

HOME & GARDEN

Home heating systems provide optimal efficiency

A heating system is one of the most important purchases a home owner will ever make. In recent years, there have been many improvements in the design and efficiency of home heating units, but large differences still exist.

The trend these days is toward mid-efficiency and high efficiency gas furnaces, which have introduced a whole new level of economical heating to the home.

With efficiencies ranging from 80 per cent to 92 per cent AFUE (Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency), gas furnaces can now reduce energy costs by one third compared to older furnaces. Older furnaces operate at a much lower efficiency, which results in a lot of wasted heat.

Newer furnaces are designed and built using better materials and will produce more heat per fuel dollar.

If a home owner doesn't want to replace a mid-efficiency furnace, he has the option of installing a special liner made of aluminum flex in the chimney. This will create greater efficiency and minimize the down draft and is quite easy to install.

If you opt for a high-efficiency gas furnace, your initial investment is higher than a mid-efficiency unit, but you will realize approximately a 15 per cent savings in your heating costs per year.

For a 2,000 square foot home, the average price of a replacement gas, mid-efficiency furnace is about \$1,800.00, compared to about \$2,700.00 for a high-efficiency unit. Within several years, the accumulated savings on your heating costs will pay for the higher priced unit.

If you decide to move before you have recouped your initial investment, you can factor any unrecovered costs into the selling price of your home.

Many home owners are deciding to introduce zone heating into their homes. There are many gas baseboard heaters, wall heaters and gas fireplaces which can be installed directly out and which require no chimney.

Another popular heating option is a two-stage gas furnace, which is available in both mid-efficiency and high-efficiency units. The gas flame in these units modulates from a high to a low flame, according to the temperature registered on the thermostat, rather than operating at one maximum level all the time.

In the long run, the two-stage gas furnace provides a more constant indoor temperature and is more efficient in gas utilization. This type of unit is more expensive, but the long-term payback in home heating costs make it a sound investment.

As an alternative heat source, many homes are being outfitted with high-efficiency boilers. Years ago, boilers were used primarily as a source for heating radiators, and today, some still provide heat for forced air heating systems.

The boiler unit provides tremendous flexibility in heating other areas of the home, both inside and

out. Using a sophisticated heat exchanger, heat can be transferred via plastic pipes to heat walkways, basements, driveways, bathroom floors and even towel racks.

Generally, today's heat exchangers are guaranteed for life.


Natural gas and propane fireplaces are another efficient and popular source of heat. Many flexible venting systems

are available and certain models can be installed almost anywhere in the home. The direct vent models have a sealed combustion chamber and vents directly out a side wall of the home.

Newer 'zero clearance' units are particularly efficient and can be installed almost anywhere in the home. Zero clearance refers to fireplaces that permit combustible building materials to be positioned on all sides of



the fireplace (except the front). With these units, heat radiates out from the front area, and any furniture should be kept back at least four feet.

Just as important as choosing the right home heating unit, should be your choice of contractor. Make sure that you choose a contractor who is fully licensed, insured for liability and who has good references.





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