

Lower heating costs by using electric bedding at night

Electric bedding provides uniform heating comfort regardless of temperature changes in a room. It helps you save energy because you heat only your bed rather than the entire room. Lowering your heating system's thermostat 10 degrees for eight hours each night will save on your heating bill.

An electric blanket will allow you to turn down the thermostat to 60 degrees F or as low as 45 degrees F. People with concerns about exposure to electricity may want to use electric bedding to warm the bed, then turn off the electricity, points out Ardis Koester, Oregon State University textiles and clothing specialist.

Think about the features you really want and don't pay for extras you won't use. If you're thinking about buying an electric blanket or mattress pad, Koester suggests keeping these tips in mind.

- * Look for the UL Seal (Underwriters' Laboratories). The seal assures proper wiring and maximum safety. Read the warranty carefully. Warranties are usually for two to five years.

- * What kind of control does the bedding have? Dual controls provide separate settings for each side of the bed. A separate on/off switch allows you to turn the blanket on and off without disturbing the heat setting. Mechanical controls usually have up to nine settings. Solid state control may have as many as 27 settings. Solid state controls are more expensive, but produce an even temperature

and don't click on and off, which may be important if you're a light sleeper. If you're sensitive to temperatures, these controls may be a good choice. Be sure controls are easy to read in the dark and are large enough to see without your glasses.

- * Check all tags and labels for information on flame-retardant finishes.

- * Blanket costs vary with fiber content, weight and types of trim. Polyester and nylon are the most durable fibers. Acrylics added to blends help blankets retain shape, wrinkle resistance, and a fluffy feel.

- * Check the size of the blanket.

For example, a double bed size blanket may be 72 inches by 84 inches, or 80 inches by 84 inches. If your mattress is thicker than the standard, look for the larger size blanket.

- * Some electric blankets have convertible corners that may be used flat or snapped together at the bottom corners to fit the contour of the bed for extra warmth. Do not tuck in the portion with the wire in it under the mattress.

- * Electric blankets should not be covered with other bedding while in use so that the sensors can respond accurately to room temperature. If the blanket is left on and gets bunched

up or covered with clothes or heavy spreads, it can overheat, which will damage its operation.

- * Electric blankets must be machine washed in warm with a gentle cycle. Follow the care label to tumble or line dry. Do not dry clean electric blankets or mattress pads. Drycleaning solvents may damage the wiring insulation.

An electric blanket is an appliance and requires proper care and use to provide the expected service. Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions to extend the blanket's usefulness.



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4-H volunteers make program

The partnership of volunteers working with Oregon State University specialists and agents make Extension what it is.

Although it's the Extension Service mission to extend information from OSU to the people of Oregon, "We couldn't give all the individuals and families the information they need each year without volunteers."

An estimated 510 volunteers help with County Extension programs

each year, giving about 7,600 hours. At the rate of \$8 an hour, the donated time is valued at more than \$60,000. Although \$8 may seem high, volunteers are filling more responsible roles through the increasing number of master volunteer programs.

We see increased training efforts for volunteers as a trend in Extension to make the partnership more effective.

Drycleaning may cause damage to electric blanket wiring

Electric blankets and mattress pads should be laundered, not drycleaned. Drycleaning solvent may damage the wiring insulation. Most electric blanket use and care instructions explain appropriate care methods, points out Ardis Koester, Oregon State University Extension textiles and clothing specialist.

Blankets can be laundered in the washing machine with a gentle cycle using an 8 to 10 minutes warm soak/wash cycle, cold rinse, and minimum

agitation. Regular laundering detergents may be used. Dissolve powdered non-phosphate detergents in hot water before adjusting to the warm water setting. Most blankets instructions include warnings not to use chlorine bleach.

Blankets can be hand washed in a large tub or bathtub using similar times and water temperatures. Squeeze water out, but avoid twisting or vigorous wringing.

Dry blankets by draping them over

two parallel clothes lines or a drying rack. Electric blankets may be tumble dried to the "damp" stage (no more than 10 minutes in a home dryer), but full drying will damage the thermostat. Complete drying over clothes lines or a shower curtain rod.

Use these tips for a safe Christmas in your home

electrical fires. Use only lights that have been tested for safety. Look for the UL Label. Electric lights should not be used on a metallic tree.

Outdoor lights must be labeled for outdoor use. Fasten these lights securely to trees, walls, or other firm support to protect them from wind damage.

Check each set of lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections. Do not use damaged light sets.

Avoid using extension cords. If necessary, use no more than three light sets per extension cord. Do not hide cords under rugs as they might overheat. Too many lights on the same electric circuit will trip fuses. Avoid an overload by moving electrical equipment rather than adding extension cords to accommodate the holiday lighting.

Always turn off lights when you go to bed or leave home. A short circuit in any of the equipment could cause a fire.

Put child proof caps on unused outlets or sections on an extension cord. If your preschool child is extremely curious about the lights, try to plug the lights into an outlet that is controlled by a wall switch.

Open flames are especially haz-

ardous during this festive season when the house is filled with wrapping paper, ribbons, laces and trims. It is very important to keep the tree and trimmings away from heat sources.

By using tinsel or artificial icicles made of non-leaded material, you can avoid harm to children or pets if eaten. Mistletoe and holly berries as well as other plants are poisonous so must be kept out of children's reach.

Keep trimmings that are small, sharp, break easily or have removable parts out of your child's reach. Avoid use of ornaments that resemble candy or foods since a small child might try to eat them.

Small children can be curious, consider alternatives to the large tree that a child might pull over. Preschool children would enjoy a little tree that they could decorate and redecorate throughout the holiday season. Do not use electric lights or ornaments on "their" tree. Some families let the children decorate and play with ornaments near the bottom of the tree. Consider ornament size and durability if the children or pets can reach it.

Keep matches, lighters & candles out of children's reach.

Make an emergency plan to use if a fire breaks out. Know at least two escape routes.

Avoid wearing loose flowing clothes, especially long, open sleeves, near open flames or candles.

Never burn candles near evergreens on a mantle or table.

Do not burn wrapping paper, it produces carbon monoxide.

Make your child's visit pleasant

Children face mixed emotions switching homes between divorced parents. They may feel both excitement and anxiety about visiting the other parent. The parent being visited also may experience mixed emotions.

Jan Hare, Oregon State University Extension family life specialist, suggests some ways to make the visit more pleasant.

Provide some unscheduled time after your child's arrival. Rather than ask children to jump into a flurry of activities, let them relax, help fix a meal, or wash the car.

Provide them with an assortment of postcards and stamps. School-age children and teens generally are very attached to their friends. Postcards and occasional phone calls can help them keep in touch.

Establish some basic rules at the beginning and outline the expected schedule. Accommodate the child's regular schedule and routine as much as possible, but help your child understand that rules and routines will differ somewhat.

Focus on your relationship with

your child rather than ask about your ex-spouse's activities. Make a commitment to enjoy your time together and learn more about each other.

Make a holiday spending plan

We look forward to holiday activities such as special dinners with family and friends, travel, parties, and exchanging gifts. To enjoy the holidays, with a minimum of financial stress, make a spending plan.

Start by making a list of estimated holiday expenses—estimated costs of travel, special foods, parties, charitable gifts, greeting cards, postage, phone calls, and gifts. Make a list of people for whom you usually buy gifts, gift ideas for this year, and the approximate costs.

Estimate the amount of money you can spend on the holidays. How much is available from November and December incomes? How much, if any, are you willing to withdraw from savings? How much, if any, can you put on credit cards or charge

accounts?

If your spending estimates are greater than income estimates, think of ways to increase income or decrease expenses. Alice Mills Morrow, OSU Extension family economics specialist, suggests discussing this as a family.

Before deciding to reduce expenses, think about the activities that are most special. Think about ways to maintain and even expand the most meaningful events and eliminate those with less meaning or those which have become a burden.

As you spend for the holidays, keep track of the expenses whether they were paid for with cash, check, or credit card. If you find some expenses are higher than your estimates, make adjustments in your plan, Morrow advises.

Know which toys are safe gifts for your children before you buy them

Of all the gifts children will receive this Christmas, bicycles, tricycles, and skateboards will account for the most accidents. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), these vehicles will cause more than 400,000 childhood injuries. And more than 100,000 children are treated each year for injuries caused by other toys.

Choking on small toys, such as marbles, kit pieces, and crayons causes the most toy-related deaths in

infants. Balloons can be particularly dangerous: Children can easily choke on uninflated balloons or pieces of those that have been popped.

Here are a few safety tips recommended by the CPSC:

- * If you give your child a bicycle, tricycle, or skateboard, be sure the vehicle fits the child's age and maturity level. Also buy approved safety devices, such as helmets and arm and knee pads. Explain the safety rules and enforce them.

- * Read recommendations, but don't buy toys not suitable for your child's age.

- * Soft toys' eyes, noses, and other small parts should be tightly secured, so that such items cannot be pulled off and swallowed.

- * For infants and toddlers, avoid toys with long strings or cords; be very cautious about having cords of any length in cribs. Remove crib gyms as soon as the child can get up on hands and knees. Older babies can

get their necks caught in cords, or clothing can get caught in gyms or mobiles.

- * For children younger than 8 years, don't buy electric toys or those with heating elements.

- * Don't buy toys that shoot or propel objects that can injure eyes or become lodged in throats.

- * For older children, make sure arrows or darts have protective tops securely attached to their shafts.

- * Toy boxes should have a support device to hold the lid up; children have been killed by lids slamming down on their necks.

If you need specific information, call the Consumer Products Safety Commission Hotline at 1-800-638-2772.

Sending cookies by mail?

Baking cookies for far-off friends and family is a wonderful idea, but too often that's the way the cookie crumbles.

The best advice: First, go for sturdy cookies—ginger snaps, for instance. Chewy bar cookies, like blondies, and chunky drop cookies, such as oatmeal-raisin, are also mailbox friendly. Don't pack crisp and chewy cookies together—the crisp ones will absorb moisture and become limp.

Arrange cookies in fluted paper baking cups inside airtight decorative tins. Line the tins with gold or silver Mylar wrapping paper to lock in freshness. Use a shipping box made of corrugated cardboard, with extra room for padding (newspaper, bubble wrap or popped corn). Before sealing, shake the box. If it rattles, add more padding.

living indoor Christmas decorations that can later be transplanted outdoors in the home landscape. Many of these tree seedling decorations are Douglas-fir, Alberta spruce or coast pine.

You can also give outdoor landscape plants. Sasanqua camellia and either English holly or willow leaf holly can be planted outdoors in December in western Oregon. Gift packs that include bulbs and bulb planters are another possibility.

Try cranberry tea for the holidays

Combine the following: 1 quart of water and 1 quart of cranberries. Cook until skins burst and strain.

Add 2 1/2 cups sugar, 3/4 - 1 cup cinnamon red hot, 1 stick cinnamon, 4 whole cloves. Cook until red hot and sugar dissolve, remove cinnamon and cloves.

Add 2 cups orange juice, 3 lemons (juiced), 3 quarts of hot water. Serve hot or cold.

Helpful ideas given for holidays

Constantly cutting too much or too little wrapping paper? Loop string around the gift, then stretch the string out on the wrapping paper to calculate exactly how much paper you need.

Save old egg cartons for storing your small Christmas lights. Put the bulbs inside the carton and wrap the

Chocolate upside down cake

1 cup flour
2 Tbsp. cocoa
3/4 cup sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
Mix together & add:
1/2 cup milk
1 tsp. vanilla
2 Tbsp. melted butter
1/2 cup nuts (optional)
Pour in an 8 x 8 baking dish.
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 tsp. salt
2 Tbsp. cocoa
Mix and spread on top of batter.

Then mix 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1 cup cold water and pour over the top. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Best if served warm with whipped cream.

cord around the outside—bulbs won't break and the cord won't get tangled.

Another table-top treat that will make holiday meals more fun: Buy ice cube trays with compartment shaped like stars, trees, and hearts (found in houseware stores), fill with cranberry juice (or any brightly colored beverage) and then freeze.

Buy your teacher a gift

Teachers play a special part of your children's life. What to get them for the holidays shouldn't be too difficult. Nothing very expensive, but just enough to convey your appreciation of their difficult task.

A good rule is to ask your youngster to select the gift. He or she has a better knowledge of the teacher

than you do. Of course, your child may come up with some inappropriate choices, but here are some selections to help you along:

- Plants. A small plant for the desk or windowsill. A small cactus or other low-maintenance selection might be right.

- Stationery. Who writes more notes than a teacher? Several personalized pads or cubes could be helpful.

- Gift certificates. Nothing fancy. Either to a nearby restaurant where he or she can have a nice midweek lunch or to a book or record store.

- Kits. A small tool or sewing kits for that classroom emergency.

- Organizers. They come in all shapes and sizes these days and could be just the thing to help organize their busy schedules.

- Chocolates. Check first, but a soothing chocolate is always a pleasure after a long day.

Determine the moisture content of your Christmas tree

Fresh Christmas trees are safe indoor decorations says Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University (OSU) Extension home gardening agent. A freshly cut tree is best because it keeps its color longer and is less of a fire hazard in the home.

"Buy a tree with a high moisture content if possible," says McNeilan. "Try these methods to determine the moisture content of a tree."

- Break a small branch between your fingers; if the branch breaks easily, the tree or that part of the tree is dry. A dry tree is a high fire risk in the home.

- Tapping the tree trunk on the ground can indicate the tree's vitality. If an abundance of needles drop from the tree, a good part of the tree may be dangerously dry.

- Needles that bend and cannot be easily pulled from the tree's branches are a good indication that the tree is fresh.

After bringing the tree home, immediately saw two inches of trunk from the base of the tree, McNeilan says. This exposes fresh tissue that will readily absorb water.

If the tree is to be stored for some time before being moved indoors,

stand the tree trunk in a container filled with water. If the tree will be displayed immediately, set the trunk in a tree-stand designed to hold water.

After putting the tree indoors, fill the stand with water and keep it filled for as long as the tree remains in the home. Some tree-stands hold only a small amount of water, so be certain to fill these stands every day.

McNeilan suggests the following precautions to keep the tree fresh and safe while in the home:

- Locate the tree away from heat sources, such as heat registers and radiators.

- Be certain to place trees away from doors. In the event of a fire, the tree could block escape from the room.

- The cooler the room temperature, the longer the tree will stay fresh in the house. Consider lowering the thermostat a few degrees until after the holidays.

- Consider stabilizing tall trees with guy wires to the ceiling and

Consider practical gifts for gardeners

Holiday shopping for a home gardener? If so, you're in luck. There are lots of gardening things on the market that would make ideal gifts.

"If you want to give a practical gift consider a garden tool or sprinkler," says Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University (OSU) Extension home gardening agent.

Irrigation gift ideas include water wands, drip irrigation kits and decorative garden faucets. In the tool department, consider sets that consist of interchangeable tool extensions,

such as a rake, hoe, vegetable seeder, soil crumbler and cultivator, that all fit one handle.

Gardening books are always popular. Hundreds can be found in gardening and book stores. Try to match the information in the book to the climate region the gift recipient lives in, says McNeilan. And don't forget garden calendars. Many kinds are available.

Tree seedlings are another gift possibility. During the holidays, evergreen tree seedlings are sold as