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A little know-how and work will save a lot of fuel

★INSULATE
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So now, in a tight house, a vapor barrier is not recommended in the attic floor. With 6 to 12 inches of insulation, a vapor barrier is academic. If you want to put one in, fine, if you don't, fine, too.

If you already have some insulation installed, then definitely do not add another vapor barrier; don't use one at all. Just add enough unbacked insulation to bring the total to 9 to 12 inches.

Install fiber glass insulation between the joists in an attic floor. For more than 6 inches, add another 3½ or 6 inches. Nine or 12 inches will come up above the tops of the joists, but this is OK. Do not cover the joists; you won't know where to walk if you have any reason to work in the attic.

If your attic has a floor, you have two options: have insulation blown in or rip up the floor and install insulation as you would if there was no floor. If the insulation does not go higher than the tops of the joists, you can reinstall the floor.

Ventilation

When you insulate your attic floor, attic ventilation is a must. Otherwise moisture is likely to collect and then condense on cooler surfaces. This causes wooden members to become damp, which encourages growth of mildew, which can cause decay. Dripping water also can ruin insulation.

The rule for ventilation is to have three square feet of ventilating area for every 300 square feet of attic floor area.

This formula can be used when installing any kind of ventilation. Most common is triangular aluminum vents with louvers and screens at the top of the gable, where the roof line forms an upside down "V". If you have a chimney at one gable end, vents can be installed on each side of the chimney.

If you have a hip roof (roof coming down to the eaves on all four sides of the house, eave vents can be installed, either in strips or round vents.

Wall insulation

Putting insulation in finished walls presents a unique problem. If you have an old house and tend to tear out the walls in every room you renovate, then you can put in insulation with vapor barrier before putting up new walls.

But if this is not necessary, it has to be blown by a contractor.

Either way, 3½ inches is usually maximum because this is the thickness of the air space. .

Blown-in insulation can be fiber glass, mineral wool or a new plastic foam called urea formaldehyde. Fiber glass is the most common, and the plastic is the most expensive.

All insulation blown in the walls can present a condensation problem because it has no vapor barrier, which must be toward the heated part of the house.

At any rate, for existing walls you can paint a vapor barrier on the inside of the exterior walls. It must be a low permeability paint, which is generally two coats of an oil based paint. Also, some manufacturers, such as Glidden, make a special vapor barrier paint. Most such paints can be used as a base under ordinary interior wall and trim paints, or under wallpaper.

Insulating basement

There's often an argument about insulating your basement ceiling. Some people advise against it, noting that the furnace helps keep the basement warm and the rising warm air warms the upstairs floors.

Others say pooh pooh to this, maintaining that the floors will be just as warm with insulation under them, and snuggling down the house this way will save heat. We agree with the latter opinion.

Install 2½ to 3½ inches of insulation in the basement ceiling. Install the vapor barrier toward the heated part of the house. It might be tough to staple the vapor barrier that's obscured by insulation, but it's possible. To keep the insulation from dropping down (it will be exposed), staple chicken wire under it.

Crawl Spaces

If you have a crawl space, insulating the floor above it is a must; the technique is the same. You can even insulate down the edge of the walls to the dirt floor. Because the walls are probably concrete, you can staple the insulation to the perimeter joist and let it hang down the wall to the floor. Where it bends around the sill, nail wood strips ¼ by 1¼ inches over the insulation and into the sill.

The earth should be covered with a vaper barrier, to prevent moisture from the earth from getting up into the insulation. Put down 6 mil (6/1000 of an inch) polyethylene, lap sections by two feet and tuck it under the insulation that is sitting on the earth. You can also use roll roofing, half lapped, but it's more expensive.

You can put a 2x4 board along the insulation where it goes from the wall to the earth, just to weigh it down. Rocks will do well, too.

Ventilate your crawl space, using a 1/100 ratio; that is, one square foot of ventilating area to 100 square feet of crawl space area.

Vents must be open in the summer, can be closed in the winter. As for basements, you can install screens in basement windows for summer ventilation.

You can even insulate your basement, but this is not really necessary unless you use the basement for living space and heat it.

Pipes and ducts

A cool basement that has insulation on its ceiling requires one more job: insulate hot water heat pipes with wrap-around or tubular insulation. Insulate domestic hot water pipes the same way.

You can insulate hot air ducts with duct insulation, which is one or inches of fiber glass backed by a vinyl vapor barrier. The vapor barrier goes on the outside.

This insulation comes in four-foot-wide rolls. Cut it long enough so you can wrap a section around a round or rectangular duct; leave enough overlap so you can fold the vinyl edges on themselves and staple them together. You can rent or borrow a special stapler that staples on itself, making a neat seam.

When you've done all these things, and correctly, you should save 40 to 50 percent of your fuel consumption.

And that's a lot.

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