

# Save money on home heating

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

While the price of oil is at its lowest since 2004 and propane is significantly more affordable than past years, home heating costs still make people shiver. In Maine, experts say that filling your tank to the brim and kicking back is not the most cost effective way to keep your house and family warm this winter.

So what’s a homeowner to do?

“There continues to be very strong demand for efficiency projects including energy assessments with air sealing, insulation and ductless heat pumps,” said Dana Fischer, residential program manager for Efficiency Maine Trust, an Augusta-based nonprofit organization working on affordable energy solutions.

To lower heating costs and increase year-round comfort, Fischer and a bevy of heating experts in Maine suggest upgrading heating systems, plugging holes and insulate.

“The first step is to get insulation, that’s the thermal envelop, the shell that separates you from outside,” said Tom Gocze, an energy buff, who hosts a weekly radio

show, “Hot and Cold,” on WVOM. “It’s not as sexy as other advancements, but if you put a heat pump into an old drafty house, you will lose heat.”

The next step is to rethink what it means to go green.

“One can lower their carbon footprint by making decisions to use local materials and labor,” said Fisher.

In other words, heat local.

Because Maine is the most forested state in the country, an entire firewood and wood pellet manufacturing industry has sprung up.

Pellet and wood stoves, furnaces and boilers are a “stable and economical heating choice but also keep heating dollars in the local economy,” said Fischer.

Just as the buy local and eat local credo resonates, using a forestry-based fuel matters.

“That way we are not at the mercy of people from other places. I’d rather give it to someone who maybe likes me,” said Gocze.

According to Efficiency Maine, more than 500 pellet boilers were installed in Maine in the last two years, more than the rest of New England and New York combined.

Gocze, who also is the

owner of American Solartech, a Searsport manufacturer of modular heat storage tanks for solar and wood heating systems, is always thinking outside the boiler.

“My goal is to try to do it better and less expensively, with an eye toward DIY-ers,” he said.

Many people are changing over to mini-split heat pumps, which cost about \$3,000.

“It’s an elegant system that’s revolutionary,” said Gocze, who is impressed with the improved technology.

Powered electronically or via solar, the air-source pumps minimize electric consumption by exchanging energy with ambient air.

The pumps do not involve combustion, thereby reducing emissions and particulate levels in the environment.

“What makes heat pumps green and getting greener beyond efficiency has to do with the renewable mix of electricity sources in Maine and the ability of homeowners to add solar panels to their own roof or join a solar farm to offset electrical consumption over the course of the year,” said Fischer.

Another long-term heat-saving measure Gocze recommends is updating your wood burning stove if it was built before 1980.

“The newer ones are very clean, waste less energy and make for a good neighbor,” which means less smoke lingering in the area, he said.

Amid the advancements, a no-frills option remains. One of the best ways to warm up a room on the cheap can be found at the hardware store or could be lurking in your attic.

If you have a spot need, use a space heater, said Gocze.

“It’s electric heat that goes right into the room. It’s 100 percent efficient,” he said.

Purchased for as little as \$30, it can quickly heat up a bathroom in an old farm house.

“Turn it on for 20 minutes, and shut it off before you get in shower,” he suggested, noting that warming up a room in such small bursts will cost you about 15 cents.

“It’s very easy to use, you plug it in, it’s all basic. And you don’t have to turn on the central heating system to heat a room for short-term use,” he said.

# ALBUM

## Engagement



Rachael Menius  
Dan Burgess

NEWPORT - David and Donna Menius of Ocean Isle Beach, North Carolina, announce the engagement of their daughter Rachael Menius to Dan Burgess, son of John and Susan Burgess of Newport, Maine.

Ms. Menius, a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Pennsylvania, is a Pediatric Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Boston Children’s Hospital. Mr. Burgess, a graduate of the University of Maine and Northeastern University, is the Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Staff at the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources.

An April 2016 wedding is planned. Dan and Rachael live in Boston.

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## Grains

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Aroostook County’s fallow farmland includes almost 19,000 acres in Presque Isle, Easton, Fort Fairfield and Caribou alone, according to University of Maine Presque Isle researchers. Those lands are “good enough” for organic grains or conventional food-grade grains, said Williams, a former University of Maine Extension crop specialist. “Our biggest challenge is getting more land in production. It’s been the challenge from day one.”

And while it may be easier than ever for Maine farmers to sell their crops through local and regional markets, with grains

“there’s a knowledge infrastructure that needs to improve, as well as the scale of the physical infrastructure,” said Amber Lambke, president of Maine Grains, a mill in Skowhegan.

“We saw some issues at the mill last winter. Well-intentioned farmers, knowing that grain had to go into storage dry, had used propane driers and sent grain into tanks,” Lambke said. “Unbeknownst to us until the product got milled and sent to bakers, the grain had been heated too much. It heated up the protein in the wheat and made terrible bread.”

Overall, she said, “We’ve got farmers right now that are kind of all over the map.”

Along with Aurora Mills, other area farms have long been growing

grains for food. Bouchard Family Farms in Fort Kent has grown buckwheat for ploye mix products since the 1980s (although buckwheat is technically a fruit seed, not a grain).

For almost 10 years, Marquis Farm in Van Buren has grown a mix of conventional and organic potatoes for grocery stores and oats and barley for the livestock feed market.

“Our goal is to sell food-grade grain,” said Wayne Marquis. “It pays a premium.”

Another local producer, selling to food and feed markets, is Benedicta Grains, an organic farm growing barley, buckwheat, rye, spelt and soybeans.

The farm is co-owned by Jake Dyer, who grew up in Sherman and worked in

University of Maine agricultural research stations before partnering with his father-in-law Andrew Qualey to convert his conventional potato farm to organic grains. Dyer also is working in a new job as an alternative crop specialist with the Maine Potato Board, tasked with helping potato farmers diversify in a changing market, and he thinks grains and a myriad of other crops offer good opportunities.

The movement to local and organic food has “been around long enough that we know it’s here to stay,” Dyer said. “We just need to take it one step at a time and work on the logistics.”

## Lights

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dens in the blue, pink, yellow, orange, purple, green and red lights.

Frank Merrill, a facilities assistant, said that at the beginning, he felt overwhelmed by the task.

“It’s such a vast area,” he said. “I thought how are we ever going to cover this area? But we did it. At first we were going to just do a few here and a few there, but it didn’t work. So every few days, we said ‘More lights! More lights!’”

“It’s like a big color explosion,” Folsom said.

In order to string the lights, workers used ladders, a borrowed scissor lift and cherry pickers. Some inched their way up the tall evergreen trees “like bears,” Merrill said, to wrap the trunks in shimmering bands of light. They stayed late in order to see what their handiwork looked like after dark, and just days before the scheduled opening, they were still making tweaks to the display.



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

Harry Hinkley (left), 7, of Southport helps his stepfather, Adam Harkins, string lights for the first “Gardens Aglow” event at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay last week. The light show at the gardens will run through Dec. 31.

Bill Cullina, the director of gardens, was among those working into the evening to make the display even better.

“We’re really hoping this will be a chance to expose the gardens to a whole new audience,” he said. “It’s still the gardens, but the flowers are now lights. And this time of year, what’s better than lights?”

“Gardens Aglow” will be open from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday through Sunday

nights from Saturday, Nov. 21, through Thursday, Dec. 31, at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. It will be closed Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Eve. Admission is \$12 for adults, \$6 for ages 3-17, and \$10 for ages 65 and over, with reduced prices for families and members. The gardens are located at 132 Botanical Gardens Drive in Boothbay. For information, call 633-8000 or visit [www.Maine-Gardens.org](http://www.Maine-Gardens.org).

## Granola

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comparable to Houston, Texas, and just 10 percent less than sunny Florida,” said Greenhalgh, who added that cold, sun-filled days generate more solar energy than hot ones.

“This proves that you can do it in Maine,” he said.

When the company creates more solar power than it needs, it accrues credit with the power company. So during snowy, dark days, GrandyOats will tap the grid just like anyone else, but its excess solar production is applied against the power it consumes.

“Over the course of the year they will have produced 100 percent of their electric demand with the solar,” Greenhalgh said.

The panels will generate enough electricity to pro-

duce 1.2 million pounds of granola and snacks annually. With a combined capacity of 80 kilowatts, every aspect of the facility, from electric ovens to heating and cooling, will be powered from the sun.

By switching to green energy, the company moves from kerosene and propane — that means dwindling electricity bills.

“This insulates us from world pressures. It feels good that we are generating our own power on site,” Anker said. “It makes sense.”

GrandyOats, available in 40 states across the country, will have three times the space in its new facility and will be able to double its production. The company just entered the California market and announced a new line of gluten-free granola, which is expected to hit shelves in the second quarter of 2016.

By putting the sun to work, GrandyOats hopes to be a model for other companies.

“Businesses that have the long view can control energy costs, and that’s good for the environment,” Greenhalgh said. “There are very few things that are awesome for the environment and awesome for the wallet.”

When the company moves into the refurbished 12,620 foot space, complete with a gluten-free room and new warehouse constructed off the former school cafeteria, GrandyOats will be the largest employer in Hiram, a town of 1,600.

“We are lucky to have them,” Hiram Selectman Harold Gillman said. “Because we are so far out here, it’s refreshing to have a business with such forward-thinking insight. It’s great use and a great product. It couldn’t be better.”

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