Surviving Winter: 10 Easy Ways To Cut Your Electricity Bills

Each time you get your electric bill, it is sure to be a revolting experience.

If you live in a highly regulated community, have little property to work with, or live in an apartment, it may seem like you will never find a way to generate sufficient electricity. Fortunately, there are some things you can do with relative ease to cut your electric usage by 50% or more.

Target the Most Power Hungry Devices First

If you stop and think about where the most electricity is being used in your home, you'll immediately name:

- Electric hot water heater
- Air conditioner
- Electric heaters
- Central heating blower
- Electric cooking stove
- Refrigerator
- Washer/dryer
- Dishwasher

As you look at this list, you may feel even more helpless because it may seem like there is no way to cut back on the usage of these appliances and still live comfortably. There are actually several ways to cut your electric usage from these devices with relatively little effort and almost no cost.

You may need to make a few adjustments to how you go about each day, it will be more than worth the effort.

Turn the Hot Water Heater on Only Once a Day

If you have an electric hot water heater, chances are it runs around the clock. Do you really need hot water at 2 am? Is it really necessary for that heater to be going on and off all day long, even when you aren't home or using the water at all?

Some people can afford the expense of a flash heater that produces hot water only as needed, you may find it necessary to improvise.

The easiest thing you can do is take a look at your power box. The hot water heater uses more current, so it has a circuit breaker all its own. If you cannot afford an electrician, or don't' have access to the hot water heater's power switch, simply throw the circuit breaker that goes to the heater. When you need hot water, simply set the breaker so that current can flow to the heater again.

At the beginning, you will need to figure out how much time it takes for a tank of water to heat up.

For example, if it takes one hour to heat the water up, then you would turn the heater on one hour before you do the dishes, take a shower, or use the hot water for some other purpose. Once the water is hot enough or you are ready to use it, simply shut the heater back off.

Insulate the Hot Water Heater

If you aren't comfortable with turning the hot water heater on and off, then you can at least insulate the heater. All you need is fireproof sheet insulation for this purpose. In fact,

most hardware stores sell insulation for this purpose.

Depending on how cold the area is where the hot water heater is located, you may want to wrap the insulation around the heater more than once. Just make sure the insulation does not touch any electrical parts or areas that need to be left open for one reason or another.

As an additional note, if you do decide to turn the heater on and off manually, you can still increase your savings by insulating the heater. Whether the heater is located in a cold basement, or is in some other out of the way place, the insulation will reduce the amount of heat escaping from the unit.

This will also cut down on the amount of time required to heat the water, which, in turn, can only help reduce your electric bill.

Use a Wet Fabric Barrier in Front of Box Fans

If you thought the hot water heater was an energy hog, chances are you don't feel much better about the air conditioner.

So when temperatures soar into the 90's or into the triple digits, then you will need to do something to cool down your home or risk getting very sick. In many cases, you can reduce your air conditioner usage by 30% or more by taking advantage of box fans and moisture.

Evaporating water leads to cooling until such a time when the air can no longer take in more water. This point is

determined, in part, by the temperature of the air. If you are using box fans, you can increase the capacity for cooling by putting a screen of wet fabric in front of them. Use thin to sheer fabrics that will dry easily in the draft from the fan.

For the sake of saving space, and creating an increased flow of cool air, you can also try making an "air conditioner" from a 5 gallon bucket fan and a desktop fan.

This design can be adapted to fit all different sized fans and areas. In fact, if you are looking to build an air conditioner on a budget, you can even use buckets from the dollar store, and cheap fans from the flea market.

Take Advantage of Solar Window Sill Coffee

While you are in the process of taming major energy hogs such as the heating and cooling systems, look at any appliances you

use as a matter of routine. Many people are truly amazed at how much electricity it takes to make a pot of coffee in an electric coffee maker, and then keep it warm.

Unless you are in a household where four or five people want a cup of coffee all at the same time, it will make more sense to brew your coffee on a window sill. There are a number of solar powered coffee makers that will produce a single cup of coffee, or keep it warm for several hours.

Just put these solar coffee makers in a windowsill and fill them with water and coffee. Even if you still need a cup of coffee from a conventional coffee maker before the sun comes up, you can still use the solar powered coffee maker for the rest of the day.

If you don't mind instant coffee, you don't even need a dedicated window sill coffee maker to get a hot cup of coffee. Take a mason jar and paint it dull black. Set the jar in a small box made of aluminum foil, and let the heat and light from the sun land on the aluminum foil. As the sun hits the foil, it will bounce onto the blackened mason jar. The black paint will absorb the heat, which will warm up the water inside the vessel. Once the water is hot enough, all you need to do is add the coffee.

Solar Cooking in the Summer

Chances are, during the summer months, you won't be as interested in hot meals. You may also exchange using the stove top and oven for the microwave. Even if you have a small, low wattage microwave, it will still use a good bit of power.

You can achieve the same results as you would get on your stove top or conventional oven by using a solar cooker. To get started, you can experiment with a cardboard box and some tinfoil. Later on, as you get accustomed to solar cooking, you may want to build something that remains in one place.

Aside from being healthier and cheaper than using a microwave, solar cookers can also be adapted for drying foods in bulk. If you have a garden, or go to local farms during peak crop seasons, this is the perfect way to dry foods for usage later on.

Try Thermos Cooking

Have you ever noticed that there is not taking the place of a bowl of oats, a plate of spaghetti, or a cup of hot soup? There is no reason to give up your crock pot, you can use thermos cooking for some meals, as well as for warming up others.

Video first seen on TheModernSurvivalist.

Basically, instead of cooking food or heating it up all the way on the stove, you let it finish to cook in an insulated vessel such as a thermos.

To get the most from this form of cooking, keep the following in mind:

- Typically, you will save anywhere from 3 to 10 minutes of active heating time depending on the food type
- Meat, eggs, and other foods that can carry disease should still be cooked to the proper internal temperature and for the proper duration. While you may want to mix them with other foods for warm up, they should not be cooked using thermos cooking methods. For the most part, you will be somewhat limited to pasta, grains, beans, and pre-cooked soups.
- As pasta cooks, it continues to absorb water. You will have to watch carefully to make sure it doesn't absorb too much water while it is sitting in the thermos. Different pasta shapes will also absorb water at different rates. Elbows tend to take longer to turn

into mush than spaghetti strands, so it may be best to master them before moving onto other shapes.

- A good quality thermos with good insulation will be more effective than a cheaper one. Remember, it is the insulative properties of the thermos that will enable the food to continue “cooking” using the heat already contained by the food.
- You may need to use different sized thermoses based on the amount of food you plan on preparing. Remember, air inside the thermos will also heat up. Therefore, if you don’t want the food to lose all of the heat it contains, it is best to use a smaller sized thermos for smaller amounts of food.

Insulate Your Refrigerator

If you have children at home, then you know just how much electricity is being used each time the refrigerator door is opened or closed. While you can’t do much of anything about this particular problem, you can take steps to make sure the cold temperatures are preserved as much as possible.

As with insulating the hot water heater, you will be amazed at how much electricity you can save when you insulate the refrigerator. In this case, you can save 10 – 20% of your total electric usage by adding insulation boards onto the sides and top of the refrigerator. Remember to insulate the doors to save even more.

When it comes to reducing the electrical usage for your refrigerator, it may also help to take a look at where it is located. For example, is it located near the stove, heat registers, or some other area where heat builds up? If so, move it to a colder or draftier part of the kitchen. Not only will the refrigerator will be in a naturally cooler place, it may even warm that corner up a bit with the heat released from the device’s operations.

Use Salt and Ice in the Freezer

Unlike your water heater, it isn't so easy to simply shut the refrigerator off and remain confident that foods will remain at a safe temperature. A refrigerator or freezer may go for as much as 24 – 48 hours in an emergency situation, but it doesn't mean you should make a habit of shutting the fridge off for this long.

On the other hand, there are some things you can do to keep foods frozen even if the temperature setting is a good bit higher than what you would normally use.

Once you get accustomed to this method, you may also be able to shut the refrigerator down altogether for a few hours at a time and still not have to worry about added electrical usage to regain a suitable temperature. Just make sure that the compressor unit and other parts will not be damaged by being shut off and on in this manner.

Storing foods in ice mixed with salt will keep them in good condition for several days even without electricity. When combined with insulating the outside of the refrigerator unit, you may be able to cut freezer usage by as much as 50%.

As an added bonus, since the freezer always takes more energy than the refrigerator, you can have peace of mind knowing that you cut back on a major part of electricity usage for this particular appliance. From there, all you will need to do is figure out how you will cut back on the refrigerator side of the unit.

Some options may include buying a very small, energy efficient refrigerator unit and insulating it to get the most from it so that you don't have to worry about the larger unit taking up so much electricity.

Put Computers and Other Appliances on a Power Strip

Computers, printers, and all sorts of other electronic devices draw small amounts of current even if the power switch is shut off. While it may not seem like much at first glance, it can add up to as much as $20.00 or more per year.

This constant flow of electricity through TVs, monitors, and other appliances can also wear out power switched and shorten the life of the device. The easiest and cheapest thing you can do is put all your appliances on a power strip, and then shut down the switch on the strip when you are done using the devices.

Today, you can also purchase good quality power strips with fuses and circuit breakers on them that will help protect your devices from brownouts and power surges. If you decide to experiment with generating power later on, these power strips can truly be very handy and save you a bit of money. Just be sure to replace them on a regular basis, as the surge protection parts can degrade over time and fail when you need them most.

As you set up your system of surge protectors, you may also want to add timers. Let’s say you decide to put the coffee maker, toaster, or other appliance commonly used for making breakfast on a power strip. An external timer that doesn’t use electricity to count down can still be used to make sure the device(s) have power so they start up at the proper time.

Trying to find ways to cut back on the electric bill can seem like a daunting task. Whether you are stymied by the power usage for large appliances or small ones, there are always ways to cut back without losing all that you gain from having electricity.

While you are formulating plans to generate power, you can

still take these simple steps to save electricity and see how they work for you. Once your electric bill starts going down, you are sure to be more motivated than ever to see how much more you can cut, and then see how best to meet the electricity needs for what is left on your list.

Keep looking for new ways to reduce your costs, as it will help your long term prepping!

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