

warming up

We've finally ditched our 'harden up and put on an extra jumper' attitude to heating and insulation.

When householders in Scandinavian countries arrive home during dark, icy winter months, they typically leave their warm boots, coats, hats and scarves in porches or mud rooms, stepping into dry, bright, warm interiors where light clothing is the norm, all-year-round, thanks to Government insistence that every dwelling must have adequate insulation and double glazing.

It's taken a long time for us to ditch our 'harden up and put on an extra jumper' approach here but there's been a very tangible change in attitudes among householders during the past few years as we become better acquainted with the concepts of insulation, heat maximisation and retention.

Recent results from the annual Homestar/realestate.co.nz survey of 1000 homeowners nationally prove this point, with nine out of 10 respondents rating sun orientation and insulation as important priorities at 91% and 90% respectively. That's a stunning leap from the 2012 survey when those figures were just 43% and 51%.

This dawning is due in no small part to the tireless work of EECA (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority) and a succession of Government initiatives and subsidies developed around the premise that a warm home is a healthy one and that significant improvements can easily be made, saving money and energy while enhancing conditions for inhabitants and adding to potential resale value.

With winter practically upon us the first thing to consider is whether your house is as dry as it can possibly be. A few days of wide-opened windows might be sufficient to set the scene for future warmth.

ECCA is a fan of this simple method but the authority also points out that moisture can come from insidious sources so if you think there may be a problem, now's the time to check under the floorboards and in walls, the roof cladding and flashings. If you do find a leak, get it fixed quickly.

It may be worth considering a ventilation system where warm air from the roof cavity is pumped into the house. These are generally most effective only when all other moisture issues have been addressed so they may not be a quick fix in existing homes. They can be a very good idea if you're building from scratch. Ventilation systems are not heating systems.

Next, check your insulation. Good insulation serves many purposes, including helping prevent moisture build-up. With the vast majority (between 30-40%) of heat energy lost through the ceiling, good roof-space insulation is essential and should be sitting at a level just above the rafters for a decent chance of achieving and maintaining a healthy home.

If you can install insulation underfloor and in walls, you certainly won't regret the effort or outlay. It can be tricky to retrofit into walls and you'll need consent from your local council if you're a renovator.

Check old windows for gaps and draughts, then use thermal lined drapes which go to, and even slightly beyond, floor length. The best drapes have a separate thermal lining as it's the two pieces of fabric that provide the best insulation effect. Don't be tempted by curtains that have thermal treatment applied straight onto the fabric – they won't work as well. Pull them tight as soon as dusk arrives to ensure that heat doesn't escape unnecessarily.

Heating

It's well-known now that un-flued gas heaters are a home-heating menace because they generate damp air. It's best to leave these off your list of potential heat sources and switch to a flued gas fire, a modern energy-efficient woodburner (always using dry firewood) or a heat pump.

Flued gas fires: Flued gas fires can look as good – or even better – than the real thing, without the need for cleaning chimneys, buying coal and putting out hot ashes. Old-fashioned fireplaces heat a very limited area and are therefore hopelessly inefficient. They are also outlawed now in many towns because of the pollution risk.

Modern gas fires don't come particularly cheap but can work out to be economical in the long term, especially if you have access to mains gas.

 Resene Wild Thing

top tip

Deal to any mould or mildew now using preparations such as Resene Moss & Mould Killer. If you are painting walls or ceilings before winter, ask staff at your local Resene ColorShop about MoulDefender to inhibit mould, and the Resene Kitchen & Bathroom range.

 Resene Blaze

top tip

Consider your colour scheme too. While it won't change the temperature, warm reds and oranges can make your home feel much warmer and cosier than cool whites or blues.

Heat pumps: These have grown increasingly popular. They are relatively inexpensive to run and are easily controlled with thermostats and timers.

They work by taking air from outside then pushing it inside via a sophisticated engineering system that works like a refrigerator in reverse.

It's important to choose the correct size for the area you're hoping to heat as a too-small heat pump can be a huge disappointment.

It will pay to study EECA's website (www.eeca.govt.nz) closely, then get a number of quotes before proceeding.

Modern woodburners: The reason these are tagged 'modern' is because they are designed to ensure that heat isn't lost up the chimney which is what happened with many older models.

Modern woodburners can be so efficient that energy is able to be harnessed via a wet-back system to heat your hot water, while heat transfer kits can be used to move warm air to other areas of the house. They require a permit and professional installation but that's a small price to pay for such cosy, cheering ambiance.

Heat in a flash: In small areas such as a home office or bedrooms, small electric heaters or radiators still have their place. They're inexpensive to buy and while they're hungry in terms of energy, can be effective for a localised fix. Bear in mind that they won't heat large areas and any real benefit quickly dissipates in most spaces.

Check with your local council for any insulation schemes currently running. For example, the Auckland City Council will advance a certain amount towards insulation, which can be paid back with your rates.

The Warm Up New Zealand Healthy Homes programme is available in certain cases too, offering subsidies towards ceiling and underfloor insulation for low-income dwellings where household members have a community services card or specific health issues. **H**

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