

How to Select an Electric Space Heater for Various Uses

BY JIM DULLEY

Dear Jim: I have seen ads claiming their electric space heaters will cut my electric bills. Is this true, and which types of space heater are best for various uses and rooms? - Vicki G.

Dear Vicki: Running an electric space heater to selectively heat a room or two may save some energy, even if you have an efficient heat pump. The keyword here is “selectively.” Some ads exaggerate the savings by giving the impression their expensive space heater can heat your entire house, which is not accurate. Most people use space heaters in addition to their central heating, which can actually increase electric bills.

The only way to save overall with a space heater is if you set the central heat pump thermostat several degrees lower. Why? Standard 110-volt space heaters can produce maximum heat of about 5,100 Btu/hour. A heat pump produces three times as much heat as a space heater per dollar on your electric bill.

Depending upon your climate, you can expect to save about 2 to 3 percent of your heating bills for each degree you lower the thermostat setting. That savings will offset the electricity used by the resistance heating of the

space heaters to keep just one or two rooms toasty warm.

The actual efficiency (Btu of heat per watt-hours of electricity used) of all electric space heaters is the same. This is true for the inexpensive \$20 ribbon heaters and the very expensive so-called “furnaces.” All of the electricity used becomes heat, so all models are effectively 100 percent efficient as compared to a gas or oil heating appliance where some heat is lost out the flue pipe.

The type and design of electric space heater does impact your savings and comfort. The size of the room, number of people and specific activities determine which type is your best choice. For example, are you looking for quiet heat in a bedroom at night, heat for just one person watching TV in an easy chair, for a group of people in a large room, etc.?

Your basic choices are direct radiant and convection (air circulation) space heaters with each having its advantages. Within each group, there are many comfort features and options that may impact your decision. If you have young children, there may also be extra safety considerations.

Radiant style units produce quick heat.

These use a red-hot ribbon, quartz or carbon tubes to produce infrared heat similar to the sun's rays. They are designed to warm people directly in front of them. Carbon tubes produce far-infrared heat, which penetrates objects and skin slightly below the surface. This makes it very comfortable, effective heat.

Radiant heaters are quiet and are ideal for heating a specific spot. One should be no more than 8 feet away and in a range of 20 degrees from direct center for the best comfort. To heat a slightly larger area, select a model that automatically oscillates.



LASKO PRODUCTS

This oscillating heater is small enough to be used on the floor or a tabletop for very directed heating.