

Buying a New HVAC Unit

It's cold outside, and that's not usually the time we think of needing a new air conditioner. However, winter may be prime time to look at a new unit.

You may be able to snag an off-season price on equipment during the low-demand cooler months, and with cooler weather on tap, you and your family can be more comfortable during the installation.

Keep reading for more on buying a new climate control system.

LIFESPAN

The average lifespan of an HVAC unit is about 15-20 years, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. They're also energy hogs. The average air conditioned home uses more than 2,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year to keep cool.

Today's air conditioners are more energy efficient than ones made just 10 years ago. A new, more efficient unit may save 20% to 40% of cooling energy costs.

EFFICIENCY

An HVAC unit's SEER rating



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is the cooling output during a typical season divided by the total electric input during the same period. The higher the SEER rating, the more energy efficient the unit. In addition to a high SEER rating, look for the Energy Department's ENERGY STAR rating.

Qualified units can be 15% more efficient than standard models, a savings of about \$115 per year.

While you have a professional out to evaluate your new HVAC, have them look for air leaks in your house and duct system. Even the most

efficient systems can still have heat and cooling loss if there are leaks where cool air can escape.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Some other features the Energy Department recommends you look for when buy-

ing a new HVAC include:

- A thermal expansion valve and a SEER greater than 11.6.
- A variable-speed air handler for new ventilation systems.
- A quiet unit.
- A fan-only switch for nighttime ventilation to reduce costs.
- A filter check light to remind you to check the filter.
- An automatic-delay fan switch to turn off the fan a few minutes after the compressor turns off.
- A programmable thermostat to help you use less energy when you're not home.

INSTALLATION TIPS

Be sure that your contractor:

- Allows adequate space for the installation, maintenance and repair of the system with an access door in the furnace or duct to access the evaporator coil for cleaning.
- Ensures there are enough registers to supply cool air and enough return registers to carry warm house air back to the air conditioner.
- Seals all duct work with duct mastic and insulates the attic ducts.
- Locates the condensing unit where no objects will block airflow and where the noise will not bother your or your neighbors.
- Locates the thermostat away from heat sources.



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REAL ESTATE 101



Buyers Tip

Your HVAC is a huge component of your new home. Make sure you get a qualified home inspection, and, if needed, an inspection by a separate HVAC contractor. Look for regular maintenance on the unit, like an annual service plan. Note the age of inside and outside units and ask for proof of any repairs. If the unit is older, consider asking for a home warranty to cover the cost of a possible replacement.

HOMEWISE GLOSSARY

Investment property: a property not occupied by the owner as their primary residence but instead used to produce income, depreciation for tax benefits or future gains by appreciation.
SOURCE: Homeclosing101.org

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