

OTTAWA HVAC PRO

Air Conditioning

AC installation, repair, and maintenance

22 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawahvacpro.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

What is the difference between AC and heat pump?

Air conditioning only cools your home, while a heat pump both heats and cools. Think of a heat pump as an air conditioner that can run in reverse to provide heating during milder weather.

How Air Conditioning Works Traditional central air conditioning moves heat from inside your home to the outside during summer months. The system includes an outdoor condenser unit, indoor evaporator coil, and ductwork to distribute cool air throughout your home. When winter arrives, you'll need a separate heating system like a furnace or electric baseboards to keep warm.

How Heat Pumps Work A heat pump looks similar to an air conditioner but operates year-round. In summer, it cools your home just like AC. In winter, it reverses the process and extracts heat from outdoor air (even in cold temperatures) to warm your home. Modern cold climate heat pumps can effectively heat Ottawa homes down to -25°C or lower, though many homeowners pair them with a backup heating source for the coldest days.

Ottawa Climate Considerations In Ottawa's climate, heat pumps offer excellent energy efficiency during spring, fall, and mild winter days. However, traditional heat pumps lose efficiency when temperatures drop below -10°C.

Cold climate heat pumps are specifically designed for Canadian winters and remain efficient even in Ottawa's harsh conditions. Many Ottawa homeowners install heat pumps alongside their existing furnace for optimal comfort and energy savings year-round.

Cost and Efficiency Benefits Heat pumps typically cost more upfront (\$6,000-\$12,000 vs \$3,500-\$5,500 for AC alone), but they can significantly reduce heating costs since they're 2-3 times more efficient than electric heating. You'll also benefit from federal and provincial rebates available for heat pump installations.

For a free assessment of whether a heat pump makes sense for your Ottawa home, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro. Our TSSA-licensed technicians can evaluate your current system and help you choose the most cost-effective solution.

Q2

Why does my house feel clammy even with AC on?

Your house feels clammy because your air conditioning system isn't effectively removing humidity from the air. This typically happens when the AC is oversized, running short cycles, or has other issues preventing proper dehumidification.

Oversized air conditioning units are the most common culprit. When your AC is too powerful for your home, it cools the air quickly but shuts off before running long enough to remove moisture. Air conditioners dehumidify most effectively during longer run cycles - the evaporator coil needs time to condense water vapor from the air. Short cycling means you get cold, humid air instead of comfortable, dry air.

Other factors contributing to clamminess include dirty air filters restricting airflow, low refrigerant levels reducing the system's dehumidification capacity, or ductwork problems like leaks that allow humid outside air to enter. A malfunctioning blower motor running at the wrong speed can also prevent proper moisture removal. In Ottawa's climate, where summer humidity can be quite high, these issues become especially noticeable.

Your thermostat settings also matter. Setting the fan to "ON" instead of "AUTO" circulates air continuously but doesn't allow moisture to drain from the evaporator coil properly. The fan should be set to "AUTO" so it only runs during cooling cycles, giving condensed moisture time to drain away.

Professional diagnosis is essential because humidity problems can indicate refrigerant leaks, electrical issues, or sizing problems that require TSSA-licensed technicians to address safely. An HVAC professional can measure your home's cooling load, check refrigerant levels, and ensure your system is properly sized and functioning.

For a comprehensive evaluation of your AC's dehumidification performance, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro - we can identify whether your system needs adjustment, repair, or replacement to achieve optimal comfort.

Q3

Is R-410A refrigerant being phased out in Canada?

Yes, R-410A refrigerant is being phased out in Canada as part of global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The phase-down began in 2019 and will continue through the 2030s, following the Montreal Protocol's Kigali Amendment.

The phase-out is happening gradually through production and import restrictions. Environment and Climate Change Canada has implemented a schedule that reduces the allowable quantity of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) like R-410A each year. By 2036, the availability of R-410A will be reduced by 85% compared to baseline levels. This doesn't mean your current R-410A system will stop working immediately, but replacement refrigerant will become increasingly expensive and harder to find.

New HVAC systems are already transitioning to alternative refrigerants. Many manufacturers are now producing air conditioners and heat pumps that use R-32 or R-454B refrigerants, which have much lower global warming potential. In Ottawa's market, you'll find that newer high-efficiency systems often come with these next-

generation refrigerants. The transition is similar to what happened when R-22 (Freon) was phased out - existing systems continued operating, but replacement costs eventually made upgrading more economical.

For Ottawa homeowners, this means planning ahead for your HVAC replacement. If your R-410A system is over 10 years old or needs major repairs, it might make financial sense to upgrade to a newer system with environmentally-friendly refrigerant. The cost of R-410A repairs will likely increase significantly over the next decade as the refrigerant becomes scarcer.

If you're considering a new air conditioner or heat pump, discuss refrigerant options with your HVAC contractor to ensure you're getting a system that will be serviceable for years to come. For a consultation about upgrading your current system, Ottawa HVAC Pro can help you understand your options and timing.

Does running AC all night increase my hydro bill a lot?

Running your AC all night will increase your hydro bill, but the impact depends on your usage habits, home efficiency, and Ontario's time-of-use electricity rates. The key is finding the right balance between comfort and cost.

Time-of-Use Rates Work in Your Favor In Ontario, electricity is cheapest during off-peak hours (7 PM to 7 AM on weekdays, plus all weekend), when most people run their AC at night. You'll pay around 8.7¢/kWh during these hours versus 12.8¢/kWh during peak times. This means running your AC overnight is actually more economical than running it during hot afternoons.

Smart Temperature Management Rather than turning your AC off completely at night, set your thermostat 2-3 degrees higher than your daytime setting. For example, if you keep it at 22°C during the day, try 24-25°C at night. Your body naturally cools while sleeping, so you'll likely stay comfortable while reducing energy consumption by 10-20%. A programmable or smart thermostat can handle these adjustments automatically.

Ottawa's Climate Considerations During Ottawa's humid summers, running AC overnight also helps control moisture levels, preventing that sticky feeling that can disrupt sleep. Many Ottawa homeowners find that maintaining consistent temperatures (rather than turning the system on and off) actually uses less energy because the AC doesn't have to work as hard to cool down a hot house.

Typical Costs for Ottawa Homes A central AC system typically uses 3-5 kW per hour. Running it for 8 hours overnight at off-peak rates would cost roughly \$2-4 per night, or \$60-120 per month during peak summer. Proper insulation, clean filters, and regular maintenance can significantly reduce these costs.

Energy-Saving Tips Keep your AC running efficiently by changing filters monthly during heavy use, ensuring vents aren't blocked, and scheduling annual maintenance. A well-maintained system uses 15-20% less energy than a neglected one.

For a professional assessment of your AC's efficiency or to discuss upgrading to a more energy-efficient system, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers free consultations to help Ottawa homeowners optimize their cooling costs.

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How long does a central air conditioner last?

A well-maintained central air conditioner typically lasts 15-20 years in Ottawa's climate, though this can vary significantly based on usage, maintenance, and equipment quality.

Several factors influence your AC's lifespan. Higher-end units with quality components often reach the 20-year mark, while budget models may need replacement after 12-15 years. Ottawa's relatively short but intense cooling season (roughly May through September) is actually easier on equipment than year-round use in warmer climates. However, our temperature swings and humidity levels still create wear on components over time.

Proper maintenance is crucial for maximizing lifespan. Annual professional tune-ups, regular filter changes, and keeping the outdoor unit clean can add 3-5 years to your system's life. Neglected systems often fail prematurely due to dirty coils, refrigerant leaks, or compressor damage that could have been prevented.

Watch for these signs that replacement may be approaching: your AC needs frequent repairs (especially if repair costs exceed \$1,000 annually), struggles to cool your home effectively, or your energy bills have increased significantly. Units over 15 years old using R-22 refrigerant (being phased out) become expensive to service and are good candidates for replacement.

In Ottawa's market, budget \$3,500-\$5,500 for central AC replacement, depending on your home's size and the efficiency level you choose. Higher SEER ratings cost more upfront but save money over the system's lifetime through reduced energy consumption.

If your AC is approaching 15 years old or showing signs of decline, it's wise to have it inspected by a licensed technician who can assess its remaining life and help you plan for eventual replacement.

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Can I install a window AC unit in a casement window?

Installing a window AC unit in a casement window is challenging and often not recommended. Most window air conditioners are designed for double-hung windows that slide up and down, not casement windows that swing open like doors.

Standard window AC units won't fit properly in casement windows because they need the window sash to slide down and hold the unit in place. Casement windows open outward on hinges, leaving a large opening that can't securely support a traditional window AC unit. The brackets and mounting system simply aren't compatible with this window style.

If you need cooling for a room with casement windows, consider these better alternatives. A portable air conditioner with a window kit can work well - the exhaust hose connects to a panel that fits in the casement window opening. Mini-split ductless systems are another excellent option that doesn't require window modifications and provides efficient cooling year-round.

For Ottawa homes, mini-split systems are particularly popular because they can also provide heating during our cold winters. Many Ottawa homeowners are choosing these over window units for their efficiency and year-round comfort. Installation requires an electrical permit and should be done by a licensed HVAC technician to ensure proper refrigerant handling and electrical connections.

Safety is important with any cooling installation. Improperly secured window units can fall and cause serious injury. If you're determined to use a window AC in a casement window, you'd need custom mounting brackets and professional installation to ensure it's secure.

For a free consultation on cooling options that work well with casement windows, consider speaking with local HVAC professionals who can assess your specific situation and recommend the best solution for your Ottawa home.

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Is a higher SEER rating worth the extra cost?

Yes, a higher SEER rating is typically worth the extra cost in Ottawa's climate, especially if you're replacing an older system or plan to stay in your home for several years. The energy savings, improved comfort, and potential rebates often justify the higher upfront investment.

SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) measures how efficiently your air conditioning system converts electricity into cooling. In Canada, we use EER (Energy Efficiency Ratio), but the principle is the same - higher numbers mean better efficiency. A 16 SEER/EER system uses about 23% less electricity than a 13 SEER/EER system to produce the same cooling.

For Ottawa homeowners, the math usually works in favor of higher efficiency systems. With our hot, humid summers and rising electricity costs, a high-efficiency AC system can save \$200-400 annually on cooling costs compared to a basic efficiency unit. Over the system's 15-20 year lifespan, these savings often exceed the \$800-1,500 premium for higher efficiency equipment. Additionally, high-efficiency systems typically include better components like variable-speed fans and two-stage compressors, which provide more consistent temperatures and better humidity control.

Higher SEER systems also qualify for utility rebates and government incentives. Enbridge Gas offers rebates for high-efficiency cooling equipment, and the Canada Greener Homes Grant can provide up to \$5,000 for qualifying HVAC upgrades. These incentives can significantly offset the higher purchase price.

The sweet spot for most Ottawa homes is typically 16-18 SEER/EER equipment. Going beyond 20 SEER often provides diminishing returns unless you have exceptionally high cooling loads or plan to stay in the home for decades. However, if you're replacing a system that's 10+ years old, even a mid-efficiency 14-16 SEER system will provide substantial energy savings.

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Q8

How long does AC installation take

Most central air conditioning installations take 6-12 hours for a standard replacement, or 1-2 full days for new installations with ductwork modifications.

The timeline depends on several factors. A **straight replacement** where you're swapping an old AC unit for a new one typically takes 6-8 hours. The technicians need to disconnect the old system, install the new outdoor condenser and indoor evaporator coil, connect refrigerant lines, and test the system. If your existing ductwork and electrical connections are in good shape, this is usually completed in one day.

New installations take longer, especially if ductwork modifications are needed. Adding ductwork, running new electrical circuits, or installing a new thermostat can extend the job to 8-12 hours or even two days. In Ottawa's older homes, technicians sometimes encounter challenges like upgrading electrical panels or working around existing plumbing and heating systems.

Weather and permits can also affect timing. In Ottawa's busy summer season (June-August), scheduling might take longer due to high demand. Most AC installations don't require permits, but if electrical work is needed, your contractor will handle the permit process with the City of Ottawa, which can add a day or two to the overall timeline.

Professional installation is crucial for proper refrigerant handling, electrical connections, and warranty coverage. Licensed technicians will also test the system thoroughly and walk you through operation and maintenance.

For a realistic timeline for your specific situation, it's best to have a licensed HVAC contractor assess your home and current setup. Want to discuss your AC installation needs? We offer free consultations to provide accurate timelines and estimates.

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Why is my AC making strange noises

Strange AC noises usually indicate mechanical issues that need attention. The type of sound can help identify what's wrong - squealing often means belt problems, grinding suggests motor issues, and rattling typically indicates loose components.

Squealing or screeching sounds are commonly caused by worn or loose fan belts, which can snap if not replaced promptly. **Grinding or metal-on-metal noises** often point to motor bearing problems or issues with the blower wheel. These sounds indicate internal components are wearing out and could lead to complete system failure if ignored.

Rattling, banging, or clicking sounds usually mean something has come loose - this could be anything from loose screws and panels to debris in the outdoor unit. **Hissing sounds** might indicate refrigerant leaks, which not only reduce cooling efficiency but can be expensive to repair if left unchecked.

In Ottawa's climate, AC units work hard during our hot, humid summers, which can accelerate wear on moving parts. Most strange noises develop gradually as components age, but sudden loud noises often indicate something has broken or shifted out of place.

Turn off your AC system immediately if you hear loud grinding, banging, or any sound that seems abnormal. Continuing to run the system could cause more extensive damage and higher repair costs. Check that nothing obvious is blocking the outdoor unit, but avoid attempting any repairs yourself.

Schedule a professional inspection as soon as possible - most AC noise issues in Ottawa range from \$200-\$600 to repair, but catching problems early can prevent more expensive damage. Strange noises rarely resolve on their own and typically worsen over time.

For a professional diagnosis of your AC's unusual sounds, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro for expert service you can trust.

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How often should I service my air conditioner

Air conditioners should be professionally serviced once per year, ideally in late spring before the cooling season begins. This annual maintenance helps ensure efficient operation, prevents breakdowns during hot weather, and extends your system's lifespan.

Professional annual service typically includes cleaning the condenser coils, checking refrigerant levels, inspecting electrical connections, lubricating moving parts, and testing system performance. A trained technician can spot potential issues before they become expensive repairs or leave you without cooling during Ottawa's hottest summer days.

Between professional visits, homeowners should change or clean air filters every 1-3 months during cooling season, keep the outdoor unit clear of debris and vegetation (maintain 2 feet of clearance), and ensure indoor vents aren't blocked by furniture or curtains. These simple steps help your AC run efficiently and reduce strain on the system.

In Ottawa's climate, where air conditioners work hard during humid summers but sit idle for many months, annual servicing is especially important. The freeze-thaw cycles and seasonal debris can affect outdoor units, while indoor components may develop issues during the long off-season. Regular maintenance typically costs \$150-\$200 but can prevent much more expensive repairs or premature system replacement.

Signs your AC needs immediate attention include weak airflow, warm air from vents, unusual noises, ice formation on the unit, or significantly higher energy bills. Don't wait for your annual service if you notice these issues - addressing problems early prevents more serious damage.

For reliable annual AC maintenance in Ottawa, consider scheduling your service appointment in April or May before the summer rush begins.

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Why is my AC not cooling my house properly

Your AC may not be cooling properly due to several common issues, with a dirty air filter and low refrigerant being the most frequent culprits. Start by checking your air filter - a clogged filter restricts airflow and forces your system to work much harder while delivering less cooling.

Airflow problems are often the easiest to fix yourself. Beyond the filter, check that all vents are open and unblocked by furniture or curtains. Your outdoor unit also needs proper airflow - clear away any leaves, grass clippings, or debris around the condenser unit, and ensure there's at least 2 feet of clearance on all sides.

Refrigerant issues require professional attention and are common in Ottawa's climate. Low refrigerant levels, often due to small leaks, will cause your AC to run constantly without reaching the set temperature. You might notice ice forming on the indoor coil or copper lines. Only licensed technicians can safely handle refrigerant, and in Ontario, this work must be done by certified professionals.

Other potential causes include a failing compressor, dirty evaporator coils, or an oversized/undersized system for your home. In Ottawa's hot, humid summers, even a properly functioning AC can struggle if it's undersized for your square footage or if your home has poor insulation.

Check your thermostat settings first - ensure it's set to "cool" and the temperature is set lower than the current room temperature. If the fan setting is on "auto," try switching it to "on" temporarily to see if that improves air circulation.

If these basic checks don't solve the problem, it's time for professional diagnosis. AC repairs in Ottawa typically range from \$200-\$700 depending on the issue, while refrigerant recharges cost \$200-\$400. For a thorough system inspection and repair estimate, consider having a licensed HVAC technician evaluate your system before the problem worsens in Ottawa's peak summer heat.

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When should I replace my air conditioner

You should consider replacing your air conditioner when it's 12-15 years old, requires frequent repairs costing more than 50% of replacement value, or struggles to maintain comfortable temperatures despite proper maintenance.

The most obvious sign is **age and efficiency decline**. Air conditioners typically last 12-18 years in Ottawa's climate, but efficiency drops significantly after 10-12 years. If your AC is over 15 years old and your energy bills keep climbing despite similar usage, replacement often makes more financial sense than continued repairs. Modern high-efficiency units can reduce cooling costs by 20-40% compared to older systems.

Frequent breakdowns are another clear indicator. When you're calling for repairs multiple times per season, or when a single repair estimate exceeds \$1,500-2,000, replacement becomes the smarter investment. In Ottawa's market, major AC repairs typically run \$400-800, so if you're facing compressor replacement or refrigerant system repairs on an older unit, the math usually favors replacement.

Performance issues like uneven cooling, excessive humidity, or inability to reach set temperatures often indicate your system is oversized, undersized, or simply worn out. Strange noises, frequent cycling, or visible refrigerant leaks are also red flags that replacement may be imminent.

In Ottawa, **central AC replacement** typically costs \$3,500-5,500 for a quality system, while repairs on aging units can quickly add up to \$1,000+ annually. The ideal time to replace is during spring or fall when HVAC contractors offer better pricing and availability compared to peak summer demand.

Safety consideration: If your AC uses R-22 refrigerant (being phased out), replacement makes sense since R-22 costs have skyrocketed and availability is limited.

For a professional assessment of your current system and replacement options, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers free consultations to help you make the most cost-effective decision for your home.

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What is the best air conditioner brand

There isn't one single "best" air conditioner brand - the right choice depends on your budget, efficiency goals, and specific home requirements. However, several manufacturers consistently deliver reliable performance in Ottawa's climate.

Carrier, Trane, and Lennox are considered the premium tier brands, offering excellent build quality, high SEER ratings (up to 20+), and comprehensive warranties. These units typically cost more upfront but provide superior energy efficiency and longevity. **Goodman and Rheem** represent excellent mid-tier options, delivering solid performance and reliability at more accessible price points - often the sweet spot for many Ottawa homeowners.

York and American Standard also manufacture quality units with good warranty coverage. For budget-conscious homeowners, these brands often provide the best value proposition without sacrificing essential features like two-stage cooling or variable-speed fans.

In Ottawa's climate, focus on these key features regardless of brand: high SEER rating (16+ recommended), two-stage or variable-speed compressor for better humidity control during our humid summers, and robust construction to handle temperature swings from -30°C winters to +35°C summers. A properly sized unit is more important than the brand name - an oversized "premium" unit will cycle on and off frequently, reducing efficiency and comfort.

The installation quality matters as much as the brand itself. Even the best air conditioner will underperform if improperly installed. Ensure your contractor properly sizes the unit using Manual J calculations, installs quality ductwork, and follows manufacturer specifications for refrigerant charging.

For a professional assessment of which brand and model would work best for your specific Ottawa home, request a free consultation from Ottawa HVAC Pro - we'll evaluate your cooling needs and recommend the most cost-effective solution.

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Can I install AC in a house without ductwork

Yes, you can absolutely install air conditioning in a house without existing ductwork. The most common and cost-effective solution is a ductless mini-split system, which provides excellent cooling without requiring any ducts.

Ductless mini-split systems are perfect for homes without ductwork. These systems consist of an outdoor compressor unit connected to one or more indoor air handlers mounted on walls or ceilings. The indoor and outdoor units connect through a small refrigerant line that only requires a 3-inch hole through the wall. Each indoor unit can cool a specific zone or room, giving you precise temperature control throughout your home.

For Ottawa homes, mini-split systems offer several advantages beyond just avoiding ductwork installation. They're highly energy efficient, often achieving SEER ratings of 20+ compared to 14-16 for traditional central systems. Many models also provide heating capability, making them year-round comfort solutions. The installation is typically completed in one day, and you'll have individual temperature control for different areas of your home.

Installation costs in Ottawa for ductless systems typically range from \$3,500 to \$6,000 depending on the number of indoor units needed. A single-zone system for one room might cost \$3,500-4,500, while a multi-zone system covering an entire home could reach \$6,000-8,000. This is often less expensive than installing central AC with new ductwork, which could cost \$8,000-12,000 or more.

Professional installation is essential for mini-split systems because they require refrigerant handling, electrical connections, and proper sizing calculations. The outdoor unit needs adequate clearance and proper drainage, while indoor units must be positioned for optimal airflow. Only licensed HVAC technicians should handle the refrigerant connections and system commissioning.

For a free assessment of your home's cooling needs and mini-split options, consider getting quotes from licensed HVAC contractors who can recommend the right system size and configuration for your specific layout.

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How much does central air conditioning cost in Ottawa

Central air conditioning installation in Ottawa typically costs between \$3,500 to \$6,000 for a complete system, depending on your home size, existing ductwork, and equipment efficiency level.

For a **new central AC installation** where you don't currently have cooling, expect to pay \$4,000 to \$6,000. This includes the outdoor condenser unit, indoor evaporator coil, refrigerant lines, electrical connections, and professional installation. If you're **replacing an existing central AC system**, costs are typically lower at \$3,500 to \$5,500 since the infrastructure is already in place.

Several factors affect pricing in the Ottawa market. Home size is the biggest factor - a 1,200 sq ft home needs a smaller, less expensive unit than a 2,500 sq ft home. The efficiency rating (SEER) also impacts cost, with higher efficiency units costing more upfront but saving on electricity bills during Ottawa's hot summers. If your home doesn't have existing ductwork, adding ducts can increase the project cost by \$2,000 to \$4,000.

Ottawa's climate requires properly sized equipment to handle both our humid summers and the need for efficient operation. A qualified HVAC technician will perform a load calculation to determine the right size unit for your home. Oversized units cycle on and off frequently, reducing comfort and efficiency, while undersized units struggle to cool your home adequately.

Installation timing affects pricing too. Spring installations (April-May) often have better pricing and availability compared to peak summer months when demand is highest. Most reputable Ottawa HVAC contractors offer financing options to help spread the investment over time.

For an accurate quote based on your specific home and cooling needs, request a free estimate from Ottawa HVAC Pro. We'll assess your home's requirements and provide transparent pricing for your central air conditioning project.

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What SEER rating should I look for in an AC

For Ottawa's climate, look for a SEER rating of 16-18 for the best balance of efficiency and value. Higher SEER units (20+) are available but may not provide enough additional savings to justify the extra cost in our moderate cooling season.

SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) measures how efficiently your air conditioner uses electricity over a typical cooling season. The higher the number, the more efficient the unit. In Canada, we also use EER (Energy Efficiency Ratio) ratings, but SEER gives you a better picture of real-world performance across varying temperatures.

A 16 SEER unit uses about 25% less electricity than the old 13 SEER minimum, which can save you \$200-400 per year on cooling costs depending on your home size and usage. An 18 SEER system pushes those savings even higher while still being reasonably priced. Going beyond 18 SEER often means variable-speed technology and advanced features that work well but come with a premium price tag.

In Ottawa's climate, we typically see 3-4 months of significant AC usage, so your payback period on higher efficiency units is longer than in hotter climates. However, with rising electricity rates and increasing summer temperatures, investing in a 16+ SEER system makes good financial sense. These units also tend to have better humidity control and quieter operation.

Look for ENERGY STAR certified models and consider the warranty coverage - higher SEER units often come with better warranties. Also factor in your home's insulation, ductwork condition, and size when choosing capacity. An oversized high-SEER unit that short-cycles will perform worse than a properly-sized moderate-efficiency system.

For a personalized recommendation based on your home's specific needs and cooling load calculation, request a free consultation from Ottawa HVAC Pro.

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What size AC unit do I need for my home

The right AC size depends on your home's square footage, insulation, windows, and layout - typically ranging from 1.5 to 5 tons for most Ottawa homes. A properly sized unit is crucial because an oversized AC will short-cycle and fail to dehumidify, while an undersized unit will struggle to cool your home efficiently.

Manual J Load Calculation is Required

Professional HVAC contractors use a detailed Manual J calculation to determine the exact cooling load for your home. This calculation considers your home's square footage, ceiling height, insulation levels, window size and orientation, air leakage, and local Ottawa climate conditions. A rough rule of thumb is 400-600 square feet per ton of cooling, but this can vary significantly based on your home's specific characteristics.

Factors That Affect AC Sizing in Ottawa

Your home's age and construction type greatly impact sizing requirements. Older Ottawa homes often need larger units due to less insulation and more air leakage, while newer homes with better building envelopes may need smaller, more efficient systems. South-facing windows, cathedral ceilings, and open floor plans all increase cooling loads. The number of occupants, heat-generating appliances, and your desired comfort level also factor into the calculation.

Ottawa Climate Considerations

Ottawa's climate presents unique challenges with hot, humid summers reaching 30°C+ and high humidity levels. Your AC system needs adequate capacity not just for temperature control but also for dehumidification. Many Ottawa homes benefit from variable-speed systems that can handle both peak cooling days and milder summer weather efficiently.

Professional Assessment Recommended

An experienced HVAC technician should perform an on-site evaluation to measure your home, assess insulation, check ductwork capacity, and calculate your exact cooling requirements. They'll also ensure your electrical system can handle the new unit and that your existing ductwork is properly sized. Getting the size wrong can cost you hundreds of dollars annually in energy bills and lead to comfort issues.

For an accurate load calculation and free estimate on a properly sized AC system for your Ottawa home, request a consultation with a licensed HVAC contractor who can assess your specific needs.

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Q18

Why is my AC freezing up

Your AC is likely freezing up due to restricted airflow, low refrigerant, or a dirty evaporator coil. When warm air can't flow properly over the cold evaporator coil, ice forms and blocks the system from cooling your home effectively.

Restricted airflow is the most common culprit. A clogged air filter forces your system to work harder and reduces warm air circulation over the coil. Check your filter first - if it's dirty or hasn't been changed in months, replace it immediately and let the ice melt completely before restarting. Other airflow issues include blocked return vents, closed supply registers, or a failing blower motor.

Low refrigerant levels from a leak will also cause freezing. When refrigerant is low, the remaining refrigerant gets too cold as it expands, causing ice buildup on the coil. This requires professional repair since handling refrigerant requires certification, and the leak must be found and sealed before recharging the system.

Dirty evaporator coils can't absorb heat properly, leading to ice formation. The coil may need professional cleaning if it's heavily soiled. Other causes include a malfunctioning thermostat, damaged ductwork, or a failing expansion valve.

In Ottawa's climate, frozen AC units are particularly problematic during our humid summers when you need cooling most. **Never run your AC with ice on it** - this can damage the compressor, leading to expensive repairs (\$800-\$2,000+). Turn off the system, switch the fan to "on" to help melting, and wait for all ice to disappear before restarting.

If the problem persists after changing the filter, you'll need professional diagnosis. Refrigerant leaks, coil cleaning, and component repairs require licensed technicians. **For persistent freezing issues or refrigerant problems, request a diagnostic service call** to identify the root cause and prevent compressor damage.

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How long does an air conditioner last

Most central air conditioning systems last 15-20 years with proper maintenance, though this can vary significantly based on usage, maintenance, and environmental factors.

The lifespan of your AC depends on several key factors. **Quality of installation** is crucial - a properly sized and installed system will last longer than one that's incorrectly matched to your home. **Regular maintenance** is equally important, as annual tune-ups can extend your system's life by several years. Systems that receive professional maintenance typically reach the upper end of the 15-20 year range, while neglected units may fail after just 10-12 years.

Usage patterns also matter significantly. In Ottawa's climate, where we experience hot, humid summers but relatively short cooling seasons compared to southern regions, AC systems often last toward the longer end of the spectrum. However, if your system runs constantly during heat waves or you keep your home very cool, expect more wear and tear.

Signs your AC is nearing the end include frequent repairs, rising energy bills, uneven cooling, and the system struggling to maintain comfortable temperatures. If your unit is over 15 years old and requiring expensive repairs, replacement often makes more financial sense than continued repairs.

For Ottawa homeowners, it's wise to start planning for replacement when your system reaches 12-15 years old, especially if you've noticed declining performance. **Annual maintenance visits** can help identify potential issues early and maximize your system's lifespan. A well-maintained AC system not only lasts longer but also runs more efficiently, saving you money on energy costs throughout its life.

For a professional assessment of your AC system's condition and remaining lifespan, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers free consultations to help you plan for your home's cooling needs.

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How much does AC repair cost in Ottawa

AC repair costs in Ottawa typically range from \$200 to \$700, depending on the specific problem and parts needed. Simple fixes like replacing a capacitor or cleaning coils are on the lower end, while compressor issues or refrigerant leaks cost more.

Common AC repairs and their typical costs include capacitor replacement (\$200-\$300), refrigerant recharge (\$200-\$400), fan motor replacement (\$300-\$500), and contactor replacement (\$150-\$250). More complex issues like compressor problems can reach \$800-\$1,200, though at that point replacement might be more economical for older units.

Most Ottawa HVAC companies charge a service call fee of \$150-\$250, which typically covers the diagnostic time and is often applied toward repair costs if you proceed with the work. Emergency or after-hours service calls usually carry a premium of \$50-\$100 above regular rates.

The age and condition of your AC unit significantly impacts repair costs. Units over 10-12 years old may require harder-to-find parts or multiple repairs, making replacement more cost-effective. A good rule of thumb is if repair costs exceed 50% of a new unit's value, consider replacement instead.

For safety and warranty protection, always use a licensed HVAC technician for AC repairs. DIY electrical work on AC units can be dangerous and may void manufacturer warranties. Most reputable Ottawa contractors offer free estimates and will explain whether repair or replacement makes more financial sense for your situation.

If your AC isn't working properly, start by checking your thermostat settings and air filter before calling for service - these simple checks can sometimes save you a service call.

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Should I cover my AC unit in winter

No, you should not cover your entire AC unit in winter. Modern air conditioning units are designed to withstand Ottawa's harsh winter weather without full covers, and covering them completely can actually cause more problems than it solves.

Complete covers trap moisture inside the unit, which can lead to corrosion of internal components and create an ideal environment for rust to develop. They also provide attractive nesting spots for rodents and small animals, who may chew on wiring or build nests that block airflow when you start the system in spring.

However, **you can protect the top of your outdoor unit** with a piece of plywood or a specially designed top cover to prevent ice and snow from accumulating directly on the condenser coils and fan. This partial protection helps prevent ice damage while still allowing air circulation around the sides of the unit.

In Ottawa's climate, it's more important to ensure your AC unit has proper drainage around its base to prevent ice buildup and that any nearby gutters aren't dripping directly onto the unit. Before winter sets in, you should also remove any debris like leaves or branches from around the unit and trim back vegetation to maintain at least two feet of clearance on all sides.

The best winter protection for your AC system is an annual fall maintenance service where a technician can properly shut down the system, check refrigerant levels, and ensure everything is ready for the cold months ahead. When spring arrives, avoid turning on your AC until any ice has completely melted and you've removed any winter protection from the top of the unit.

For professional AC maintenance before winter or a spring startup service, Ottawa HVAC Pro can ensure your system is properly prepared for the seasonal transition.

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Central AC vs ductless mini-split - which is better

Central AC is better for whole-home cooling with existing ductwork, while ductless mini-splits excel for targeted cooling, homes without ducts, or adding AC to specific areas. The choice depends on your home's layout, existing HVAC infrastructure, and cooling needs.

Central air conditioning works through your existing furnace ductwork to cool your entire home evenly. It's ideal if you already have a forced-air heating system, as it uses the same ducts and provides consistent temperatures throughout all rooms. Central AC also maintains better humidity control and air filtration when properly maintained. In Ottawa's climate, central AC pairs well with your existing furnace system for year-round comfort.

Ductless mini-splits consist of an outdoor unit connected to one or more indoor wall-mounted units. They're perfect for homes without existing ductwork, older homes where adding ducts would be expensive or impractical, or for cooling specific zones like finished basements or additions. Mini-splits are typically more energy-efficient than central AC because there's no duct loss, and they offer individual room temperature control. Many newer models also provide heating, making them versatile for Ottawa's climate.

Cost considerations in Ottawa show central AC installation ranging from \$4,000-\$6,000 when ductwork exists, while mini-split systems cost \$3,500-\$6,000 depending on the number of indoor units needed. However, if you need to install new ductwork for central AC, costs can increase significantly.

Safety and maintenance requirements are similar for both systems, though mini-splits require cleaning of individual indoor unit filters, while central AC uses your furnace's filtration system. Both should receive annual professional maintenance to ensure safe, efficient operation and prevent issues like refrigerant leaks.

For a personalized assessment of which system works best for your Ottawa home's specific layout and needs, consider a free consultation with Ottawa HVAC Pro to evaluate your options.

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