10 Ways To Heat Your Home & Stay Warm in Winter
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Winter is upon us and hopefully you’ve prepared to keep warm. The majority of the population lives and work in the cities and suburbs of the world and come winter time, people think less about keeping warm than they do about preparation. They are annoyed that it’s cold and snowing and it becomes a thing that people just have to deal with. This creates a form of complacency that brings with it a very real danger.

Not a likely danger mind you, but a real one that most people are not prepared for in the case of an unexpected winter storm. Earlier this year (November, 2014) Buffalo, NY was hit by a winter blizzard that buried entire areas under 7 feet of snow in less than a couple days.

This caught everyone off guard and completely by surprise. It strained the city’s infrastructure and pushed it beyond its maximum capability. Power went out, streets and highways were shut down, and the city ground to a icy halt.

Circumstances like the Buffalo, NY blizzard happen all the time all over the world. Maybe not to the severity and magnitude of that winter storm, but it happens. Above average snow fall, wind, below normal temperatures, power goes out, black-outs, roads get closed down, and usually when these kinds of scenarios present themselves, people are simply unprepared for it.

10 Ways To Heat Your Home & Stay Warm in Winter

by Eric Wichman
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The idea of course is to be prepared, to be ready, and to have the things you need to keep warm in winter. Keeping out the chill becomes one of the top priorities if your primary source of heat fails. Depending on where you are in the world and the severity of the weather in your area, this will dictate how you prepare. Here’s how to keep your home warm in winter.

Plug Your Holes!

Think of your house as a balloon. If your balloon leaks, then the higher pressure air inside wants to get outside until equilibrium is reached. Hot air has a higher pressure than cold air, so all that warm and cozy air circulating through your house really wants to get out into the frigid winter sky, and it will find just about any pathway to do so. If your windows and doors aren’t sealed, then you’re leaking comfort, forcing your heat source to work overtime, or be less effective. That translates to dollars on your energy bill, and shivers as you lay in bed.
with icicles dangling off your ears.

Check the framing around your window to make sure there isn’t just some gaping hole between the shims that hold your window in place. Seal the edges with silicon. It’s cheap and the little gun runs for just a few bucks at your local hardware store. Your hardware store also sells weather stripping for your doorway, and don’t neglect the threshold under the doors. They can settle and shift making the bottom of your door a major leak point.

Oftentimes the entire threshold can be replaced. If your home is sealed up tight, then you should get a big blast of air when you close your front door, and it will be difficult to slam. You might even find yourself haunted if opening and closing one door shuts a door in another room. Keep a camera handy and post it on YouTube, people eat that crap up! If your ears pop every time you open a door, then you’re on the right track. Just make sure you open a door every so often to keep from running out of oxygen.

**You Gotta Keep It Insulated**

Direct airflow isn’t the only way your home can lose heat. Warm air warms the walls, doors, and windows of your home and that heat energy then
warms the outside air. The farther slower that heat transfer can take place, the slower you are going to inside heat to the outside world. Most insulation is a fluffy material with lots of air pockets to retard the thermal transfer and retain as much heat as possible.

If you've still got single pane windows, then you probably want to cover them tightly at night or during very overcast days with a towel to prevent them from passing your toasty atmosphere right into Jack Frost's lap. During sunny days, the incoming sunlight will do more to heat your home than your windows will lose, but double pane windows are still the way to go. In either case, if you can draw lewd and lascivious hieroglyphs on the layer of frost inside your window, then you've got a nasty source of heat loss, and need to duct-tape them up with something soft and fluffy. Also, if you found yourself with gaping holes beside your windows when you were checking your seals, then you should probably invest in some spray foam insulation that you can jam in those cracks and fill them up. This will reduce the thermal transfer in addition to helping seal any drafts. Do this around door jams and any other opening to the outside. Chances are the fine craftsmen that build your home didn't cut every hole just right and there will be gaps that are simple covered up by trimming. Your attic is also another place where you can lose some heat. Heat rises and if all that separates you from that drafty bare junk haven is half an inch of drywall, then the bats in your belfry are freeloaders of your energy bill. If you've found yourself up to your eyeballs in snow, literally, then that's actually a good thing. New fallen snow is about 90% air making a great insulator. All manner
of animals create snow burrows for hibernation, so you'll actually find it easier to keep in the heat if your home is covered in snow.

**Back That Ash Up!**

You should always have a backup source of heat in case your utilities fail you. If you're cold, then so are your neighbors, and everybody is turning on their heater or furnace at about the same time you are. Your local infrastructure may not be able to keep up with demand, especially during a blizzard. You should always have a backup for these situations, whether it be a wood burning furnace, propane tanks that you can hook into your gas line, or a gas generator that can power a few space heaters. If you have a wood burning appliance, make sure your exhaust system, such as your chimney, didn't get clogged with snow. Drifting off into an eternal slumber as you cuddle up with your family in front of a warm fire that is filling your home with carbon monoxide will put a damper on anyone's winter, so put on your galoshes, get up on that roof and clear any obstructions from your exhaust. Whatever your backup solution is, make sure you've got a ready supply of fuel in a cool dry location that you can access on those days when your front door won't even open.

**Only Heat It If You Need It**

In extreme situations, it may make sense to cordon off certain areas of your home that aren't necessary. If you're trapped under seven feet of snow, it's not likely that you'll need that guest bedroom, or bathroom. Shut the vents in those rooms and stuff a towel under the door to reduce the amount of area you need to heat to preserve fuel. Only go
outside when you absolutely need to and go out as a group. Going in and out, in and out, just allows more and more heat to exit. If you can exit the home through an already cordoned area that is not heated, but also not nearly as cold as the outside, then you’ve got yourself a sort of air-lock to help reduce drastic releases of warmth.

**You Ought To Move It Move It! Physical activity!**

If you’ve seen the Matrix, then you’re well aware that we humans are an excellent source of heat in and of ourselves. Being stuck inside your home during the winter is a great time for pilates, so you can shrink that butt and stay warmer at the same time. If you’ve got a partner, then you can really heat things up and find yourself less miserable during those bleak winter days. If you’re staying active, then you won’t need to keep the thermostat nearly as high, and your own extra body heat will help warm up your home. So rather than putting on your Snuggie, tuning into Netflix with that pack of twinkies and hot cocoa, and sitting around all day waiting for winter to pass you buy with the thermostat at 85 degrees, you should tune into Daily Burn and turn your cozy cottage into a hot sauna, all the while running your thermostat at 65 degrees and wondering why it’s so hot in your house!

**Passive Aggressive Solar**

If it’s cold outside, and there isn’t enough snow to help insulate your home, but just enough to cover your roof and yard, then what you’ve got yourself is a giant reflector. All that wonderful solar radi-
ation, blasting back into space, and none of it to keep you warm. That's just criminal! If you can, get that snow off your roof. Your dark shingles will absorb some of the heat, and your attic might actually get warm.

**Passive Solar Air Heater Using Soda Cans**

Using this same principle, you can build solar air heaters that pass air heated by the sun into your home. Most of these can be built on the cheap, and drastically reduce your daytime energy bills. Some designs just use soda cans painted black with air inlets cut into the home, and others you build to fit your windows so that you can just close them at night when the sun stops working for you. If you’re in the design stage of your new home or off-grid homestead, keep most of your windows facing south and keep a solar air box in mind.

**Fireplace or Woodstove**

Old fashioned fireplaces and wood stoves are probably the most popular way to heat a cabin or county home. Larger homes however, require large heat pumps and ductwork, vents and blowers, but a smaller cabins and homes don’t really need large and expensive heating units. A small wood stove or strategically placed fireplace is the go-to choice for many off-gridders. Fuel sources are typically wood.

Even though this is probably the most popular choice when it comes to home heating, it falls low on our list of heating methods simply because it’s not really sustainable. Cutting down trees to
heat your home is taking from the environment. If you can source your firewood from a sustainable source like downed trees or even if you plant 5-10 trees for every tree you cut down for firewood, then it might be sustainable.

With that said, firewood is a great heat source which humans have been using for tens of thousands of years. It’s efficient, and it’s cheap, and readily available in rural areas.

A wood stove is an inexpensive way to heat your home and if you purchase or build your cabin yourself, one with a brick or stone fireplace is probably going to go a long way to keeping you warm in the harshest of winters. Besides that, it’s just plain cozy and gives one that comfortable off grid feel, getting back to our roots.

**Now You’re Cooking With Gas!**

**Propane & Natural Gas**

These are good sources of heat, though they fall last on our list because like firewood, they are NOT sustainable because they’re fossil fuels. They will heat your home in a pinch if you absolutely need
the heat and have no other way to stay warm. Propane and natural gas, though unsustainable is best used as an emergency backup heat source for heating water, cooking, and heating your home or cabin.

So don’t let seasonal affect disorder bring you to the brink of insanity this winter!

Stay warm, stay healthy, and beat those energy bill blues with common sense approaches to keeping your home sealed, insulated and warm. Also, keep your body moving this winter to release the fires from within and work off those Holiday hips.

Heating your cabin isn’t as complicated or expensive as some would lead you to believe. There are lots of ways to stay warm in winter if you use some creative thinking, and stay sustainable.

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