

Take small steps to save on monthly bills

I have done a good job in 2014 about getting my spending under control. Now I'm looking at my monthly utility bills. What are some of the best ways to trim those costs?

Bills for electricity, gas, phones and water can add up significantly. So can trimming those costs, especially if you widen the scope to include Internet service and cable or satellite television.

Here are just a few ideas to help you begin cutting costs:

- If you don't already have one, install a programmable thermostat. A programmable thermostat allows you to automatically adjust heat and cool settings to use less energy when you'll be away from the house, whether it's during working hours or when you're away on vacation, and still make sure the house is at a comfortable temperature when you get home. The U.S. Department of Energy says you can save 5 to 15 percent a year on your energy bill using a programmable thermostat. But the trick is to know how to use it: A 2003 study by Carrier, which makes such thermostats, found that more than half of the people who owned them never used the programmable features.

- Consider getting a home energy audit. A professional can determine if your home has air leaks and needs additional caulking or insulation, and can also provide other guidance. In the past few years, utility companies have offered such audits at a reasonable cost, but those programs may be drawing to a close. Check now with your home heating utility to find out if the service is available. But beware of scams. Someone



coming to your door offering a free audit could be a con.

- Replace regular incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, LEDs or halogen incandescents and you'll save between 25 and 80 percent in your lighting costs, according to the energy department.

- To reduce your water bill, be aware that small steps add up. Take shorter showers; run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full; don't let the water run when hand-washing dishes or brushing your teeth. Outdoors, consider getting a rain barrel to water the garden with during the summer.

- Study your cable/satellite TV charges and determine if you can sign up for a lower-cost basic plan. Contact your provider to find out if there are any special deals you can sign up for to reduce your bill. If there are certain shows you don't want to miss, you may be able to watch them through DVD rental or a streaming service for less money. Ask friends and family what they use for television viewing, and if they're satisfied with the service and the cost.

- Similarly, check your phone and Internet service. Are there less expensive options you can choose? As with television service, you may be able to cut your bill by talking with a customer service agent with your provider.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or f Filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: Next month, Family Fundamentals will have a new look for 2015.

This column was reviewed by Nancy Stehulak, Ohio State University Extension educator in Family and Consumer Sciences.

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