

How to avoid the winter power bill shock

After a summer of paying skimpy power bills, it can be easy to forget how quickly they jump as the temperature drops. Making some changes around your home over the next few weeks could make a real difference to what you'll pay for power this winter.



by **Kate Harvey**



A few changes around the home got Tesha MacGregor hooked on finding ways to save on power.

Just ask Tesha MacGregor, from Turangi.

A \$300 monthly power bill used to be the norm for her household over winter. But last winter she got it down to half that: \$150.

It started with a visit from an assessor who was going door to door helping people reduce their power bills as part of a government project. Tesha was given Ecobulbs – a New Zealand-invented LED bulb that replaced all her old light bulbs without any electrical work having to be done. She was also given a shower head that lets her control how much water comes out.

“It’s made such a big difference,” Tesha said. “Those old bulbs were just chewing up power. Now we can leave a light on at night and it doesn’t cost us anything.”

Seeing such a big difference on her power bill got Tesha interested in what else she could do to get it down further. Her landlord came to the party by putting a rangehood above the oven to take away moisture during cooking. And sealing tape was put around the windows to stop the draughts.

Tesha and her partner love their fireplace and have noticed the heat is staying inside more now as a result of the window gaps being blocked.

“We always dry our clothes in the sunshine or if it’s raining, we put them out in the garage. We never use the dryer any more because it would mean more power getting chewed up.”

She also has a new habit of trying to trap the sun’s warmth.

“The sun hits the lounge in the afternoon and once it starts to move away, I quickly close the curtains,” she said. “It’s also important to have good, thick curtains because they keep the house really warm.”

The couple’s clothes now only get washed in cold water and the freezer in the shed doesn’t stay plugged in all year. Once the hunting season’s venison has run out, it’s cleaned out until it’s ready to be used again.

“We only have the one supermarket in Turangi and it’s so expensive to buy food here,” Tesha said. “So the extra money is used to buy little extras each shop to get us through winter. I’ll buy a bit of extra meat and put it in the freezer or cook it up first. Then when winter does come, we’ll have enough to carry us through.”

Tesha, a former supermarket deli assistant, has turned her new interest in saving power into her job – she’s joined the team of assessors and is now helping others avoid a power bill shock this winter.

Some of the houses she goes to are so remote, other assessors can’t get to them. It’s only because Tesha has a 4WD that she can.

She’s visiting people who live near the skifields and are used to it being cold, but the cost of power has made some change their habits.

“They’ve gone back to the old way of living,” she said. “They’re using hot water bottles instead of electric blankets and hanging their clothes in front of the fire instead of using a dryer.

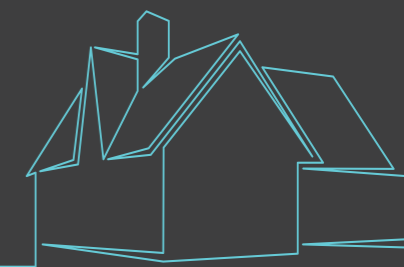
“Water heating takes up so much of your power when you’re living under the mountain, so they’ll go down to a hot spring for a bath or go to the indoor pool just so they can use the shower there.”

She’s seeing people light a fire under an old bath and have a soak outside in winter too, as well as cooking over bonfires.

“For a lot it’s like they’re camping. They’ll use their barbecue in winter rather than the oven.”

Our tips to help you get your house ready for winter

Here are more things you can do around your house this autumn that will save you money in winter.



- 1** If you’re thinking of installing insulation, prioritise the ceiling – it’s where you lose the most heat and is usually the easiest to do.
- 2** When we tested curtains, it was floor-length, heavy lined curtains that did the best job of keeping the heat in. Even when heavy lined curtains only went to the length of the windowsill, they still did a better job than floor-length thermal curtains. Thermal curtains have a plastic coating bonded to the fabric, while heavy lined have an extra layer of fabric.
- 3** In our test of window blinds, honeycomb blinds did the best job of keeping the heat in. Roman blinds were next best, followed by roller blinds then, lastly, Venetians.
- 4** Try putting rolled-up towels above your curtain rail. This hack won’t do much for the aesthetics of your home but we found it increased the performance of curtains by creating a seal at the top.
- 5** If you know you’re going to be hanging your washing inside, spin the load on the fastest speed. Every extra drop squeezed out at spinning means less evaporating into your living space.
- 6** If part of your house doesn’t get a lot of airflow and tends to be damp, consider a dehumidifier. It does a good job of drying out small spaces and acts as a heater too. You can see which models we rate on our website. Or if you already have one, make sure its filter is cleaned out and ready to be used again.
- 7** Make sure the pots you cook with have close-fitting lids so steam doesn’t escape.
- 8** A shower dome over the top of a shower will turn steam into condensation and send it down the drain.
- 9** Compare power companies at [powerswitch.org.nz](https://www.powerswitch.org.nz). We run this comparison website to help you find the best deal on power. On average, Powerswitch users save \$385 a year. You fill out a quick questionnaire about your house, compare prices and then activate the move to a new company.
- 10** Consider changing the way you use power around your house. Some power plans give you cheaper off-peak power or free periods of power. So you could save by moving your major power use to these times.
- 11** If you’ve been using an LPG gas heater, make this the autumn you ditch it. They’re expensive to run and also fill the air with moisture. Heat pumps are the cheapest heater to run.
- 12** Give your heat pump filters a vacuum to make them work more efficiently. They slide out easily and once you’ve done it, you’ll notice the difference straight away.
- 13** If you’re going to buy an electric heater, look for one with a thermostat to maintain an even temperature so it’s more cost efficient. One with a fan will also warm up a room faster and distribute the air more evenly. DeLonghi and Dimplex are our Top Brands – based on how they perform in product testing and what people have told us in our reliability and customer satisfaction surveys.

POWERSWITCH
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