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Old Homes Can Save Big Money with an HVAC Update

Ductless mini-split HVAC systems are the best choice for old homes.



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Older homes offer the kind of style and grace you can't get in new construction. Features like solid wood doors, beautiful wood trim and real plaster walls and ceilings really show off your home's craftsmanship. But there's one thing old homes don't have—an energy-efficient heating and cooling system. In fact, if your home is 50 years old or older, chances are you're paying at least 25 percent more in energy costs than a comparably sized new home. That's a lot of money to throw down the drain every year.

We're not just talking about inefficient hot water boilers either. If you're cooling your old home with inefficient window or in-wall AC units, you're wasting even more money. They not only cost more to operate but also generate cold spots near the unit and hot spots on the opposite side of the room—so you're not even getting comfortable cooling. Finally, window and in-wall AC units aren't just noisy; they're downright annoying because the compressor continually kicks on and off. That's a real problem if you're a light sleeper. In other words, your home's current HVAC systems waste energy and deprive you of the comfort you deserve. It's time for an HVAC upgrade. Here are your options.

Retrofit forced-air or ductless mini-split

Twenty years ago, HVAC contractors had one option for retrofitting an old home; they had to install a ducted forced-air system. Some contractors still install those. However, retrofitting a forced-air system into an old home is a huge job that requires running new supply and return ductwork. Installers cut large holes in your walls and ceilings to run the ducts. Or they can run the new ducts inside closets, which means you'll lose precious closet space. Either way, you'll have to patch and paint when they're done.

Ductless mini-split HVAC systems are much easier to install because they don't use ducts. The contractor won't have to tear up your walls or confiscate any closet space. They simply install the main condensing unit outside your home and cut small 2-in. to 3-in. holes in your outside wall for the refrigerant lines. If the lines have to run up the side of your house, the contractor will put a cover on them that best matches the color of your home. Some ductless systems can run up to eight individual zones from a single outside condensing unit.



Ductless mini-split systems are more energy efficient

No matter how well new ducts are sealed and insulated, they still lose energy. They suck energy from the ducted air and transfer it to the air surrounding the duct, and they also transfer hot and cold energy from the surrounding air into the duct. Contractors refer to this as "duct loss," and the energy loss is significant. Studies show that duct loss can account for more than 30 percent of your total heating/cooling energy bill. Because ductless mini-split systems don't utilize ductwork, they provide an immediate energy-saving advantage over ducted systems.



Which ductless mini-split system is best for your home?

Several companies make ductless AC mini-split systems and combination heating and cooling systems, but the Energy Star mini-split systems from Fujitsu are 2.35 times more efficient than the minimum government standards. In fact, some Fujitsu ductless mini-split systems deliver a 33 SEER rating (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio), among the highest in the industry! That extremely high efficiency is 2.5 times greater than the 13 SEER central air conditioning systems contractors typically install, and it means you save even more on your energy bill.

Fujitsu ductless mini-split systems can also be configured to run up to eight individually controlled zones from a single condensing unit. Each zone has its own thermostat, so you save money by heating and cooling only the rooms you want, rather than the entire house. Plus, Fujitsu offers several variations of the individual room units. Choose between an attractive wall, floor or ceiling unit.



Fujitsu ductless mini-split systems are also smart-home friendly. Just download the FGLair app and control Fujitsu's RLS3Y and RLS3YH series heating and cooling systems right from your smartphone or tablet.

Utility companies offer rebates on energy-efficient ductless mini-split systems, and most Fujitsu systems qualify for those rebates when they're offered.

For all those reasons, contact an authorized Fujitsu ductless mini-split contractor first for a complete evaluation of your home's heating and cooling needs. To find a Fujitsu contractor near you, go to contractors.fujitsu-general.com.

– Rick Muscoplat, Contributing Editor

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