



Home Energy Efficiency

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During the coldest days of winter and warmest days of summer, our energy costs are at their highest. In 2026, as we experience higher gas and electric rates, it's a great time to take actions that will reduce our energy use while maintaining the same level of comfort in our home. Start with no and low-cost actions like changing furnace filters and unplugging electronics, then plan for upgrades like LED lighting, heat pumps, or solar.

Low-Cost and No-Cost Fixes

- Seal Air Leaks:** Caulk and weatherstrip around doors, window, and gaps.
- Manage Thermostat:** Use a programmable or smart thermostat to adjust settings for heating/cooling.
- Unplug "Vampire" Electronics:** Use smart power strips for TVs, game consoles, chargers.
- Optimize Appliances:** Run full loads in dishwashers, clean HVAC filters, take shorter showers and lower water heater temp.
- Use Curtains/Blinds:** Close them in summer to block heat and open in winter to gain solar heat.
- Complete a Free ComEd/Nicor Home Energy Assessment and receive Free or Low-Cost Energy Saving Products:** Sign-up for your assessment at GROW's January 17th event: "Save Money and Energy this Winter".

Investments for Greater Savings

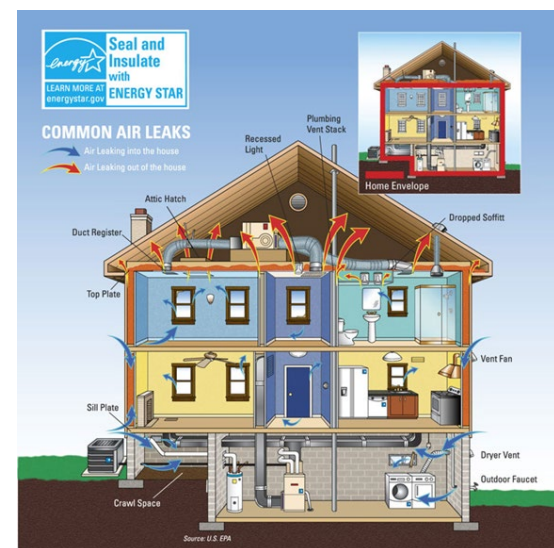
- Insulation:** Add insulation to attics, walls, and crawl spaces to prevent heat loss/gain.
- HVAC Upgrades:** Replace old systems with high-efficiency ENERGY STAR models. Consider a cold climate heat pump when it's time to replace your system.
- Windows & Doors:** Install double glazed or ENERGY STAR certified windows.
- Lighting:** Switch to LED bulbs and install dimmer switches.
- Appliances:** Choose ENERGY STAR certified washers, dryers, refrigerators, etc.
- Water Heating:** Consider heat pump water heaters or solar hot water systems.
- Duct Sealing:** Seal and insulate ducts, especially those in unconditioned spaces.

Financial Incentives & Resources

- Tax Credits:** Look for federal tax credits for energy-efficient home improvements.
- Energy Audits:** Get a professional audit to pinpoint your home's biggest energy wasters.
- Utility Rebates:** Check for ComEd and Nicor rebates on efficient equipment.
- Attend:** "Save Money and Energy this Winter" Saturday, January 17th @ 9:00am in the Westchester Village Hall Boardroom.

Air Leaks and Home Weatherization

Half of Westchester's housing stock was built by 1954, and the vast majority of all homes in town were built prior to 2000. Homes built prior to the 1970s are more likely to have uncontrolled gaps letting outside air in due to less stringent construction standards, minimal insulation, and older, less-sealed windows/doors. Leaks exist in all ages of homes, with newer builds being tighter but may still require enhanced ventilation and air filtration to ensure good air quality. Air leaks reduce home comfort and waste energy. Home weatherization may save you up to 10% off your energy bills. Learn more at energystar.gov



Green Fact:

"Homes and buildings account for 40% of all energy used in the US, and much of it is wasted. The average homeowner loses \$200 to \$400 a year due to energy efficiency problems!" See "57 ways to improve your home's energy efficiency in 2025" <https://www.cleanenergyconnection.org/article/57-ways-improve-your-homes-energy-efficiency-2025>

Recipe of the Month:

Cauliflower Paprikash Stew - makes 4 servings
Ring in the new year by trying a delicious new recipe! This one is quick to prepare and great for warm comfort in the winter months.

Ingredients

- 1 medium onion, 1 cup finely chopped
- 1 red or green bell pepper, 1 cup finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- ½ cup dry sherry
- ½ cup water
- mushrooms, 5 cups sliced

salt, pinch

1 head cauliflower, separated into florets

sour cream, 1 cup

salt and ground black pepper to taste

Egg noodles, package for 4 servings

Instructions

In a large saucepan, sauté onions and peppers in oil for 2-3 minutes. Stir in paprika, sherry and water then cook on high heat for a minute. Add mushrooms and salt, then cook covered on medium heat for 5 minutes. Mix in cauliflower and simmer for 5-7 minutes until the cauliflower is tender.

Remove pan from heat and stir in sour cream. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm over cooked egg noodles (follow instructions on package).

Source: From Moosewood Restaurant, Cooks at Home, Fireside Book, p 202, 1994.

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.