

What did you say about the...



Mechanicals

Furnace filter:

Buy the inexpensive filters and change them one a month. It is the easiest and best way to make sure your furnace will last. You should reasonably expect a furnace to last 20-25 years.

Humidifier:

Change the pad annually before the heating season. Do not run it in the summer time, you definitely do not want to add humidity into the air conditioning. Set the humidistat to roughly one-half the indoor air temperature and then monitor your windows. Condensation on the glass means you have too much humidity and that is not good for your house so back the humidistat off; a static shock every time you turn around means you don't have enough, so turn the humidistat up.

Programmable thermostat – forced air system:

Generally leave the AC set a constant temperature. It takes a lot more energy to cool a house down than it does to heat it up. The heat you can vary through the course of the day. Even the most basic programmable thermostat has 4 settings for the weekdays and 4 for the weekend. If you keep a consistent schedule you can program the thermostat to warm the house up before you wake up, lower the temperature when you go to work, bring it back up when you come home and finally drop it when you go to bed. If the temperature is not what you want it to be you can always override it and when the thermostat gets to the next programming cycle it will automatically go back. If you are going away for a prolonged period of time, you can set and hold the heat setting and the temperature will remain at that setting until you release it.

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Boiler thermostat settings:

The heat can be varied with a boiler as well, but since radiant heat is generally slower to respond than forced air, it is generally better to leave the heat at a constant temperature. A boiler can last 30 years or more.

AC condenser:

Don't cover it in the wintertime, it is meant to be outside. Make sure the unit stays clean, that is done by simply hosing it off. Yes, you can wash it out with a garden hose – it gets rained on. Also, make sure the insulation on the refrigerant line is in good shape. Over time sunlight and exposure to the elements will cause it to break down. A dirty AC unit and missing insulation will cause the unit to work harder costing you more to run it and shortening its useful life. You should reasonably expect an AC unit to last 10-15 years.

Water heater temperature setting:

Set the temperature of the water heater to no more than 120°F. Any hotter and you are increasing your risk of being scalded and you are wasting money. You are also shortening the life of the tank by overstressing the bottom. Your clothes are not going to get any cleaner and your dishwasher has a heating element in it. The easiest way to check the temperature is to use a food thermometer, digital or the simple one I use, at the kitchen sink.

How to tell how old a system is:

Most mechanical systems today have a date of manufacture right on the nameplate. Of those that don't, often the age is in the serial number. Different manufactures will put the age different places. Most serial numbers are written as 1234A56789. The age is the first 4 digits. Most often, the second pair is the year, if it is reversed that is often stated with year/week. For instance, an AC unit, furnace or water heater with a serial number like 4598G07512 was manufactured in 1998, probably in the 45th week. Some manufactures have a longer serial number, like FD5DY707390945897. In this case, you have to look a little deeper into the number. Here the age is the 4 numbers after the FD5DY707, 3909. So this unit was probably manufactured in the 39th week of 2009. Some manufactures don't put a build date in the serial number nor do they give a build date. In this case you have to look at the ANS standard it was built to. This doesn't always work, especially for boilers, but typically that standard changes every three years. So a unit built to a standard of 2002 can be no older than 2002. To get a more accurate age, add three to the standard year, so in this case 2005, and you should be within a year or two either way of how old that appliance is. If the home was built, renovated or converted in the last 5-10 years you can be reasonably sure the units would be as old as the house using the ANS standard method of estimating the age.