

your home

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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

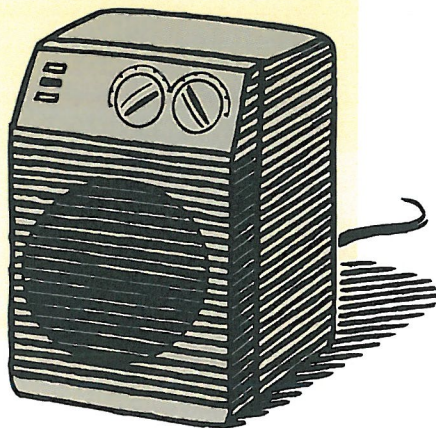
POWER balance

↘ It may be tempting to shut the doors and blast your air conditioning once summer kicks into full gear, but if you can avoid that impulse, you can actually save money as well as help the environment. Find out what you can do to save energy this summer with the following advice from the U.S. Department of Energy.

One easy way to take advantage of natural cooling is to turn off your air conditioning at night and open your windows instead. This will let cool air into your house that you can trap by closing the windows when you wake up in the morning. Making sure your windows have a tight seal will also prevent cold air from escaping, and it will help you save energy in the winter.

Turning off appliances that emit heat is another simple way to save on energy and keep your house cool. Using items such as your oven, lamps and dishwasher will cause your house to heat up, requiring your air conditioner to do more heavy lifting. You can avoid building up excessive heat in the house by cooking outside or doing the dishes at night when it is easier to keep the house cool.

Learning how to program your thermostat will also pay dividends. If your house is unoccupied for periods throughout the day, set your thermostat so the air conditioning isn't operating during those times.



CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION



Summer is here, and there's no better way to celebrate than with a cool drink at an outdoor party with your friends and family. If throwing your own celebration is part of your summer plan, these tips from RealSimple.com will help make your party seem effortless.

Get help: While you may want to give the impression that you pulled off the perfect party all by yourself, if you really want to ensure everyone has a great time — including yourself — ask one of your friends to help you with simple day-of tasks, such as making sure the garbage isn't full or restarting the music when the playlist ends.

Eat right: Pick smart choices for your party. This means if it's outdoors, try to find things that are easy to eat without making a mess. Finger foods like bruschetta or small sandwiches are always a big hit. If you're making a salad, try using hardier greens like cabbage that won't wither in the heat as easily; lightly dressed coleslaw is great for this.

Banish bugs: Citronella candles at the edges of your party will help drive away annoying insects. You can also leave bowls of juice (cherry is one that works well) farther away to attract insects so they don't bother your guests.

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HOME AWAY from home

✓ Renting a vacation house offers a lot that hotels or other accommodations often don't provide: keeping your large group together, cooking out and eating family style, and unique amenities such as a private pool or hot tub. Finding the right rental for your group isn't always easy, however. Here are some tips from *The New York Times* and *Frommers.com* to help you make a decision on a rental this summer.



and about and just use the house as a place to sleep, you probably want to go for a less expensive option.

DECIDE EARLY ... OR DON'T: Good rental properties are tough to find, and that is doubly true if you're heading somewhere during popular vacation times such as Christmas or spring break. So if you locate a place you're particularly fond of, book it as soon as you can finalize your plans. However, if you're the spontaneous type, you can sometimes find big dis-counts by waiting until the last minute because discounted renters are better than no renters at all for property owners.

DO YOUR RESEARCH: These days, there is no shortage of information about available rentals. Sites like VRBO.com, FlipKey (which is run by TripAdvisor), and HomeAway.com list thousands of rental homes in North America and across the world. Once you've located a few rentals you like, make sure what you see is accurate. Check the owner's website, online reviews and comments from past users on sites like Yelp or Facebook.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WANT: Determine your priorities before you start looking. A beachfront place may be more expensive, but if your family loves the water, it may be worth it. If you know your group is more likely to be out

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