

NEBRASKA

Magazine

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December 2021



Inside:

- Home Infrastructure Upgrades • What to Look For When Shopping For a New Washing Machine
- Five Cool Uses to Power Your Yuletide

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- Dual braking system featuring manual locks and handbrakes
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Cover photograph by Bob Rooney, Sandhills Images



Wayne Price

Make a Positive Impact

Volunteering May Provide Purpose to Your Life

With the holiday season upon us and the New Year just around the corner, I want to talk about the importance of supporting our communities. The past couple years have been a challenge. I am encouraged by the ways we have all pulled together and supported each other. But there is more that can be done.

Because we are public power, volunteerism and giving back are a part of who we are. Line workers are volunteer firefighters and first responders, putting their lives at risk to help others. Many employees coach youth sports, assist in school productions or serve on local boards.

Dawson Public Power District has a Holiday Charity Drive each year, giving around 30 gifts to different groups in need. Polk County Rural Public Power District sponsors an American Red Cross Blood Drive each November. The event requires help from linemen to load and unload supplies, while office personnel schedule donor appointments. KBR Rural Public Power District participates in Trick or Treat Street for Halloween and hangs Christmas lights in towns in their territory.

Volunteering is the gift that keeps on giving. While it's difficult to quantify the impact that volunteers have, I do know they make a tremendous difference in our state and make our corner of the world a better place. Many organizations depend on volunteers to fulfill their mission. Volunteers fill in gaps and spread joy and compassion through their efforts. Even assisting with the smallest tasks can make a big impact in the lives of people, animals or an organization in need. Often a big commitment or special skills are not needed, just someone who cares.

I hope you'll consider volunteering. Give an organization or cause that you care about the gift of your compassion, time and talent. In addition to the organization and the community benefitting from your efforts, you will receive a gift as well. Not only will you enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you are helping a good cause, you will likely make new friends, expand your social network, strengthen existing skills or learn a new one.

At the end of the day, the gift of volunteerism is a gift that will continue giving all year long. So, this holiday season, consider starting a new tradition and give the gift of time.

Bad to the Bone

Full tang stainless steel blade with natural bone handle —now **ONLY \$79!**

The very best hunting knives possess a perfect balance of form and function. They're carefully constructed from fine materials, but also have that little something extra to connect the owner with nature.

If you're on the hunt for a knife that combines impeccable craftsmanship with a sense of wonder, the **\$79 Huntsman Blade** is the trophy you're looking for.

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The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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— J., La Crescent, MN



"The feel of this knife is unbelievable...this is an incredibly fine instrument."

— H., Arvada, CO



Home Infrastructure Upgrades

In response to the combination of pandemic-induced stay-at-home requirements and expanded remote working options, many of us are not only spending more time at home, we're also considering a home office upgrade, a new music or entertainment room or enhancing an outdoor space. Mischa Fisher, chief economist for HomeAdvisor, says the growth in home improvement in 2020 was huge: "We nicknamed it the year of the home."

"In past years there was a significant focus on return on investment," Fisher says. "People do a project because they're planning on selling their house." 2020 was different because 41% of people said they planned upgrades specifically to make their homes better suit their lifestyle needs.

No matter what project is on tap, it's essential to start with basic improvements that ensure your energy needs are met safely and efficiently. HomeAdvisor, a digital marketplace that aims to connect clients with prescreened local service professionals, found home maintenance budgets doubled in 2020 compared to previous years. Simple updates to infrastructure can make every home kinder to the environment and safer, with the added benefit of trimming fat from electric bills.

The EnergyStar Is Your Friend

Peter Pfeiffer, president of Barley|Pfeiffer Architecture in Austin, Texas, was an early advocate for the EnergyStar program, which encourages energy-efficient appliance purchases. The program's original Austin proponents included architects, utility planners, builders and engineers who shared the goal of promoting more efficient appliances and incorporating better building standards to conserve energy.

"We went around to the appliance showrooms and gave a little blue star on the more energy efficient ones so that the homeowner could see, 'ah, this is an energy-efficient one,'" Pfeiffer says. The effort gained national



attention as a successful municipal conservation program.

Green Building With Simple Improvements

Simple improvements based on a home's current condition can go a long way toward improving energy efficiency, often more so than investing in newer technology such as solar panels and tankless water heaters, Pfeiffer says. He recommends that homeowners plan their improvements based on increasing overall energy efficiency, beginning with modest repairs. The next step involves pricier improvements like replacing windows and upgrading to more efficient appliances. The most advanced improvements center on renewable energy generation and storage—solar panel installation



Replacing regular window screens with solar screens can keep your home 10–15 degrees cooler in the summer by blocking the sun's rays that can heat the inside of your home.

and other devices.

Pfeiffer suggests homeowners start by eliminating energy-wasting gaps in the home's structure and shading windows and walls.

An Energy Audit

To find your home's trouble spots, engage a professional for a home energy audit. Your electric co-op offers advice on audits, which include a review of your electric bills and a thorough examination of your home. Auditors will inspect the quality of insulation, test for electrical hazards, make a thermographic inspection with infrared scanning, and conduct a blower test that measures the quality of air sealing around ducts, doors and windows.

The auditor then prepares a report detailing their findings and recommendations. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average home has enough air leakage to add up to a 2-square-foot hole that remains open 24 hours a day. Fortunately, simple remedies can save up to 30% on utility bills. With your co-op's guidance, an energy audit will help you prioritize fixes for tightening your home and using shade to your advantage.

Keep Outside Air Outside

Managing the infiltration of outside air can affect homes year-round. Common recommendations are to update the weatherstripping and caulk around doors and windows, clean filters and vents, and seal leaks in your ducts. Pfeiffer points out that leaky ducts are more wasteful than an inefficient air conditioner. It's more important to make sure you have an airtight heating, ventilating and air conditioning system before upgrading to a new air-handling system.

Prevent Radiant Heat

Radiant heat is absorbed from sunlight and can be transmitted through roofs and windows into the home. Pfeiffer advises using roof overhangs, awnings or planting trees and landscaping to shade west-facing windows, to prevent the sun's rays from hitting the windows directly. Thermal drapes and window coverings can also deflect heat from sunny rooms. Radiant barriers in an attic can prevent heat from the roof from transferring to the attic floor and warming the rest of the house in the summer, saving money on cooling bills.

Add Insulation

Adding insulation to a home's attic, basement, walls or crawl spaces will improve energy efficiency. Pfeiffer

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says that optimal roofing materials combined with shade will prevent radiant heat from leaking into the home in the first place. Sealing basements and crawl spaces and wrapping your hot water heater in a thermal blanket also improve energy efficiency.

Safety First

Rewiring your lights and adding new electrical systems to your home are complex and hazardous tasks that are best left in the hands of a licensed electrician.

Replacing old electrical outlets with ground-fault circuit interrupter outlets, while not a cost-saving improvement, is a necessary safety upgrade for outlets around water. GFCIs protect against shocks by breaking the flow of electrical current if they detect a fault. They are required in new construction, but the Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates 40 million homes do not have these lifesaving outlets in all “wet” rooms.

In addition, consider having an arc-fault circuit interrupter breaker professionally installed. AFCIs protect against fire-causing arcing that is commonly caused by damaged or worn wiring.

Once you’ve invested some time and a little money into making basic improvements, Pfeiffer advises implementing additional energy-saving measures. Replacing older appliances and windows with EnergyStar-rated and e-coated products will save energy over the lifetime of your home. Solar panels can help you create your own power, but unless you address your energy demands, they won’t have as big of an impact.

“Before you go to the sexy things like solar on the roof, things that you can talk about at a cocktail party, let’s reduce the demand of energy first,” Pfeiffer says.

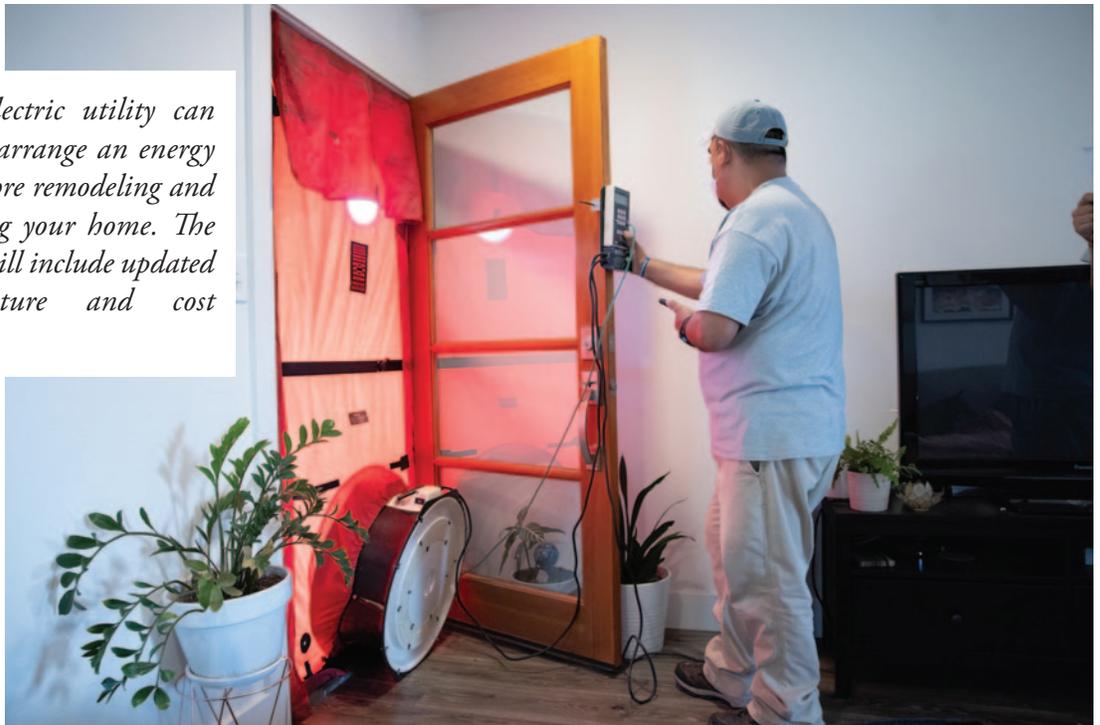
Upgrade Lighting

Efficient lighting and lighter colors are key considerations when adding a home office or hobby space.

Replace lightbulbs with energy-efficient CFLs or LEDs to decrease energy consumption. An EnergyStar qualified CFL uses about one-fourth the energy and lasts 10 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs, and EnergyStar-qualified LEDs last 15 to 25 times longer. Light fixtures should hang close to the work- or hobby space without getting in the way.

“The color of the horizontal reflecting surfaces in the room makes a big difference in how much energy you use,” Pfeiffer says. “You need about three times as much lighting if you’ve got dark countertops compared to light-colored countertops.”

Your electric utility can help you arrange an energy audit before remodeling and renovating your home. The benefits will include updated infrastructure and cost savings.



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What To Look For When Shopping For a New Washing Machine

by Cory Fuehrer

Not all clothes washers are created alike. However, all will eventually face a catastrophic failure when used on a regular basis. If the warranty has long expired or the frequency of repairs is increasing, it may be time to go appliance shopping.

Statistics show the average American family washes about 300 loads of laundry each year, and though Consumer Reports® notes 10 years as being the average length of life, clothes washers should last anywhere from nine to 14 years. When replacement time comes, many shoppers start by focusing on purchase price. This causes some to shy away from high-efficiency machines in favor of conventional models. In doing so, they fail to recognize the savings a high-efficiency washer can bring after the initial investment.

First, these washers reduce utility costs through energy and water savings. When shopping, they are easily identified by looking for the EnergyStar logo. To earn the EnergyStar rating, products must meet strict energy efficiency criteria set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the U.S. Department of Energy. Available in either front-load or redesigned top-load styles, EnergyStar clothes washers use improved technology to cut energy consumption by 25% and water consumption by 33% compared to conventional washers.

These savings are achieved through use of sensors that reduce the amount of water used to only the amount needed. During the rinse cycle, clothes are repeatedly sprayed instead of soaked in a full tub of water. In the final spin cycle, high-efficiency washers spin clothes two to three times faster to extract more water. Less moisture in the clothes means less energy used by the dryer.

Then consider wardrobe savings by extending clothing life. Instead of twisting and pulling clothes around a turning agitator, high-efficiency washers use sophisticated wash systems to gently flip and spin clothes. This lengthens the life of often-washed items.



If your appliances need an upgrade, many new models feature high-tech energy efficiency settings that make the upfront cost worth the investment. But remember—to see savings on your electric bill, you have to use the energy-saving settings.

Because they are so gentle, many models can safely clean silk, wool and other hand-washables.

Next consider detergent costs. While a container of high-efficiency detergent will often cost more than standard detergent, less is needed per load and re-washing clothes is often avoided. Note that regular detergents should not be used in a high-efficiency washer as they produce too many suds in lower water levels. High-efficiency detergents are easily identified by a small “HE” sticker on the product’s label.

Then there are time savings. Load capacities of high-efficiency washers are generally larger than with a



Photograph courtesy of GE.

traditional washer, partially because they do not contain an agitator that takes up space. This translates to fewer loads. And, remember – although a high-efficiency washer takes slightly longer to complete a load, the high-speed spin cycles remove more water, resulting in significantly shorter drying times – which, again, extend clothing life.

Finally, it is important to realize the useful life of a high-efficiency washer can be extended if installed on a flat surface, not overloaded, and when always using the correct detergent.

Time For an Upgrade

You’ve had your fridge forever. With the exception of some crumbling parts of the seal, it’s in pretty good shape and keeps your food cold. Why worry about budgeting for an upgrade?

For starters, inefficient appliances have a huge impact on your home’s monthly electric bill. Replacing a refrigerator made before 1993 with a new, EnergyStar-rated model could knock \$65 to \$100 off your power costs each year.

When evaluating older appliances, one key question emerges: Which is the biggest user? To estimate the energy consumption of an appliance, use this general formula provided by the U.S. Department of Energy’s EnergySavers.gov:

$$(\text{Wattage} \times \text{Hours used per day} \times \text{Days used per year}) \div 1,000 =$$

Annual kilowatt-hour (kWh) used

Remember: 1,000 watts = 1 kilowatt (kW).

Then calculate the annual cost to use an appliance by multiplying the kWh per year by the national average rate per kWh or use your local utility rate.

For example, a PC and monitor:

$$\begin{aligned} & [(120 \text{ Watts} + 150 \text{ Watts}) \times 4 \text{ hours per day} \times 365 \text{ days per year}] \div 1000 \\ & = 394 \text{ kWh} \times 11 \text{ cents/kWh} \\ & = \$43.34/\text{year} \end{aligned}$$

You can usually find the wattage of most appliances stamped on the bottom or back of the appliance or on its nameplate. The wattage listed shows the maximum power drawn by the appliance. Because some appliances have a range of settings—just like the volume on a radio—the actual amount of power consumed depends on the setting used at any one time.



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YOUR HOME, ELECTRIFIED

HEATING & COOLING WITH HEAT PUMPS

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, when paired with proper insulation, an electric heat pump can save over 30 percent on your heating and cooling bills compared to conventional HVAC systems. Here are some advantages of a heat pump:

- One system to heat your home (even in sub-zero temperatures) and cool during warmer months
- Eliminate potential carbon monoxide exposure from combustion byproducts
- Costs substantially less to heat your home than propane or electric baseboard heat

POWER UP YOUR GARDENING TOOLS

Electric garden tools can last longer and are emissions-free, meaning you'll smell the scents of summer, not the smell of exhaust. Plus, with modern technology, they are just as effective as gas-powered alternatives. Just charge the battery and go!

- Low maintenance – no oil changes or need to treat fuel, change spark plugs or filters.
- No need to purchase and store gasoline
- Electric models are lightweight and easy to handle

SAVE WITH AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV)

Sales of light-duty electric vehicles rose by 43% in 2020. On average, EVs have a lower cost of operation over their lifespan, and buyers are taking notice.

- Less maintenance
- Increased savings compared to gasoline
- Fun to drive because of torque

REBATES FOR YOUR HOME

Contact your local electric co-op or public power district to find out more on available rebates and incentives

Winter wonderlands are beautiful, but they can be a driving nightmare. Snow, slush, ice, and wind make it stressful and difficult to drive. These driving conditions also make it more likely that your car will skid off the road. Losing control of your car may seem like the worst-case scenario, but if you do not know what you are doing, the moments following an accident could potentially be more dangerous than the accident itself.

In an accident, a car may slide off the road and into a power pole. The pole may fall down, lines may fall on your car or nearby, and the area around your car may become charged with electric energy. If you stepped out of the car in this scenario, your body would become the path to ground for the electricity, and you could be electrocuted.

While downed lines can sometimes show they are live by arcing and sparking with electricity, this is not always the case. Power lines do not always show signs that they are live but are just as lethal.

Stay in the car after an accident with a power pole. Warn those who try to come near your car to help that they must stay far away. Call 911 for help, and wait until a professional from the electric utility tells you it is safe to leave the car.

The exception to this rule is if your car is on fire. In that case, jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and the ground at the same time. Then hop away with



Be aware of the various weather advisories that are issued during winter, such as frost and freeze warnings, ice storm and heavy snow warnings, as well as winter storm watches and warnings. Know what they mean to ensure your family is prepared for the weather.

feet together. This way there will not be a voltage difference between your two feet, which would give electricity the chance to flow through your body.

If you witness a car collision with a power pole, do not approach the accident. By trying to help, you will put your own life at risk. The best thing to do is contact emergency responders and stay far away from the accident.

Power lines may be difficult to see if they are covered in snow or ice, so be cautious if you must be out driving after a winter storm.

Murphy's **WONDERFUL LIFE**



What Can a Smart Home Do For You?

Smart technology makes running a home easy and convenient, but that's not all. Check out these five smart home gadgets that can also save money. With so many ways to save, it's easy to see why investing in smart home technology is a wise move. Check out these clever gizmos that can save you money and make your life easier.

ENERGY MONITORS

Energy monitors provide real-time feedback on home energy use. They can even analyze trends and make recommendations for future savings. Energy monitors offer the technology for understanding your electricity usage, but they give the most value when you take action as a result of the information they provide.

Smart LEDs

Smart LED bulbs can be controlled through apps, smart speakers and switches. Some can even play music. You can save a lot in energy usage, particularly when you use LED lights with dimmers. Sometimes you just don't need full brightness from a light bulb, and the dimmer can cut down on energy usage to reduce your electricity bill.

Smart Thermostats

Smart thermostats heat and cool a home on a personalized schedule. Save more by controlling temperatures remotely from an app on a mobile device. Many smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and automatically adjust to energy-saving temperatures when you are asleep or away. Geofencing allows your smart thermostat to know when you're on the way home and automatically adjusts your home's temperature to your liking.

ADVANCED POWER STRIPS

According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, wasted standby power adds up to approximately \$200 a year for the average home. Advanced power strips shut down devices that are in standby mode. They can also make homes safer by turning off fire hazards, like irons and space heaters in case they are forgotten.

Smart Safety Detectors

Carbon monoxide, fire and flood detectors help monitor potential dangers. One advantage of a smart detector is that it connects to your smartphone. If it ever detects smoke or carbon monoxide, you'll receive a notification, even when you're away so you can call the fire department. Insurance companies often offer policy discounts for homes with these systems.



Five cool uses to power your yuletide

by Paul Wesslund

At the end of the year, thoughts of gifts dance in our heads, whether for others or just treating ourselves to the achievement of being able to turn the page on 2021.

Electricity offers one way to brighten the choices as inventors and innovators keep coming up with new gadgets and gizmos to power our lives with efficiency and fun. Here are five electric ideas to add pizzazz to your holiday shopping list.

Hit the road

“Electric vehicles” doesn’t mean just cars and trucks anymore. The sidewalks of college campuses and

downtowns are now shared with electric scooters. And if you’re having trouble keeping up with a bicycle-fanatic, an electric bike might help you scale those steep hills. You can go off-road with an electric All-Terrain Vehicle. If that doesn’t sound like it fits the idea of zooming through the woods, consider that electrics are a lot quieter, whether you’re out for hunting or bird watching. Wear a helmet and drive carefully—ATV



Electric scooters are relatively easy to use, inexpensive and some versions are even foldable, making it compact and easy to carry and store. Photograph courtesy of Boosted

safety applies to both gas and electric motors. And if you were born to be wild, you can head out on the highway on a battery-powered motorcycle—an electric Harley boasts instant 100% torque, electronic safety features and the ability to use your smartphone for checking battery status and stolen-vehicle tracking.

Walk the talk

Walkie-talkies are one of those old technologies for staying in touch that still work great for businesses, conference coordination, or hiking and camping. They can help keep a caravan of cars and trailers together. Let the kids figure out games like hide-and-seek or scavenger hunts. There are even walkie-talkies in the shape of cartoon-character heads, and they can be as inexpensive as \$50 for a set of four. Shop carefully and know what you’ll use them for—the range

Healthy French fries?

Electric air fryers have been around since 2010, but their popularity started taking off about five years ago. As health-consciousness increased, people liked the idea of these cookers that could prepare traditional fried favorites with much less oil. Sales bumped up even more as the pandemic kept people at home and paying more attention to their cooking. Air fryers aren’t really fryers but high-heat convection devices that simulate traditional recipes like chicken tenders, egg rolls, potato chips, fried vegetables and apple fritters. A friend of mine calls his electric air fryer “the greatest invention of all time.”



Air fryers aren’t really fryers but high-heat convection devices that simulate traditional recipes like chicken tenders, egg rolls, potato chips, fried vegetables and apple fritters. Photograph by Hamilton Beach



Tablets come in a variety of screen sizes that make it easier to enjoy that magazine, detective novel, streaming movie or TV show or your computer game of choice.

can vary from a half mile to 20 miles depending on the type of model, and whether they'll be used indoors or outdoors.

Easy reader

If being bent over a computer keyboard seems too much like work and you're tired of squinting at the little screen on your phone, take a look at tablets. They come in a variety of screen sizes that make it easier to enjoy that magazine, detective novel, streaming movie or TV show or your computer game of choice. Most models come with the ability for you to write or draw on them.

Packing power

A portable charger may be one of the least-exciting gifts you can give or get, but you'll change that thinking

when your phone's about to die as you hike over a hill and see a sunset vista to photograph, or you're at a concert and they play that song you wanted to record. A word of advice—charge it up the day before; the smallest ones for your purse or pocket tend not to hold a charge for the several weeks they sit in a drawer waiting for the next event.

Shop carefully and know how you want to use the device—they all come with a variety of features and prices. And be cyber-safe: anything connected to the internet can be hacked, so set a strong password. Then focus on having a blast.

Energy Sense

by Pat Keegan and
Brad Thiessen

Looking For Home Energy Savings?

Q : Our energy bills seem higher than they should be, but I'm not sure where to start looking around my home for opportunities to save energy. Do you have any suggestions?

A : That's a great question. There are many products and services that claim to provide maximum energy efficiency, so it can be challenging to know where to start. Fortunately, our monthly bills can help identify areas for the most energy savings.

For the vast majority of homes, the months that require the most energy use are in the winter and summer when temperatures are most extreme. Just total up your average energy use for the months when you use the most energy, then subtract the average amount you use during "shoulder months," when you're barely using your heating or cooling system, typically during fall and spring.

The most likely reason for the difference in energy use is heating and cooling your home. If someone says switching to a new heating or cooling system could save you 20%, they likely mean you can save 20% on heating or cooling costs, which are a portion of your overall energy costs.

Every home is different. For example, there's a small percentage of homes that include uncommon energy uses like a well pump, swimming pool or a home business that requires more energy than heating or cooling. But typically, heating and cooling your home are by far the largest energy uses.

Sealing air leaks is often the least expensive energy-saving measure that delivers the most bang for your buck. The second most cost-effective way to cut heating and cooling costs depends on your situation.

If you have an older propane or oil furnace, replacing it

with an energy efficient heat pump might be your best investment. If you already have a relatively efficient furnace or air conditioning unit, insulating your attic could be the next most cost-effective measure, followed by insulating exterior walls or the crawl space or basement.

Replacing windows is a high-priority project for many homeowners, and new windows can certainly add value to your home. However, this can be a costly project, making it difficult to justify solely based on potential energy savings. If your windows are old and leaky, it

could be worth the investment. Do your research upfront so you fully understand the costs of the project.

After you've found ways to reduce your heating and cooling costs, where else should you look for energy savings? Your next largest energy use is likely water heating. A few low-cost measures like repairing leaky faucets and insulating the first 6 to 10 feet of hot water line could deliver significant savings. Installing energy efficient showerheads can save water and reduce energy use. Check out

Consumer Reports for reliable comparisons and reviews of energy efficient showerheads.

If your water heater is more than 10 years old, it's likely time to consider how and when to replace it. You can purchase a traditional water heater that uses the same fuel you're using now. But there are several other options, including heat pump water heaters, tankless water heaters and even solar water heaters. Be sure to do some research before your water heater breaks so you know about your options.

Appliances and lighting account for a smaller portion of your energy use. As you replace older appliances and lighting, look for options that include the EnergyStar sticker. You should also review energy use information found on the EnergyGuide label.



Loose-fill insulation is the most common and preferred method of insulating your attic floor. Notice the baffles near the attic perimeter that allow air to ventilate from the eaves into the attic space. Photograph by Owens-Corning

Be Safe at Home Around the Holidays

By Larry Oetken



The most wonderful time of the year can also be the most stressful—particularly when it comes to keeping your kids safe through parties, presents, travel, and meals. Follow these tips from the Electrical Safety Foundation

International (ESFI) to protect your little ones this holiday season.

- Keep candles, matches, and lighters out of reach, and never leave children unsupervised when candles are lit. Instead of traditional candles, try using battery-operated candles.
- Cover any unused outlets on extension cords with

plastic caps or electrical tape to prevent children from coming in contact with a live circuit.

- Place electrical cords out of the reach of small children.
- Never allow children to play with lights, electrical decorations, or cords.

Ranges and ovens are often involved in thermal burn injuries. Many of the victims are younger than five. Keep little kitchen helpers in check:

- Never leave the kitchen when something's cooking—a fire or accident can happen in an instant.
- Keep children at least three feet away from all cooking appliances.
- Never hold a child while cooking or when removing hot food from the microwave, oven, or stove.
- Turn pot handles in, away from reaching hands.

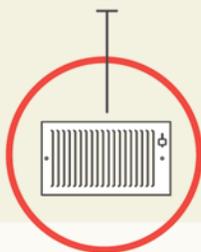
Larry Oetken is the Job Training & Safety Coordinator for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.

Holiday Tree Safety Tips

Ensure a merry and bright holiday season by safely maintaining your tree with the following tips.

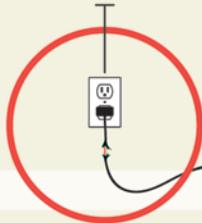
Keep away from heat:

Make sure your tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like an air duct, fireplace or space heater.



Examine cords:

Examine extension cords and lights for signs of damage. Frayed electric cords should be discarded.



Keep it watered:

Fill the water reservoir daily and check the condition of the trunk bark and branches for moisture. Shedding or dry needles could mean the tree is drying out, increasing overall fire risks.



Inspect lights:

Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before you use them. Cracked or damaged sockets and/or loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.

Trim the stump:

Trim the tree's stump by at least two inches on freshly cut trees. Allow it to absorb water for 24 hours before bringing it inside.

Source: National Fire Protection Association

Festive and Flavorful Holiday Snacks

The holidays are filled with delicious food – from indulgent breakfasts to decadent desserts – but snacks can get overlooked. Spice up this holiday season with festive snacks that are perfect for a quick on-the-go bite or a taste of your favorite holiday dessert.

Although beloved in pie, pecans are a versatile nut that can be used beyond the pie shell – add them to a snack mix, incorporate them into granola or munch on them straight from the bag. Delicious and nutritious, 1 ounce of pecans offers 3 grams of plant-based protein and 3 grams of fiber, plus 12 grams of “good” monounsaturated fats and only 2 grams of saturated fat – perfect to power you through long days of holiday shopping.

This holiday season, nosh on a handful of these spiced Gingerbread Pecans for a sweet and savory snack while decorating the house or wrapping presents late at night, or set out a bowl for the family to enjoy.

You can also make snack-sized versions of your favorite holiday desserts to have on-hand when you’re craving a quick and tasty treat. Pecan halves provide a festive touch to these Reindeer Pecan Brownies.

Discover more nutritious, delicious and festive recipes at AmericanPecan.com.



Reindeer Pecan Brownies

- Nonstick cooking spray**
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, melted**
- 1 tablespoon pecan or canola oil**
- 1 cup, plus 2 tablespoons, granulated sugar**
- 2 large eggs**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour**
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder**
- 1 teaspoon espresso powder (optional)**
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt**
- 20 raw pecan halves, cut in half**
- 40 candy eyeballs**
- 20 red chocolate candies**
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips**

Preheat oven to 350 F. Spray mini muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray. In large bowl, whisk melted butter, oil

and sugar until well combined. Add eggs and vanilla extract; beat until mixture is thick and pale in color, about 1 minute.

Sift in flour and cocoa powder. Add espresso powder, if desired, and salt. Using rubber spatula, fold dry ingredients into butter mixture until just combined. Batter should be thick.

Using 1-tablespoon cookie scoop, transfer batter to prepared mini muffin tin. Bake 13-15 minutes until toothpick inserted in center comes out mostly clean, with some lingering crumbs.

Add chocolate chips to heat-proof bowl; microwave until smooth and melted. Pour melted chocolate into sandwich bag and cut off small portion of one corner to use as tip. Use melted chocolate to “glue” on pecan antlers, candy eyeballs and red candy noses to brownies.

Allow chocolate to set before transferring brownies to airtight container.



Gingerbread Pecans

- 1 large egg white, beaten**
- 2 cups raw pecan halves**
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- 2 tablespoons light brown sugar**
- 2 teaspoons gingerbread spice blend**
- 1 pinch salt**

Preheat oven to 300 F. Line baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside.

In large bowl, use fork to whisk beaten egg until frothy. Add pecans and stir until coated. Sprinkle pecans with granulated sugar, brown sugar, gingerbread spice and salt. Stir to coat evenly. Spread pecans in even layer on prepared baking sheet.

Bake pecans 40 minutes, stirring halfway through. Allow pecans to cool completely.

Note: Pecans can be stored in airtight container for up to four days.

Santa Whisker Cookies

- 1 cup soft butter**
- 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar**
- 1 12 oz jar maraschino cherries**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla**
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract**
- 1 3/4 cups flour**
- 2 cups shredded coconut**

Cream together butter and powdered sugar. Fold in cherries, vanilla, almond extract, salt, and flour. Spread coconut on parchment paper. Place cookie dough on top of coconut and press down with fingers and spread remaining coconut on top. Roll up to form a log. Cut and bake in 350-degree oven until golden brown.

Maureen Wesseln, Norfolk, Nebraska

Simple Crockpot Clusters

- 2 16 oz pkg salted peanuts**
- 1 12 oz pkg semi-sweet chocolate chips**
- 1 12 oz pkg milk chocolate chips**
- 1 12 oz pkg peanut butter chips**
- 1 20 oz pkg white almond bark (broke into squares)**

Layer all ingredients in crockpot. I use a crockpot liner to save on cleanup. Cook on low for 1 hour. Stir every 15 minutes to ensure chocolate doesn't burn. Once melted stir thoroughly. Use spoon or cookie scoop (medium size) and place clusters on cookie sheet lined with wax paper. Once cookie sheet is full place in fridge for 2 hours to chill. To help with chilling process, put cookie sheet in freezer for 10 to 15 minutes before putting clusters on sheet. Store in Ziplock bag or container.

Darlus McWilliams, Norfolk, Nebraska

Snickerdoodle Bread

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 1/2 cups flour 2 teaspoons baking powder 1/2 teaspoon salt 2 teaspoons cinnamon 1 cup softened butter 2 cups sugar 3 eggs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3/4 cup sour cream 1 teaspoon vanilla 1 pkg Hershey cinnamon chips 3 tablespoons sugar 3 teaspoons cinnamon |
|--|--|

In bowl, mix butter, sugar, salt, and cinnamon until creamy and fluffy. Mix in eggs, vanilla, and sour cream. Stir in flour and baking powder. Fold in cinnamon chips. Grease 6 mini loaf pans and fill two-thirds full. Mix 3 tablespoons sugar and 3 teaspoons cinnamon and sprinkle over top of loaves. Bake in 350-degree oven for 35 – 38 minutes.

Beverly Wright, Oakdale, Nebraska

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GENERATOR SAFETY

USE BACKUP POWER SAFELY

When used properly, portable and standby generators are a great option to provide backup power during brownouts or blackouts.

Learn how to use generators safely with the following tips:

GENERATORS

Location



Always keep generators at least **20 feet away** from your home



Never operate a generator in an **enclosed space**



Make sure the generator has **3-4 feet** of clear space above and on all sides for proper ventilation



Keep generators **away** from doors, windows, and vents



Always **direct exhaust away** from your home

Use



Always use **grounded cords** and inspect cords for damage prior to use



Use the **proper cord** for the wattage being used



Always use **GFCI protection**



Make sure to start / stop generators when **no electrical loads** are connected



Keep generators **dry, do not operate when wet**, and refuel when cool

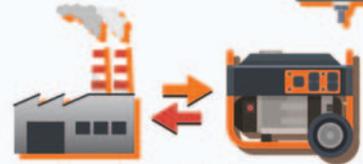


Do not overload generators



Do not plug a generator directly into your home, connect items being powered **directly to the generator**

TRANSFER SWITCHES



Transfer switches, whether manual or automatic, allow you to choose between **utility power** or **backup generator power**



Transfer switches are the only way to **safely power** your home's electrical system



Using a transfer switch **prevents backfeeding**. This occurs when your generator becomes a power source for the **surrounding area** and can damage your home, your neighbor's homes, and injure workers trying to restore power

CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING PREVENTION



Improper use and installation of generators could **cause CO poisoning**



Make sure your home has **carbon monoxide alarms** outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home



CO can kill in as little as **5 minutes**

Symptoms of CO poisoning



Dizziness



Headaches



Nausea



Tiredness



If you experience CO poisoning symptoms, **get fresh air, do not reenter areas, and call 911.**

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