

FOCUS

Australian homes often aren't built with winter in mind. Luckily Sydney winters are short, but when the chillier months do hit, an unprepared household doesn't just feel the freeze, but will have to part with extra cold hard cash come bill time.

Graham Cooke, energy expert at comparison site Finder, says the first step in avoiding winter bill shock is to shop around.

"Energy pricing is quite confusing so it can be easy to sign up to whoever your family or friends are with, but chances are you can find a better deal if you do your own research," he says.

He adds that energy providers are not in business to make friends so you shouldn't be either.

"One thing to remember when it comes to your energy plan is that loyalty does not pay off. If you've been with your energy provider for a while, it's likely

# Put your energy to good use

Making smart energy decisions now will make all the difference come bill time, writes Kirsten Craze

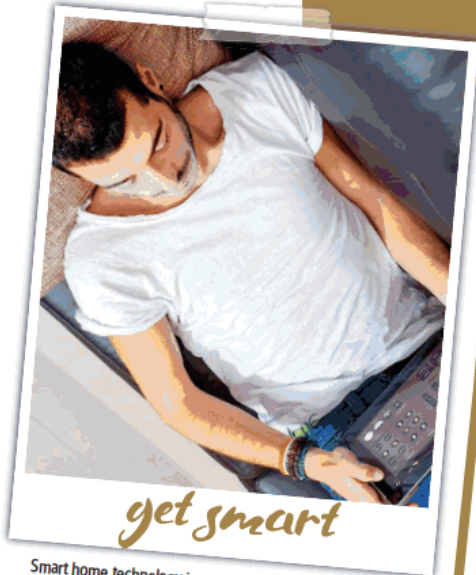
your discount period has ended and you've been bumped to a more expensive plan."

Graham suggests looking at what you are being charged per kilowatt, per hour, to get a more accurate comparison.

According to Hipages, insulation in an average family home will pay for itself in saved energy costs in just four years.

During the winter months approximately 25-35 per cent of a home's heat can escape through the ceilings as hot air naturally rises, while 15-25 per cent can be lost through the walls and 10-20 per cent via the windows. In addition, air leakage is responsible for 15-25 per cent of heat loss at home.

The trade services site estimates DIY insulation batts will cost homeowners from \$1200 per 100sq m of coverage, with more superior batts and other types such as spray or loose fill insulation potentially costing more, but it is an investment worth making. More: [finder.com.au](http://finder.com.au); [hipages.com.au](http://hipages.com.au)



get smart

Smart home technology is a great way to make your home more comfortable and convenient while also being more economically sustainable.

"Heating and cooling account for about 38 per cent of our home's energy consumption and about 45 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in the average Australian household, so smart planning and innovative technology are key elements of keeping our families warm and bills down," says Clipsal's Marc Jeisman. "Installing an energy monitoring system such as Clipsal's Wiser Energy gives you your very own energy coach with the ability to send notifications when you've reached, or exceeded, your monthly energy target."

More: [dipsal.com](http://dipsal.com)



go with the flow

Staying cosy and safe in winter means maintaining air flow when heating with gas. Each winter brings reports of households falling foul of poor ventilation, leading to carbon monoxide poisoning.

A flued gas heater vents air pollutants outside the home through a chimney or flue, but an unflued gas heater releases them directly into the home. Unflued gas heaters can be economical, but ensure yours is the correct size for the room, has a safety system that shuts down if there isn't enough fresh air and have it installed and maintained by a professional.

Clear all air vents in the room and keep the fresh air flowing with a door or window left ajar, or a reversed ceiling fan on low to keep the warm air circulating to all the right places.

More: [beaconlighting.com.au](http://beaconlighting.com.au)



cover up

Homes with floorboards and little to no insulation underneath can be the worst culprits when it comes to valuable hot air disappearing. Not only will an ample coverage of rugs help prevent air leakage, they also add character to individual rooms and zones around the house as well as keeping you cosy underfoot.

Also, if double-glazing your windows or fitting new seals is out of the question this winter, then rethink what types of window coverings you have.

A heavyweight curtain which covers the whole window will hold in more valuable heat than a blind and really personalise a room.

More: [carmineandteal.com](http://carmineandteal.com)



### HEAT IS ON

For renters or apartment-dwellers sometimes the most energy-efficient options are off the table, such as the latest hi-tech centralised heating or total insulation, but there are still ways to be savvy when buying winter appliances



*keep it contained*

**"IF YOU'VE BEEN WITH YOUR ENERGY PROVIDER FOR A WHILE, IT'S LIKELY YOUR DISCOUNT PERIOD HAS ENDED AND YOU'VE BEEN BUMPED TO A MORE EXPENSIVE PLAN"**

Cold winter evenings spent on the couch watching Netflix can be very cost-effective.  
 "If you're only looking for a heater to warm yourself up you might be better going with an electric throw blanket, which can cost 16 times less than using a traditional electric heater," Graham says.  
 "If you do want to buy a small portable heater then shop around. Fan heaters are cheaper upfront and can warm up a larger space quite quickly, but they do have high running costs. If you want to save money in the long run, it might be best going with an oil heater."  
 More: [kmart.com.au](http://kmart.com.au)



Guillaume Roux of Oblica Fireplaces says the first step to choosing a fire is deciding if you want the fireplace to be a feature, or simply a heating appliance.  
 "Then, do you want an in-built fireplace, a freestanding stove style, a sculptural suspended, or wall-hanging one? They all perform the same function and it comes down to personal taste," he says.  
 "When installing an open fireplace ensure the room is well-ventilated as a fire consumes oxygen."  
 More: [oblica.com.au](http://oblica.com.au)