

YOUR HOME

MAY
2008

TIPS AND TRENDS TO HELP MAXIMIZE HOME BUYING AND SELLING



Fan Fare

If you're looking to stay cool and save on energy bills this summer, look up. A good ceiling fan, when properly used and maintained, can help keep your cooling and heating costs down throughout the year.

To reap the maximum benefits — in comfort level and savings — it's important to make sure that ceiling fans are properly installed and that you use the right size and model for the room.

Consider ceiling fan blade spans, which range from 29 to 54 inches, and room size, and be sure that the fan is mounted in the middle of the room, at least 7 feet above the floor and 18 inches from the walls. Other performance factors to consider include the motor type and grade (performance, medium or economy), and the blades' pitch and material. The fans with the best blade and motor designs are most efficient and quieter as well. Look for models with the highest air flow efficiency, which is measured by cubic feet per minute per watt (CFM/watt) at each speed.

An Energy Star-rated fan is 50 percent more efficient than a conventional fan and can save \$10 or more annually on utility bills. If this doesn't seem like much, consider the additional savings that come from adjusting the thermostat accordingly and keeping air conditioner (or heater) use to a minimum. Ceiling fans keep people cool, not the spaces they're in, so be sure to turn off the fan when not in a room. In the summer, make sure the fan is moving in a counter-clockwise direction so that it produces the downward windchill effect; in the winter, reverse the direction and use the fan at a low speed to force the warm air near the ceiling up and then down along the walls and floor.

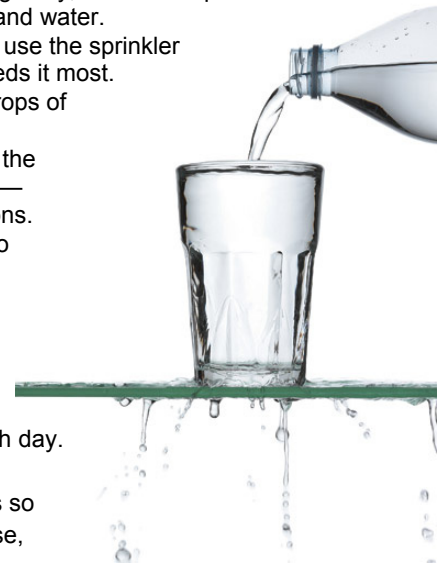
And don't forget about the lights. Most ceiling fans include some kind of light fixture, which is often used as the main light source in a room. Be sure to use an energy-efficient light kit and to turn it off when a room is empty.

Source: www.energystar.gov

Cut, Don't Run

Pools, sprinklers, hoses — there are many ways to use water outdoors in the summertime, and there are also countless and easy ways to conserve it. Check out the following tips for developing good H2O habits:

- Water your lawn only when necessary; if you leave footprints when you walk across it, it's time to water (usually once every three days).
- Minimize evaporation by watering your lawn during the early morning hours, when temperatures are cooler and winds are lighter.
- Divide your watering cycle into shorter periods to reduce runoff and allow for better absorption.
- Periodically check your pool for leaks if you have an automatic refilling device.
- Weed your lawn and garden regularly; weeds compete with other plants for nutrients, light and water.
- When the kids want to cool off, use the sprinkler in an area where your lawn needs it most.
- Use sprinklers that throw big drops of water close to the ground.
- Use a hose nozzle and turn off the water while you wash your car — you'll save more than 100 gallons.
- Use a screwdriver as a probe to test soil moisture; if it goes in easily, don't water.
- Use a grease pencil to mark the water level of your pool, and check the mark 24 hours later; your pool should lose no more than 1/4 inch each day.
- Check your sprinkler system frequently and adjust sprinklers so that only the lawn (not the house, sidewalk or street) is watered.



Source: www.wateruseitwisely.com

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Figure out how much you might save by using an Energy Star fan at www.energystar.gov. Click the "heating and cooling" link through to ceiling fans, where you'll find a Savings Calculator worksheet as well as lists of energy-efficient fans.



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Branch Out

Aside from their beauty, trees provide many significant benefits to homes, streets and cities. They keep the air supply fresh, provide shade and shelter, and minimize noise pollution. They can also increase the value of your property by up to 25 percent. Professional tree appraisers can determine the dollar value of your trees and plants by evaluating their size, type, condition and location. But regular care is what's ultimately more cost-effective and important in maintaining and protecting the value of trees.

Proper tree maintenance involves pruning, watering, mulching, pest management and, sometimes, removal. Inspect your trees for signs of disease or insect damage as well as potential hazards, such as large dead or detached branches, mushrooms at

the base of the tree, and proximity to utility lines.

When you need professional help, be sure to find a certified arborist with a reputable tree care company. You can start by looking in the Yellow Pages, but remember that some of the most highly regarded companies rely more on word-of-mouth marketing. Seek recommendations from neighbors and friends, make calls to several companies and interview each one. Before you hire a company, ask for copies of valid and current insurance certificates and get a detailed written estimate of the work needed and costs. Also be sure to get a complete diagnosis before a tree is cut down. Beware of companies that solicit work door to door, demand payment in advance or advertise topping — a harmful practice of cutting back a tree's crown.

Sources: Tree Care Industry Association (www.tcia.org); International Society of Arboriculture (www.treesaregood.org)

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