to consider ways to make our homes more energy efficient.

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Special to The Seattle Times

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Energy wants to move.

Heat will escape from your house any way that it can. And with cooler weather just a couple of months away, it's time to consider ways to make our homes more energy efficient.

Open up your home energy conservation efforts to include your windows. Most homes have lots of them, and heat loves to go out the window.

Addressing heat loss from windows has often meant replacing them, which is usually an expensive proposition. Let's look at two less-costly alternatives among the new wave of home energy efficiency strategies: window inserts and insulating blinds.

Window inserts

Sometimes called interior storm windows, window inserts are a great fit for older homes.

Typically made of clear acrylic plastic, they are lighter and easier to handle than traditional storm windows and usually are custom-sized to fit snugly.

Most companies that sell window inserts have developed their own frame system. Inserts blend right in with the existing window, making them perfect for vintage windows.

In effect, inserts create an energy-efficient double-pane window. The layer of air in the middle provides insulation. Window inserts also keep noise out while they keep heat in.

For a homeowner, installation of the first window insert may take an hour or longer, but the rest should go much quicker. If you don't want to upgrade all of your windows with inserts, installing them only in your most drafty windows will still help.

Window inserts generally cost \$100 to \$300 each. This compares with \$400 to \$1,000 for a replacement double-pane window.

However, the payback period — the time it takes for savings on energy bills to cover installation costs — can be substantial for window inserts.

A 2013 U.S. Department of Energy-funded study in Seattle found that the payback period for inserts can be nine years, and sometimes much higher, which is only slightly less than the standard estimated payback period for high-quality double-pane window replacements.

Northwest companies that manufacture window inserts include Indow Windows in Portland and Blue Home Thermal Imaging in Kingston, Kitsap County.

Several retailers and contractors in the Seattle area offer Indow Windows. Blue Home, a smaller operation, does its own initial installation. Blue Home uses thermal imaging to compare heat loss from windows before and after installation of their inserts.

Insulating blinds

For another approach to keeping your home cozy, consider indoor insulating blinds, a category that includes shades.

Many insulating shades use a honeycomb design with air in the cells — the same principle as double-pane windows and window inserts. Triple-cell shades, with three layers of insulating air, are the latest and most efficient.

Some honeycomb-style shades, including those by Hunter Douglas, for example, have motorized systems to draw them up and down. They come with a remote controller, have their own app to use with mobile devices and can be linked into a home-automation system.

Quilted insulated shades are another option. You can even make your own, using detailed instructions found online.

Insulating blinds and shades must be installed properly to do their job. And while they can be attractive and effective at keeping heat in, they sometimes cost more than window inserts, including installation.

Insulating blinds obviously only work when they are closed, so they wouldn't be a good choice for windows you rely on for light or a view. Conversely, insulating blinds do an excellent job keeping light out of a room, and keeping heat out in the summer.

The new advances in insulating blinds and window inserts have been a welcome development on the energy-efficiency front. You can still pour plenty of money out the windows to help keep heat inside your home. But you can also now invest less money in your windows and get clear results.

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