34 ways to reduce your energy costs

Behavioral Changes & DIY Tips (Low/No Cost)

Thermostat Management

(1) Adjust for absence/sleep: Set your thermostat up 7-10 degrees in summer or down 7-10 degrees in winter when you're away or asleep. A smart or programmable thermostat can automate this.

(2) Optimal settings: Aim for around 76-78°F in summer when cooling and 68°F in winter when heating (or lower at night/away).

Lighting

(3) Turn off lights: Simple, but effective. Turn off lights when leaving a room.

(4) Maximize natural light: Open blinds and curtains during the day, especially in winter, to let in warmth. Close them in summer to block heat.

(5) Switch to LEDs: Replace old incandescent or CFL bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs. They use significantly less energy and last much longer.

Appliances & Electronics

(6) Unplug "vampire" electronics: Many devices (TVs, chargers, gaming consoles, coffee makers) draw power even when off or in standby mode. Plug them into smart power strips or manually unplug them when not in use.

(7) Only run your washing machine and dishwasher when they're full.

(8) Cold water laundry: Most modern detergents work well with cold water, saving energy on water heating (which accounts for a large portion of laundry's energy use).

(9) If your dishwasher has an "air dry" or "energy saver" setting, use it, or simply open the door at the end of the wash cycle to let dishes air dry.

(10) Clean the dryer lint filter before every load to improve efficiency and reduce fire risk.

(11) Keep your fridge between 36-38°F and freezer at 0-5°F. Clean the coils regularly and ensure adequate "breathing room" around the unit. Avoid placing hot food directly into the fridge.

(12) Use microwaves or smaller appliances when possible, as they are often more energy-efficient than a full oven. In summer, consider cooking outdoors to keep heat out of your home.

Water Heating

(13) Lower water heater temperature: The default is often 140°F, but 120°F is usually sufficient and can save 4-22% annually. Never set it below 120°F for health reasons.

(14) Take shorter showers: Showers use a lot of hot water. Consider low-flow showerheads.

Drafts & Air Leaks

(15) Seal leaks: Use caulk and weatherstripping to seal gaps around windows, doors, pipes, and electrical outlets. This is one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent conditioned air from escaping.

(16) Close unused vents/doors: If you have central air, close vents and doors to unused rooms.

(17) Fireplace damper: Keep your fireplace damper closed when not in use to prevent heat loss or gain.

HVAC Maintenance

(18) Change air filters: Regularly check and change your HVAC air filters (every 1-3 months). Clogged filters make your system work harder and use more energy.

(19) Clear vents: Ensure all air vents are clear of furniture or obstructions.

Home Upgrades & Investments (Higher Cost, Greater Savings)

Insulation & Air Sealing

(20) Professional assessment: Consider a professional home energy audit to identify specific areas of energy loss.

(21) Attic insulation: A properly insulated and air-sealed attic is crucial. Many homes are under-insulated. This can cut energy use by around 10%.

(22) Wall insulation: If undergoing major renovations, consider adding wall insulation.

Windows & Doors

(23) Upgrade to energy-efficient models: Replace old, drafty single-pane windows and doors with ENERGY STAR certified models (double or triple-pane with low-emissivity coatings). This can reduce energy loss significantly.

(24) Storm windows/doors: A less expensive alternative to full replacement that still offers good insulation.

HVAC System

(25) Upgrade to energy-efficient HVAC: If your heating and cooling system is old, consider replacing it with an ENERGY STAR certified model. Heat pumps are increasingly popular as they provide both heating and cooling efficiently.

(26) Duct sealing: Leaky ducts can waste a lot of energy. Have them sealed professionally.

Water Heater

(27) Heat pump water heater: These are highly efficient and can save significant amounts on water heating costs.

(28) Insulate your water heater tank: If your tank is warm to the touch, an insulating blanket can reduce standby heat loss.

Smart Home Technology

(29) Smart thermostat: Automatically adjusts temperatures based on your schedule, presence, and even local weather, optimizing heating and cooling.

(30) Smart plugs: Allow you to remotely control and schedule power to individual devices, eliminating vampire draw.

(31) Smart lighting: Offers remote control, scheduling, dimming, and sometimes motion sensing to ensure lights are only on when needed.

(32) Energy monitoring systems: Some smart home systems can track real-time energy usage, providing insights into where you're consuming the most energy.

Renewable Energy

(33) Solar panels: While a significant investment, solar panels can drastically reduce or even eliminate your electricity bill over time, and can also increase your home's value.

(34) Government Programs & Incentives

Federal Tax Credits	The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) offers substantial federal tax credits for energy-efficient home improvements.
Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)	For low-income households, WAP helps reduce energy costs by increasing home energy efficiency. It's administered at the state and local level.
Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	Provides financial assistance for heating and cooling costs and may also help with energy efficiency improvements for eligible low-income households.
Utility Rebates and Programs (Energy Savings Hub)	Many local utility companies offer rebates, discounts, or special financing for purchasing ENERGY STAR appliances, smart thermostats, or performing energy audits and upgrades. Check your local utility's website (like PSE&G in New Jersey) for available programs.
Energy-Efficient Mortgages (EEMs)	These loans can help you qualify for a more expensive home if it's energy-efficient or help finance energy-saving improvements.

Shopping for energy in a deregulated market

Benefits of shopping for energy in a deregulated market

- **Power of Choice:** You can choose your energy supplier and the plan that best fits your needs and budget.
- **Increased Competition**: Multiple providers vying for your business can lead to lower rates, better services, and more innovative solutions.
- **Potential Savings**: By comparing offers and switching providers, you might save money on your monthly energy bills.
- **Enhanced Services & Innovation**: Providers may offer specialized plans or perks like green energy options, usage tracking tools, or smart home integration.
- **Environmental Considerations**: You can choose plans with a higher percentage of renewable energy sources, helping to reduce your environmental impact.

How to confirm if your energy market is deregulated

1. **Check your energy bill:** Look for clues like multiple company names, separate charges for "supply" and "delivery," or mentions of "energy choice" or "alternative supplier."
2. **Visit your state's public utility commission (PUC) website:** Most states have a regulatory body that oversees the energy market. Their website will often have information on whether the state is regulated or deregulated, and if so, how consumers can choose their energy supplier.
3. **Use online energy marketplaces:** Websites like Choose Energy, ElectricityPlans.com, or SaveOnEnergy.com allow you to enter your ZIP code to see if there are multiple energy plans available from different providers in your area. If you see a list of competing offers, you're in a deregulated market.
4. **Contact your local utility company:** They can tell you directly if you have the option to choose your energy supplier.

Many states have some form of deregulation, but it can vary by commodity (electricity vs. natural gas) and even by specific utility territory. **Some common states with deregulated electricity include**:

- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Illinois
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan (natural gas only, electricity varies)
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New York
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- Texas (most areas, and you *must* choose a supplier)
- Washington D.C.

Keep in mind that energy deregulation is a dynamic process, and policies can change. Always verify the current status for your specific location.

Steps to shop for energy in a deregulated market

1. **Understand Energy Deregulation**: Familiarize yourself with how deregulated markets work in your state, including the roles of the utility company (delivers energy) and the energy provider (sells energy plans), as well as your rights and responsibilities as a consumer.
2. **Determine Your Needs**: Analyze your energy usage patterns and preferences. Consider factors such as:
   - Energy Consumption: How much electricity or natural gas do you typically use each month? Your historical energy bills can provide valuable insight here.
   - Contract Length: Do you prefer a stable rate for a longer term, or the flexibility of a shorter contract or month-to-month plan?
   - Plan Type: Fixed-rate plans offer predictable pricing, while variable-rate plans fluctuate with market conditions. Other options like green energy plans or no-deposit plans may also be available.
   - Features & Incentives: Look for additional benefits like renewable energy options, energy efficiency programs, or bill credits.
3. **Research and Compare Providers & Plans**:
   - Online Marketplaces: Utilize platforms like Choose Energy or SaveOnEnergy.com to compare offers from various providers in your area by entering your ZIP code.
   - State-Run Websites: Some states, like Texas (Power to Choose) and Pennsylvania (PA Power Switch), offer official websites that allow you to compare plans.
   - Check Provider Reputation and Customer Service: Read reviews and ratings to gauge customer satisfaction.
   - Thoroughly Review Plan Documents: Pay close attention to the Electricity Facts Label (EFL) or Terms of Service (TOS), which outline the plan's rates, contract length, fees, and energy sources.
4. **Initiate the Switch**: Once you've chosen a provider and plan, contact the new provider to enroll. They will typically handle the process of switching your energy supply and notifying your current utility company. You'll usually start getting billed at your new rate within 1-2 billing cycles. Be mindful of any early termination fees with your existing plan, and ensure a smooth transition by providing necessary information like your utility account number.