

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, February 23, 1933
U. S. Department of Agriculture

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Keeping the House Warm." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, U.S.D.A.

- - - oCo - - -

While we're considering bills and budgets and practical ways to save on household expenses, we ought to mention the coal bill or the oil or wood bill--in other words, the cost of keeping the house warm these February days, because that's an item bothering a lot of us. Some of the money spent on fuel goes up the chimney because the furnace isn't well managed. And leaks and cracks and chinks here and there let out the heat and let in the cold. You'd be surprised how much fuel you can save by using some very simple devices for keeping the warm air in your house and the cold out and by managing your heating equipment carefully.

What are some of the best ways to cut fuel costs yet keep the house comfortable? Mr. S. H. McCrory, who is chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, suggests, first, that you heat only the rooms in actual use in your home at this season. When fuel is scarce, better keep a few rooms comfortable than merely take the chill off the whole house. This may seem like going back to the old days when downstairs rooms were like the tropics and upstairs rooms were like the arctic regions. We've grown so used to the idea of heating every room that we don't realize how much fuel we can save in an emergency by cutting off a room or two upstairs and hanging a heavy curtain across a hallway or over a door to stop drafts. Of course, you need to see that the radiator pipes in these unheated rooms don't freeze. During a very cold snap, tie blankets or a thick layer of newspapers around the radiators in these cold rooms.

Another way to save heat is to stop up the leaks through cracks and around doors and windows. Weather stripping is the thing for this purpose. The ideal time to put on weather stripping is in the summer or fall. And the ideal weather strips are of metal, or wood, or good grade felt. But, in an emergency, cheap felt stripping quickly put on with a few tacks will help a great deal. One neighbor of mine recently made his own weather stripping by cutting strips of rubber from old tires and inner tubes and tacking those around windows. Another ingenious friend, who couldn't manage even weather stripping, made narrow bags of unbleached muslin, just the width of her windows, and filled them with sand. She laid these long sandbags at the joining of the upper and lower sashes of her windows. They weren't noticeable and they stopped a lot of cold drafts.

Speaking of very simple devices, you'll find that just pulling the shades clear down below the sills and drawing the curtains way across the windows on cold winter evenings helps keep a room warmer. You see, the shades and curtains act as insulators. Storm doors and windows also act as insulators. If the man of the house will make a storm door just from scrap lumber or an old packing box and cover it with roofing paper, it may save a lot of fuel and make the house more comfortable. A man, handy with tools, may also find it worth while to put thresholds at the bedroom doors. When the bedroom windows are open at night, cold air won't leak under the doors to chill the main part of the house.

An open fireplace chimney is another place where heat escapes when a fire isn't burning on the hearth. If the chimney has a damper, be sure to close it when the fireplace isn't in use. Or get a wooden panel, made of two or three boards tacked together, to fit up into the throat of the chimney.

So far we've talked about ways to keep heat from escaping and cold from coming into the house. Now let's consider managing the heating equipment itself.

First, see that the chimney and smoke pipe are clean and give a good draft, and that the dampers are in order. Then, you can force your fire or check it, as you wish. An easy way to inspect your chimney from the bottom is to remove the smoke pipe and hold a mirror in the opening. Generally, the best way to clean a dirty chimney is for a man to get up on the roof and swab it out with a sack of straw weighted with a brick or some other heavy object. You can brush out the dirt from the smoke pipe. When you put this pipe back into the chimney, see that it fits tightly. Fill in any cracks with ordinary clay, if you have nothing better on hand.

By the way, better keep watch of the condition of your grates both in the stove and the furnace. When grates warp or break, good unburned fuel falls through and is lost in the ashes. To avoid overheating or warping the grates, keep your ash pit clean. Of course, a fire burns better when the ashes are raked down to allow a draft underneath. In an emergency, you can use a piece of sheet iron with holes punched in it over the broken grate to save fuel. Wire the sheet iron loosely over the grate. You can stop up leaks around the ash pit with ordinary clay.

Now about choosing fuel for economy. Of course, your selection will depend a good deal on local supplies. Ton for ton the low grades of coal have about as much heating value as the better grades, but they are often dirty and difficult to burn in a home furnace or stove. If you use soft coal, you'll find that dampening it will help keep down smoke and dust. Sprinkle the coal before it goes into the bin and again before you shovel it onto the fire. Put only small quantities of the soft coal on your fire at a time and be careful not to smother the fire. Shake it frequently or break up the crust with a poker.

If you happen to be planning a house and are trying to decide on the type of heating system to install, you'll be interested to know that a new bulletin is being printed right now which gives the general principles of house heating and explains the advantages of different types of equipment. This bulletin is called "Heating the Farm Home" and will be on sale very soon. You can have it by sending your address and five cents to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

Tomorrow: We'll talk about oranges, grapefruit and lemons.

