



## Energy Efficiency

Energy efficiency means using less energy to do the same job. It is the low-cost option when you're looking to reduce your power bills, and will also make your home more comfortable. Here are three easy ways to make your home energy efficient, regardless of whether you're a renter or an owner looking to build, buy or retrofit.

### Draught proofing

Canberra gets cold in winter, but our homes can feel far colder to us than they really are when they're draughty. Even in a warm room draughts can make us feel cold, and in a cold house they make life miserable. Sealing up draughts can save you up to 25% of your heating and cooling bills, and makes you far more comfortable – no more huddling under a blanket all winter! Use an incense stick or candle to determine where your draughts are coming from. You'll be able to tell by where the smoke moves. When you know where they're coming from, block the area. Here are a few of the common problem areas:

**Windows:** Windows lose and gain significant amounts of heat. Exposed glass will freeze us in winter and cook us in summer. Heavy (lined) curtains or cellular blinds are great at keeping the sun out in summer and cold draughts out in winter. Make sure the top of the curtain is blocked to stop a cold air 'chimney' cycling cold air through your home – you can use a pelmet, or even a pool noodle – anything that fills the gap between the wall and the curtain.

**Seal around skirtings and architraves:** Depending on the size of the gap and where it is, you can plug it with just about anything. Use a

caulking gun for a neater look (you can pick them up cheaply at any hardware store). Get a clear variety and the only way you'll notice it is through your power bills. If you have big gaps, you can use gap filler rod and caulk around that.

Energy efficiency addresses a number of permaculture principles, including 'catch and store energy', 'produce no waste' and 'use small and slow solutions'.

Stopping draughts and using insulation helps to prevent heat energy escaping from your home in winter. Making your home more energy efficient means wasting less electricity and gas. Many of the things you can do to make your home more energy efficient are small and/or 'do it yourself' – like putting on a jumper, making a door snake, or applying some weather stripping around your windows and doors.

**Weather stripping:** Use weather stripping around your windows and doors. This will block the gaps between them and the wall, where air leaks in. Use it on external or internal doors. Internally you can even use a good old-fashioned door snake – these are cheap to buy or easy to make. Try the ‘double’ type that slide under your door and block it on both sides, that way you won’t have to remember to kick it back into place every time you come through the door ahead.

**Vents:** There are vents all through your house – wall vents, heating vents, chimneys and extractor fans. Ensuring they’re blocked when they’re not needed will cut a lot of draughts!

Wall vents can be blocked with gap filler rod cut to size, or packed with just about anything you have. If you have a gas heater, check it has a flue before you go. Choose a gap filler rod slightly bigger than the gap you’re using it to fill. This will ensure that no sneaky drafts can get around it.

Air-conditioning and heating vents also allow draughts in – block them using cardboard in the ‘wrong’ season, or purchase fitted covers that will seal them up when they’re not in use. Consider the same treatment for ornamental fireplaces.

### Insulation

If you own your home and can insulate it, do so! Most older Canberra houses have very poor levels of insulation or none at all. Ceiling, wall and floor insulation can save you up to 45% on your heating and cooling bills. After draught-proofing (which is far cheaper), insulating your home is the single most effective thing you can do to reduce your energy use.

**Down-light covers:** down-lights generate a lot of heat, so insulation can’t be placed over the top. Gaps in insulation significantly reduce its effectiveness. Think about replacing down-lights with more efficient halogen versions, or fit a

down-light cover so that insulation can be placed over the top.

**Rugs:** Using rugs or carpet on your floors will also work as an insulating (and possibly draught stopping) layer, and can make a real difference to the comfort of your home in winter.

### Some common sense

**Windows:** The sun on glass will heat a room. This is great in winter, but not in summer. Providing shade through deciduous trees or vines will keep the sun off in summer, keeping your home cooler, and let it warm things up in winter. Awnings will do the same job. Double glazing will make a big difference, but is expensive to install. You can try a glazing film or an acrylic pane to do almost the same job much cheaper.

**Curtains:** Use some common sense with your curtains. In winter, leave them open through the day to capture the sun’s warmth and close them up in the evening to keep that warmth in. In summer, do the opposite – keep them closed during the day and open the curtains and windows in the mornings and evenings. Opening your windows also allows breezes to circulate clearing warm air from your home.

**Selective heating & cooling:** In winter heat only the rooms you’re using. Close off vents in areas that aren’t being used, and never leave your heating or cooling running when you’re out during the day. Canberra generally has cool nights in summer, so you shouldn’t need to leave cooling on all through the night. Think about using a timer in winter and summer, so you never leave heating and cooling on all night. Investing in an extra blanket will do the same thing in winter and won’t cost a thing after you buy it.

**Wear appropriate clothing:** Put on an extra jumper when it’s very cold, and wear light clothing in the heat.

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## Further information on this topic

giy – green it yourself: [www.greenityyourself.com.au](http://www.greenityyourself.com.au)

Your Home: [www.yourhome.gov.au](http://www.yourhome.gov.au)

Canberra Environment Centre: [www.ecoaction.com.au](http://www.ecoaction.com.au)

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