

CHILL OUT

Cranking up the aircon isn't your only option this summer: with smart changes, you can stay cool and keep costs down, writes *Georgia Madden*.

Outside it's a scorcher - but if the thought of your next power bill is causing you as much stress as finding a way to sleep through another warm night, don't despair. With a few minor changes to your home and daily habits, it is possible to keep the indoor temperature down without having crippling energy costs. Here are some strategies you could consider. ►



Don't let the sun in

The best way to keep your home cool is to prevent heat from entering - and external shading is your first line of defence, says Frances Cosway, head designer at White Pebble Interiors.

"External blinds, retractable awnings, shade sails and angled louvres are some of the best options," she says. The right internal blinds can also help, says Vera Meharg, marketing communications manager at Luxaflex Window Fashions. When you're selecting interior window coverings for temperature control, choose a style that sits close to the glass in a sunscreen-style fabric that will reflect heat and UV rays, or opt for an insulating fabric, she says.

Turn it down

Flicking the switch is sometimes the only option on those searing days, but there are ways to keep running costs to a minimum. "Set your airconditioner to 24°C - every degree below that adds an extra five per cent to energy bills," says Jan Prichard, general manager of customer care at energy retailer Origin. "Close the windows and doors and seal gaps. Cooling only the space you're in rather than the whole house can save you about \$470 per year," she says.

Upgrade the aircon

If your airconditioner is a few years old, it might pay to invest in a new one. "An energy-efficient airconditioner could save you up to \$166 a year compared with



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Duetto Architella **top-down/bottom-up shades** in Volcanic Ash, from \$2190 (151cmx181cm), Luxaflex Window Fashions; luxaflex.com.au. **Garden design** by Mint Pool+Landscape Design; mintdesign.net.au. **WS09TWS 2.5kW reverse-cycle airconditioner**, \$1242, LG. **Airfusion Akmani 152cm ceiling fan**, \$795, Beacon Lighting; beaconlighting.com.au.

"FANS ARE THE CHEAPEST FORM OF COOLING, COSTING ABOUT \$6 PER SUMMER TO RUN." DR ROBERT SIMPSON, AUSGRID

a 15-year-old split system," says Prichard. The higher the energy-star rating, the more efficient the appliance. "A 2.5-star-rated model could cost up to 85 per cent more to run than a 7-star unit," she says.

Many of the latest airconditioners have smart features which help to keep costs down. "Inclusions such as movement detection, which switches the machine to energy-saving mode if no movement is detected for a certain period and returns it to normal operation when occupants re-enter, can really help with energy management. A unit with an economy mode, where the temperature adjusts by 1°C to reduce power, is great too," says Kyle Rafter, national product manager at Fujitsu General Australia.

From late 2019, owners of Fujitsu General airconditioners that are less than 10 years old will be able to use a wi-fi-enabled device to control temperature, fan speed and louvre position remotely with a smart device - phone, tablet or home assistant - ensuring your home is at the perfect temperature when you arrive home.



Feel the air move

Ceiling fans are surprisingly efficient. They move air across the skin to make you feel up to 3°C cooler. "Fans are the cheapest form of cooling, costing about two cents an hour to run, or about \$6 over a summer," says Dr Robert Simpson, energy-efficiency expert at Ausgrid. Using a ceiling fan in conjunction with aircon can also cut costs. "A ceiling fan pushes cool air down and through the room. As a result, you don't have to set the thermostat as low, which can reduce airconditioning costs by up to 10 per cent," says Denise Hammond, product knowledge specialist at Beacon Lighting. "Direct Current (DC) ceiling fans consume 75 per cent less electricity than standard ceiling fans," says Hammond. "Typically, you need a 122cm blade span for a small to medium room and a 132cm or 142cm span for a larger space."

Grow your own shade

"Climbing plants on pergolas connected to the home break the sun's path and can help cool the house overall," says Nicola Cameron, director at Pepo Botanic Design. "Deciduous climbers, such as ornamental grape (*Vitis vinifera*), drop their leaves during winter so you can enjoy the sun in the cooler months," she says.

Plant trees in your garden to protect your home from the sun and hot winds, says Chris Mahoney, group director of landscape architectural firm Verdé Design Group. "Consider golden penda (*Xanthostemon chrysanthus*) for smaller gardens; for larger gardens, try tulipwood (*Harpullia pendula*)."

Go for grass

Lawn feels far cooler underfoot than hardscaping such as pavers or gravel, says Darin Bradbury, director at Mint Pool+Landscape Design. "The best species for Australian conditions is buffalo grass - Sir Walter or Sapphire - as they can self-repair and are more drought-tolerant than other options. Laying lawn in rainier seasons like spring or autumn helps it establish before a hot summer or cold winter."

Just add water

A strategically placed water feature, such as a pond, can also help make hot days more bearable. "Locate water features near windows or in breezeways, where they'll catch the breeze and provide evaporative cooling," says Mahoney.

Get cross-ventilating

"Cross-ventilation draws cool air into the house while warm air is expelled," says architect Rebecca Naughtin. "You can achieve basic cross-ventilation simply by opening windows and doors on opposite sides of a room." Alternatively, maximise your home's cooling potential with specially designed openings, such as louvres. "These allow twice as much air to circulate as more traditional windows when fully open," says Leigh Rust, director of Safetyline Jalousie Louvre Windows. **H&G**

FAN-TASTIC OPTIONS



Euromatic 30cm retro **desk fan**, \$69, Bunnings; (03) 8831 9777 or bunnings.com.au.



Dyson Pure Cool Me **personal purifying fan**, \$499, Harvey Norman; harveynorman.com.au.



Goldair Navigator tripod **pedestal fan**, \$149, Domayne; domayneonline.com.au.



Sunbeam FA8900 **pedestal fan**, \$169, Winning Appliances; winningappliances.com.au.