

# You Are Reading . . . *The Independent & Free Press* Real Estate Digest

## Add windows and skylights to help 'lighten' your mood

This year, consider improvements that will benefit your family year-round, especially when the darkness of winter inevitably returns. Adding more windows, skylights or a solarium will brighten up your home when you need it the most.

When winter sets in, many people begin to experience mood changes similar to symptoms of depression. For some, weight gain, lack of energy, tendency to oversleep and irritability all begin to manifest shortly after setting

the clocks back to standard time.

This condition, Seasonal Affective Disorder, can be treated with light therapy, which researchers say can help brighten moods and give back vitality during the long months of winter.

Of the millions of adults and children across North America who develop SAD each year, the majority exhibit relatively mild symptoms that can be treated by simply adding a little more light to their environments, according to national health experts.

For mild sufferers, installing a window or skylight to open up a dark room can be an excellent way to combat SAD. Skylights can flood a room with up to five times more light than a traditional wall window, while specialty windows can capture the optimum light for the room's design. Researchers also have found it is not the kind of light that is effective, but the intensity of the light.

The recommended treatment for mild symptoms of SAD consists of daily interaction of light with the eyes at levels ranging from 2,500 lux (a measure of brightness) to 10,000 lux. The maximum recommended exposure is 10,000 lux, which is about the same brightness as a cloudy midday in the Yukon, according to a SAD support group.

In other words, just being near a window during daylight while reading or working can improve the way some people feel in winter. And, because the entire retina responds it isn't necessary to stare at the light— simply face it so light falls on the retina, the support group says. Light helps regulate brain chemicals by controlling the levels of serotonin and melatonin the brain produces. Inadequate production of these chemicals can lead to depression.

### Don't sacrifice light for warmth

The introduction of more windows into your home doesn't necessarily mean you'll feel better emotionally but shiver all winter.

"You can brighten up your home and beautify it, while staying warm and energy efficient," said Kevin Zuege, director of technical services for TruSeal Technologies Inc., manufacturer of Swiggle(R) Seal insulating glass window sealant.

Look for windows constructed with a low U-Value, which measures heat transfer, Zuege advises. A U-Value of .40 is excellent, while .80 or higher means poor thermal performance.

One of the most important components of any window is its edge spacer, which all dual and triple-pane windows have to reduce heat loss around the window's edges. "It is important to note that the edge spacer material can mean the difference between a cold window edge and one that is well insulated," he says.

Some window manufacturers use aluminum spacers filled with desiccant, a moisture-absorbing material that helps prevent condensation between the panes.

However, because metal conducts heat, aluminum spacers lower the insulating ability of the window. As a result, warm-edge spacers are gaining popularity, prompting many manufacturers to abandon aluminum spacers.

Swiggle Seal, the most widely used warm-edge spacer system, is constructed of a wafer-thin, corrugated metal strip embedded in black butyl sealant. Swiggle Seal is made using moisture sealing, heat resistant polymers that reduce the flow of heat from around the window and increase its energy efficiency by up to 10 per cent.

Moreover, warm-edge spacers reduce the frost and along the window that condensation creates with cold-edge windows.

"Warm-edge spacers allow the full, clear vision the window is intended to provide while keeping the room warmer," Zuege says. This is especially important for those who require maximum light input in winter.

Energy efficiency is also a consideration when installing windows or skylights high in the room. Because warm air rises, your windows should be constructed of the most energy-efficient materials available, Zuege says.

Also, to bring the most light into your rooms during winter, it is advisable to install windows at the home's southern exposure, he says. If your home overhangs, be sure to position windows lower to capture the winter sun, which is lower on the horizon.



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