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Cool Home Design

Take advantage of passive cooling to naturally cool your living space. You'll be surprised how your property value, as well as your comfort, may rise.

Now that summer's swelter is in full swing, notice how much heat is radiating into your home from those enormous south-facing windows? Do you long for the tantalizing shade of a forest grove? Worried about how much your utility is going to charge you next month, as your air conditioner chugs away with the regularity of a freight train? True, it may be too late to make substantial changes to your dwelling in order to combat the oppressive heat of this season. But that doesn't mean you can't observe and learn for the future, or start planning now for your next renovation or improvement project. By maximizing some common sense applications of what's called passive heating and cooling, you can take advantage of the natural heat storage and flow of the materials in and around your home.

Get in Line with the Sun While you can't exactly rotate your whole house through the day like a lizard sunning itself on a rock, you can try to plan your building's orientation in the first place. Spend some time on the site before you break ground, and you can design so summer's harshest rays are mitigated, while the winter sun is welcomed into windows and onto heat-absorbing walls.
Choose Colors Wisely You wouldn't wear a black suit to a summer parade, would you? If you live in a hot climate, think light colors for exteriors (including the roof), as well as walls and window coverings. Interior paints matter, too.
Plant Your Way to Shade Not only does vegetation improve your home's value (and carbon footprint), but give some thought to species selection. Deciduous plants are great in temperate climes, because they shield sunlight in summer and allow it in during winter.
Awnings and Overhangs Aren't Just for Stores Since the sun travels across the sky in predictable arcs, proper depth and placement of awnings and overhangs (as well as inset windows) can work wonders by blocking summer's near vertical solar rays, while letting in the low-angle rays of winter. The farther north you are, the bigger the awning should generally be, since there will be greater variation in seasonal light. Also consider glass with low-emittance (low-E) coating, which reduces heat transfer.
Punch Holes in Walls No, don't just unleash on your room with a sledgehammer, as frustrating as stuffy heat may be. But you can install vents in high spaces that allow hot air to escape, while low ducts can pull in cooler air. If you''re ambitious, you can build a cooling tower, which takes advantage of the heat gradient on a larger scale to provide substantial cooling. Think these techniques aren't worth the trouble? According to the U.S. Department of Energy, such passive solar design can cut heating bills by as much as 50 percent.

Get green air conditioning tips.

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- Keeping Your Cool (Easy Home Tips)
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- List of 10 Biggest Wildfires Now Burning

Stay Cool Recipes

- Chilled Cucumber-Melon Soup with Radish Salsa
- Strawberry Granita
- Tomato, Fava Bean and Smoked Gouda Salad