

Ask Dirk: What is the best thermostat for my home?

Heating can account for nearly half of the average family's winter energy bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Having a good thermostat may help homeowners reduce those costs. The market is full of choices when it comes to home thermostats, so let's break it down so that you as the homeowner can make an informed decision before winter hits here in Northern Nevada.



Dirk Roper

to record the inside and outside temperature, notify the homeowner when the filter should be changed and record its own operating time.

HIGH-END THERMOSTAT OPTIONS: Smart thermostats

Operates like a programmable thermostat, but allows the user to access the system from any internet-connect device, including a smartphone, which allows the user to adjust the temperature remotely. Some smart thermostats will let you manage temperature, humidity, air quality, fan speeds, ventilation and zoning, making it easy for you to create comfort settings and connect with your system while home or away.

These thermostats know the temperature outside and adjust the inside temperature, based on your known settings. Automatically.

Care should be taken to make sure your smart thermostat is programmed correctly to ensure the best energy savings. These systems also have the capacity

Learning thermostats

The next evolution in smart thermostats is the learning thermostat, which can "learn" when the home is likely to be occupied or empty, thus allowing for automatic heating and cooling upon entry. They do this by using motion detectors to determine when the home is occupied or by using a wireless network to sense when someone is away from their home.

Some manufacturers claim this new breed of comfort management device can save homeowners an average of 20% on their heating and cooling energy costs. Combine that with custom energy tips and you can make informed decisions about when and how to save even more money.

I'm not yet a fan of learning thermostats. I think they work well if you have regular patterns and don't want to bother with programming your thermostat,

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but they aren't great at unusual patterns. I tried one at my office. It noticed that I came in on a couple of Saturdays, so it started turning up the heat every Saturday whether I was there or not. It also started turning on for my cleaning crew who left the door open while they were working. I've switched back to a programmable thermostat with Wi-Fi. Now if I'm headed in to the office on the weekend, I can set the thermostat when I leave home.

MID-RANGE THERMOSTAT OPTIONS: Programmable thermostats

Allows the operator to set back the temperature based on a schedule of your choosing, so you don't have to set it back when you leave or turn in for the night. Once you manually set the

desired temperatures for, say daytime and nighttime or weekdays and weekends, the system heats or cools the home to those desired setpoints automatically.

BUDGET FRIENDLY OPTIONS Non-programmable thermostats

The most basic option that allows the homeowner to turn on the heating or cooling, set the temperature and operate the fan. Also known as manual thermostats, all functions in these systems are operated manually. Keeps the home at the same temperature 24 hours a day unless it is manually changed.

How to decide?

If you're really excited about technology, the smart and learning thermostats are really fun. If all you want is comfort without

thinking too much, programmable thermostats are a great option. Non-programmable thermostats are easy to use — no fuss, no muss.

Consider your budget and your appetite for learning, and, as I always say, do your research.

—Dirk

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