

SUMMER  
Home & Garden





# Staying Cool For Less

Warmer months don't have to mean higher electric bills

It's that time of the year when many people's air conditioners ramp back up to constant use. That often leads to far more expensive utility costs. Luckily, there are a number of recommendations from the U.S. Department of Energy that can help ease the pain.

## COOLER HOURS

Take advantage of the periods each day when it's not so hot. That's the best time to do chores around the house, so you don't have to turn the thermostat even further down. You also have an opportunity to capture some cool air. Turn off the AC and open your windows in the morning before everything heats up, or in the evening as night brings more comfortable conditions. Shut the windows and close their coverings in the midmorning hours and leave them closed again until the evening in order to protect your home from the sun's most powerful rays.

## THERMOSTAT ADJUSTMENTS

Turn your thermostat to the highest temperature that you find comfortable, in particular during the day when it will have to work so hard to cool off your living space. Adjust it to even higher temps when you are away, in particular for long periods of time. Upon return, place your thermostat back at



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its usual setting. Turning it down any further won't cool the space any more quickly, and it forces the unit into a constant motion that is stressful – and expensive. Consider buying a programmable thermostat which can make all of these adjustments automatically.

## AROUND THE HOME

How you use fans, baths and showers, and the oven can also have a big impact. A fan moves air around, making it cool enough that thermostats can be turned roughly four degrees higher without a

noticeable difference in comfort level. Take cooler, shorter baths and showers – and try to schedule them during the coolest part of the day. Vents and fans can also help evaporate the associated humidity more quickly. Finally, limit the use of your oven, since it

can heat up the entire house. Use a stove, toaster oven or air fryer, since they generate far less heat. Be aware of other sources of ambient heat, like clothes and hair dryers, dishwashers, curling irons and electronics. In combination, they can add up, too.

# Freshening Up Outside

Give your weather-beaten outdoor furniture a whole new look

After a few seasons, the sitting area in anyone's backyard, patio or balcony space can begin to look grimy and old — particularly if you live in a more humid environment. But there's no need to buy a whole new set of furniture. With the right preparation, the right paint, favorable weather conditions and a little elbow grease, you can get it all looking good as new.

## CLEAN SURFACE

Make sure you have a clean surface, otherwise the paint won't properly adhere to wood, metal or plastic. Wipe away all dust and dirt, as well as any rust or old paint flakes. Try to remove or smooth over any other imperfections. For wood, lightly sand before painting. Wash everything after each step. If hardware is in place, remove it and label everything for easy reattachment later.

## RIGHT TOOLS

Make sure you have the right tools before work begins. For instance, brush-on paint may require a pan and stir sticks. You may also need rollers or smaller brushes to get paint in tight spaces within the furniture. Table tops and bulkier items are more easily painted with large rollers. Invest in gloves, painters tape or mask-



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ing tape, drop cloths and protective eye wear, as needed.

## MANY CHOICES

There's a difference between paints formulated for indoors and outdoors, and plastic furniture requires its own special products in order to bond properly. Make sure you buy

the right version. Brush-on paints work best with primer, and make sure both are applied smoothly. Thinner coats go on more easier, while also drying more quickly. Two coats is usually a good rule of thumb on any painting project. There's no need for primer if you choose a spray paint

option. Keep the can the recommended distance from the furniture as you paint, working in bursts to avoid drips.

## WHERE YOU PAINT

Check paint can guidelines for temperature ranges, then pay close attention to the weather forecast. Some for-

mulations won't adhere if it's too hot or wet outside. Make sure you paint in a well-ventilated area to avoid the accumulation of potentially toxic fumes. A shady spot will give you a break from the heat while encouraging the paint to dry more evenly. Don't forget to hydrate!



# Ready to Power Wash?

Your house, hardscape, fences and vehicles could probably use a good rinse

As winter recedes, take an opportunity to wash away winter grime. Power washers are a quick and easy option, and there are rental options for those who don't want to make a huge up-front investment. Just be ready to adequately prepare the space and then safely operate the machine.

## HOW THEY WORK

Power washers are powered by either gas or electricity. The gas units usually boast more power, unleashing some 3,000 pounds of pressure per square inch. But bigger isn't always better. For instance, vinyl siding is rated for up to 3,000 but soft-grain wood, aluminum and stucco can be damaged above 1,500 pounds per square inch. Match the machine with your material before buying, renting or starting the wash.

Attachments and wands can make the job a little easier.

## SAFETY TIPS

Be sure to use the proper safety gear when power washing, including work gloves, goggles and an apron, as needed. Avoid ladders, in particular with gas-powered washers, since the force of the water can create balance



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issues. Avoid holes in siding, joints in furniture, and windows. Keep your wand well away from wires of any kind, and never point the wand at other people or animals.

## PREPARING THE AREA

Before you begin, cover things like light fixtures, electric sockets, air-conditioner units and anything else that

isn't waterproof. Fast-moving water can also be very damaging to vegetation, so remove potted plants and cover anything that's in-ground. For particularly stubborn dirt, stains or mold, consider pre-scrubbing.

## GETTING TO WORK

Add detergent and water to the washer according to directions, then attach it to a water

source. Select the preferred wand and test it against the desired surface, standing three feet back. Adjust the pressure and where you're standing as needed in order to remove dirt and grime without damaging anything.

## BUYING OR RENTING

Owning a power washer may make the most sense if you keep a boat or deal with

seasonal mold issues at home. But renting power-washing gear from local home stores is a more affordable option for those with only occasional needs. Driveways, for instance, might only need attention every other year. If you're unsure about purchasing, occasionally renting is a great way to try out a power washer to see how much you'd actually use it.



# Keeping Mosquitos Away

There are natural options instead of potentially dangerous chemicals

Some insects, like pollinators, are welcomed in any backyard or garden. But others are most certainly not — including pesky mosquitoes that seem to appear out of nowhere as temperatures rise each year. Here's how to fight back, the natural way.

## INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Disease-carrying mosquitoes are actually a huge problem globally, killing hundreds of thousands of people each year. That's more than any other animal or insect. They feed on blood from unwitting host animals, then transfer sometimes deadly pathogens as they move from bite victim to bite victim. Among the most serious diseases associated with mosquitoes are malaria, West Nile virus and dengue fever, but there are many others.

Studies show that mosquitoes are more attracted to people with Type O blood, as well as pregnant women and people who are breathing heavily. Sometimes, it's simply a matter of timing. You're most vulnerable to a bite around dusk and dawn, as mosquitoes virtually disappear during other parts of the day.

## KEEPING THEM AWAY

Sprays, candles and bracelets are popular repellents, but often rely on chemicals to do



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the job. Zappers can be loud and unsightly. That's why planting certain plants to keep mosquitoes away has become a growing trend. Marigolds and lavender, for instance, emit a smell that drives away these flying pests. Place these hardy plants in pots around your outdoor living space, and they will also produce gorgeous blooms.

Rosemary, sage and basil are typically only thought of as herbs used for in our kitchens, but they also keep mosquitoes away. Allium likewise have a strong smell that they don't like — but, unfortunately, you and your guests might not either, since this plant is part of the garlic and onion family. Citronella and bee balm are other commonly

used natural alternatives. Lemon-scented plants have also proven to be useful for many.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Sometimes using plants to make your outdoor space inhospitable to mosquitoes simply isn't enough, in particular for those who live in humid climates. If you're still

being hounded, be on the look out for standing water in nearby places. They're breeding grounds for more mosquitoes. Wear light, breathable long-sleeved clothing and cover your legs. Use overhead fans, if possible, to move the air around. Treat pools and water features to reduce the number of mosquito eggs, as well.



# Where to Store It All

Get more out of the outdoors by putting away all that stuff

Creating and maintaining usable and enjoyable living spaces outside often means accumulating all kinds of gardening supplies, pool accessories and outdoor dining tools, among other things. Keep it all tidy and tucked away with these fun and functional storage options.

## GARDENING SUPPLIES

Get more out of your shed by hanging a show rack on the door for smaller tools and other things needed around the lawn and garden, like clippers or gloves. Hooked items can be stored on one of the sidewalls by installing a traditional bathroom towel bar. Repurpose a now-unused baby's changing table or an old hutch for use as a potting bench.

Attach a pegboard to the wall of the shed or your garage to create a quick and easy organizational hub. Customize it with baskets, shelves and hooks to store away anything you need for outdoor gatherings or gardening tasks. Place a rolling basket or cart nearby to transport everything.

## POOL ACCESSORIES

Mount shelves in your garden shed for clean towels. Plastic stackable storage bins are a great option if you need to round up floaties, pool toys, diving rings and other small items. Pool noodles and



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skimmers can be tucked away in a wood pallet after it's been turned on the side. Install coat hooks on the front to dry bathing suits and towels, and to store masks and goggles. For larger pool rings, place shorter flag poles beside the shed.

## FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Convert a storage cabinet or hutch into a serving station or bar. The lower shelves or drawers can be used for storage, or remove several of them to create space for a cooler or small refrigerator. Stemware can be hung from a rack at the top.

Those who are more adept at woodworking can create more elaborate things like a hanging bar with wood pallets.

## ADDITIONAL STORAGE

Newer outdoor furniture options often have modern storage features, so be on the

lookout. Other existing items like beverage carts or raised garden planters can also be updated to help keep your space tidy and neat. A small unused bookcase can be turned into a bench by turning it on the side and adding a cushion.



# Thinking About Solar?

It's easier to get on board as this new technology becomes more affordable

People are increasingly turning to solar in order to save money and guard against outages. In fact, a system was being installed every few minutes in the U.S., according to one solar-advocacy survey. Because it's all still so new, however, you'll need to do your homework to figure out which option is right for you.

## HOME SUITABILITY

There are a number of factors to consider when deciding if your particular home is suitable for solar. Generally, homeowners need to have a recently installed new roof that faces south, and isn't subject to long periods of shade. Individual companies may have their own additional requirements, depending on the specific equipment they use.

## FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Solar arrays can be expensive, but there are a variety of purchase options. They can be financed through a loan, they can be leased or they can be sold outright. With leases and loans, monthly payments are more affordable — sometimes less than your regular electric bill — but you are required to sign a long-term contract. Power-purchase agreements allow customers to buy the electricity produced by the



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installed panels at a set price.

Purchased panels may qualify for special tax credits, while lease and power-purchase agreements do not have this option. Net metering allows homeowners to earn credit on their monthly utility bill for power the panels feed back into the larger electric grid. So shop around and compare the options with

local installers. Pay close attention to monthly and upfront costs, as well as whatever tax benefits are available.

## IS IT SAFE?

The U.S. Department of Energy recommends that homeowners hire a certified electrician to inspect the system before it goes online. But rest assured, the solar indus-

try is well regulated, and that includes protecting the safety of homeowners. The panels have to meet testing and inspection standards, and installers have to meet strict qualifications. Installed panels must meet local electrical, fire and building codes.

## NEED MORE INFO?

The U.S. Department of

Energy's Solar Energy Technologies Office has created a helpful primer called the Homeowner's Guide to Going Solar. They cover the basics of how the technology works, how to determine your house's suitability for installation, and the safety and financial considerations that are involved. Visit [bit.ly/3rIT1xk](http://bit.ly/3rIT1xk).



# When to Plant Your Garden

It's easy to get overexcited, but some seeds aren't ready to be sown

Year-round gardening has never been easier with indoor planters and greenhouses. But there's nothing like a traditional garden, which provides fresh flavors and a chance to enjoy the outdoors. Just be aware that many plants grow best when planted at a certain time of the year.

## KNOW YOUR ZONE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides information on growing zones, based on climate and regular weather patterns. You may have to wait until later in the year to plant or, in some cases, your options may be restricted. You'll also need to study the needs of the plants you're trying to grow. For instance, popular garden staples like herbs, peppers and tomatoes fare better when they grow as seedlings before being transplanted.

On the other hand, things like beans, corn, peas, carrots, radishes, cucumbers and pumpkins are best planted as seeds. Whatever you choose, pay close attention to the weather. It's tempting to jump the gun on the first sunny day, but remember soil should be warm over several days in a row before planting seedlings or seeds.

## BEST IN SPRING

Start transplanting plants



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that started indoors each April, and start seeding projects too. Germinating plants need the extra time in the ground. Beets, beans, carrots, corn, lettuce, cucumbers, melons and onions should be planted in April. Cabbage is one of the easiest things to grow; it's not too late for peppers and tomatoes, either. If all goes well

with peas, they could be ready for harvest by May.

## EARLY SUMMER

Unfortunately, a check of planting zones shows that many Americans live where April still brings freezing temperatures. That could mean waiting, or being prepared to cover your plants when wintry weather

threatens. Most of these plants will thrive in May, if the temperatures where you live mimic those from April elsewhere. Plant beans, squash, melons and cucumbers as temperatures continue to warm in May.

## HOTTEST MONTHS

Some plants simply love summer's heat, including zuc-

chini and summer squash. Plant them in June, with an expected harvest late in July or in early August. Choose bean varieties like Kentucky Wonder, Contender or Topcrop in June and they may be ready to eat before mid-July. Lettuce and carrots can be planted until very late in the summer.