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How to adjust a water heater temperature

PROJECT LEVEL EASY ENERGY SAVINGS 4%-22% annually TIME TO COMPLETE 2 HOURS OVERALL COST \$0 Although some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140°F, most households usually only require them to be set at 120°F, which also slows mineral buildup and corrosion in your water heater and pipes. Water heated at 140°F also poses a safety hazard—scalding. Savings resulting from turning down your water heater temperature are based on reducing standby losses (heat lost from water heater into surrounding area). Set too high, or at 140°F, your water heater can waste anywhere from \$36 to \$61 annually in standby heat losses. Additional savings will be realized by the lower temperature for consumption (from water demand or use in your home, such as clothes washing, showers, and dishwashing). These may amount to more than \$400. If you have a dishwasher without a booster heater, it may require a water temperature within a range of 130°F to 140°F for optimum cleaning. And while there is a very slight risk of promoting legionella bacteria when hot water tanks are maintained at 120°F, this level is still considered safe for the majority of the population. If you have a suppressed immune system or chronic respiratory disease, you may consider keeping your hot water tank at 140°F. However, this high temperature significantly increases the risk of scalding. To minimize this risk, you can install mixing valves or other temperature-regulating devices on any taps used for washing or bathing. Source: Save Energy at Home, ENERGY STAR This video provides step-by-step instruction on how to successfully lower the temperature of your water heater, saving you energy and money. Consult your water heater owner's manual for instructions on how to operate the thermostat. You can find a thermostat dial for a gas storage water heater near the bottom of the tank on the gas valve. Electric water heaters, on the other hand, may have thermostats positioned behind screw-on plates or panels. As a safety precaution, shut off the electricity to the water heater before removing/opening the panels. Keep in mind that an electric water heater may have two thermostats—one each for the upper and lower heating elements. Thermometer for testing the water temperature. Marker to mark the setting on your thermostat 1) Find the current temperature. Measure the beginning temperature of your hot water using a thermometer at the tap farthest from the water heater. Thermostat dials are often inaccurate. 2) Mark the setting, then turn down the thermostat. Mark the beginning temperature on your water heater thermostat with a marker, and then turn the thermostat down. 3) Measure and adjust. Wait a couple of hours, and then measure the water temperature again at the farthest tap from the water heater. Several adjustments may be necessary before you get the temperature you desire. 4) Mark the new temperature. If you are satisfied with the temperature, mark the new temperature on the water heater thermostat with a marker, so that you can make adjustments in the future if necessary. 5) Turn down or off when away. If you plan to be away from home for extended periods, turn the thermostat down to the lowest setting or completely turn off the water heater. To turn off an electric water heater, switch off the circuit breaker to it. For a gas water heater, make sure you know how to safely relight the pilot light before turning it off. No one likes a cold shower. Even worse is getting scalded when you run the hot water. Properly setting the temperature on your water heater is important not only for your health and safety, but also for saving money on your electricity bill. Here is how to adjust the temperature on your water heater to save money and your skin. The correct temperature range There are a number of reasons your water heater should be set within a specific range of temperatures. If it's set too low, not only will your hot water feel lukewarm, at best, it can also lead to bacterial growth which can cause things like Legionnaires' disease. This can be prevented by setting the water heater to a temperature where the bacteria Legionella cannot thrive. The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) recommends water heaters be set to at least 140 degrees Fahrenheit (60 degrees Celsius) to minimize the growth of Legionella and other microorganisms. While you might be prone to just crank up the heat, water that is too hot is potentially more dangerous, especially if you have kids around the house. At 150 degrees Fahrenheit (66 degrees Celsius), it only takes two seconds to suffer third-degree burns. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends setting the water heater at no more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius) to prevent scalding. Not to mention, a water heater that is set too high can unnecessarily increase your electricity bill. Of course, every house is different. The further a faucet is from the water heater, the more heat will be lost as the water travels, especially if the pipes aren't insulated. That means you might have to raise the temperature beyond the recommended 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius) to compensate. Use your best judgement for your family and household when setting the temperature. It's smart to stay within the range of 120 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit (49 to 60 degrees Celsius). Make an adjustment, test it out and repeat until you settle on the perfect temperature setting for you home and water heater. Now playing: Watch this. Step inside CNET's Guide to Smart Living Adjusting water heater temperature The interface for setting the temperature on a water heater will vary by type and model. Fortunately, most water heater types are adjusted similarly. For instance, most newer gas and electric water heaters have a thermostat behind an insulated access panel. Electric water heaters often have two thermostats—one at the top and another at the bottom of the tank. And most tankless water heaters feature a display with a temperature readout and controls for adjusting the temperature. Regardless of the water heater type, you should test the water before you make any adjustments. Turn on the water in the bathroom or kitchen sink and let it run until it's fully hot. Then hold a thermometer under the water to get an accurate reading. Tankless Adjusting a tankless water heater is a lot like adjusting the thermostat for your air conditioning. Use the digital control panel to adjust the temperature up and down as needed. See all photos +5 More Gas or electric water heaters Some gas water heaters feature a dial near the bottom of the unit that you can simply adjust by turning it -- no tools required. However, most newer tank water heaters (gas or electric) are a little more involved, but it's still easy and should only take a couple of minutes. Start by turning off power to the water heater at the circuit breaker. Find the access panel for the thermostat(s) and use a screwdriver to remove the panel. Peel back the insulation. Use a flathead screwdriver to adjust the thermostat up or down. If your water heater has two thermostats, adjust both the same amount. The top thermostat should be a few degrees higher than the bottom. Replace the insulation and reinstall the access panel. Restore power to the water heater. For gas water heaters, you may need to relight the pilot light. Once you've made an adjustment, wait at least three hours before testing the water temperature again. You may need to make additional adjustments to get the temperature just right. If you've raised the temperature and you're still experiencing cold showers, your hot water heater may need to be serviced or even replaced. Is your home energy efficient? Here are 5 ways to find out. CNET's Guide to Smart Living is a destination for tips, tricks and guides that make your life smarter.

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