

Tips & tricks around the home

There are more ways to save money than just investing in energy efficient improvements. Of course, the suggestions outlined in this guide should certainly be considered, as there's the opportunity to save hundreds of pounds on a yearly basis.

However, by just changing your energy habits there's the potential to save money without making an upfront investment.

10 Free Tips To Help You Save Money

If you can, try implementing some or all of the following energy saving tips. They'll help you create a more comfortable home environment and knock a few quid off your monthly energy bills too.

1. Switch your energy supplier

With national energy suppliers increasing the cost of gas and electricity at a yearly rate, it makes sense to compare providers and switch to the cheapest tariff. Why pay more for the same service when you don't need to? Surprisingly there's around £300 difference between the most expensive energy supplier and the cheapest, so there is the potential to save hundreds of pounds by switching.

It's easy to quickly compare the cheapest tariff rates too. uSwitch provides a service whereby you enter in your details and they'll show you which energy suppliers are the **cheapest in your area**.

Not only could you switch supplier, but then also fix your rates for a certain period of time. This is typically up to 24 months and means over this time, energy bills won't become more expensive. With variable tariff rates your bills will fluctuate, but as you probably know, energy suppliers are rarely dropping prices.

How to switch your energy supplier:

1. Visit the **uSwitch website**
2. Type in your postcode, email address and phone number
3. Click 'compare gas & electricity prices'
4. Choose a cheaper energy supplier in your area
5. Save up to £412 every year on bills!

2. Pay by monthly direct debit

There's also an opportunity to save money with your supplier, just by switching the way you pay bills. Better deals can always be found online, so setting up a direct debit will likely be cheaper than paying by cash or cheque. If your home consumes both gas and electricity, it's also worth having a dual tariff - so you're buying from the same supplier.

If you have access to the Internet, opt for paperless bills too and instead view the expenses online. Many suppliers offer a small discount to customers choosing paperless bills.

3. Wrap up warm in the winter

Of course, there are times when you'll need the central heating to warm up your home. However, if the heating's on and you're walking around in a t-shirt, this is just money being thrown away. Instead, turn down the thermostat and wrap up warm to save some cash.

Surprisingly, turning down the boiler's thermostat by just one degree can save you up to £60 each year. And the funny thing is, you won't notice any difference in the temperature of your home.

If your hot water is almost scolding, then the temperature is probably set too high. Take a look at the controls and ensure it's no higher than 60 degrees. Speaking of the controls, ensure your heating is pre-set to come on at certain times of the day rather than have it running when you're out and about.

4. Switch off your lights

Your home's lighting can contribute to around 20% of your total energy bill, but fortunately there are some easy ways to make savings. Firstly, switch your standard light bulbs with energy saving replacements. They can help to reduce electricity bills by up to £55 annually and will also last 10 times as long. Using 80% less energy to light up your home, energy saving bulbs can save you £120 each over their lifetime.

Once you have more efficient lighting in place it's time to eliminate all those bad habits of yours. Do you leave the lights on when you nip to the shops or overnight? Switch your lights off when not needed and you'll save upwards of £10 annually.

To further reduce electricity bills, ensure that you stop leaving appliances on standby. This includes the washing machine, dishwasher and TV. The only exception to the rule should be your skybox; especially if you want to record a certain show overnight or when you're out.

5. Shut your curtains

Whilst investing in energy efficient windows such as double glazing will help you reduce bills annually, you should also close all the curtains at night to keep even more heat inside.

Whether you have curtains or blinds, these can act as further insulation to keep your home warmer throughout the year and leave you not needing to up the thermostat. At night, closing the curtains and drawing blinds can block draughts in your home.

6. Become water efficient

Water usage will have an impact on your energy bills, so cutting back will help to save money every year. There are many appliances in your home where savings are

achievable, particularly in the kitchen. First off, let's start with the washing machine. You don't always need to set a long duration at high temperatures. If your washing machine has the option, select a 30-degree temperature at a quick spin, particularly if the load's not large.

You should also use the tumble dryer sparingly, especially in summer months when the sun's out for most of the day. Hang your wet clothes out on the washing line and let them dry naturally. Just be ready to get them in if a menacing rain cloud looms overhead – you can never guarantee the weather in Britain!

If you have any dripping taps, it's also worthwhile having these fixed as soon as possible. Every year a dripping tap is equal to 69 baths. Either tighten up the pipework yourself or call in a qualified plumber to give you a helping hand. You can also save up to £18 a year by switching your baths for showers. The average shower will use only 35 litres of water, whilst a bath takes 100 litres.

How to become water efficient:

1. Choose a 30-degree spin for your washing machines
2. Use the tumble drying sparingly in summer
3. Have all your dripping taps fixed
4. Take more showers than baths.

7. Regularly read the energy meter

Most energy companies calculate your bills as an estimation, rather than knowing for sure how much energy you're really using. Especially when you first move into a property, suppliers will guess how much you'll likely use over a 12-month period and average out the cost.

If you check your meter regularly and contact the supplier with updated readings, you'll avoid paying more than necessary. If your energy account is ever in credit, ask to have the money paid into your bank account. Not many energy companies do this, so jog their memory with condition 27 of the Gas Supply Licence. This states any credit must be refunded.

With the Government's plan to roll out smart energy meters to every home by 2020, energy companies will be automatically updated with your usage.

8. Cook your food efficiently

Every day you'll be in the kitchen preparing food at some point, so it probably makes sense to start cooking efficiently to save a load of money. There are a few ways you can go about reducing energy use, whilst making the process of preparing food a lot quicker.

It may seem obvious but a lot of people don't use the right size saucepan for the food on the hob. Not only will you be using more water than necessary, but it'll also take longer for water to boil. If you have the lids to hand, use these to keep heat inside the saucepan and water will boil quicker still.

This same approach should be taken when filling up the kettle too – don't use more water than you need to. If you're making a cup of tea, it doesn't make sense to boil a whole kettle full of water.

9. Clingfilm your windows

Probably not the first thing that'll spring to mind when it comes to energy efficiency, but certainly a tip that can save you money. Double glazed windows are the obvious choice for those looking to save money with energy efficient windows. However, prices can be expensive and payback time up to 10 years.

As another option, there's a superb product that'll provide some energy efficiency at just a fraction of the cost. We're not talking about the clingfilm you'll buy at the local supermarket to wrap food with. Instead, visit your nearest DIY store and ask for double glazing film or stretch wrap. This can be applied to the windows in your home, providing further energy saving reductions. What's more, it'll cost under £10 for around six metres worth.

10. Use all the tips in this comprehensive guide

Really want to start saving money on a monthly basis? Then use this guide as your reference and locate the areas of your home that need upgrading to improve insulation and efficiency. There are a number of areas in your home where this is possible and as discussed, will include the windows, walls, loft, floor and boiler.

If you want to invest in insulation that's not going to break the bank and will reward you almost immediately, cavity wall and loft insulation are perfect. With these in place you can instantly stop heat escaping your property and payback can be within just one year.

Replacing a boiler will be more expensive, but upgrading from an inefficient system to an A-rated equivalent will save you up to £310 on an annual basis. Not only this, but in the heart of winter there won't be the risk of a breakdown that will disrupt your access to heating and hot water.