

OTTAWA HVAC PRO

Seasonal Maintenance

Spring and fall tune-ups and preparing for Ottawa
temperature swings

8 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Q1

When should I switch from AC to heat?

Great timing question for Ottawa homeowners! The short answer is: **switch to heat when overnight temperatures consistently drop below 15°C (59°F)**, which in Ottawa typically happens in late September to early October.

There's no single magic date, but your comfort is the best guide. Most people find they need heating when daytime highs stay below 18°C and nights dip into single digits. Ottawa's climate can be unpredictable in the shoulder seasons — you might need heat one week and AC the next in September, so don't feel locked into one mode.

For homes with a heat pump, the transition is seamless — the system automatically switches between cooling and heating modes. For traditional **gas furnace + central AC setups**, you're simply adjusting your thermostat from "cool" to "heat" mode. There's no mechanical switchover required; both systems operate independently.

Ottawa-specific timing tends to be earlier than most Canadian cities expect. Our valley location means cold air settles overnight even when days are mild. A good rule of thumb: if you're closing windows at night by late September, it's time to switch.

Before firing up your furnace for the first time each fall, it's worth doing a quick check — **replace your air filter**, make sure vents aren't blocked, and listen for any unusual sounds when it first kicks on. A burning smell for the first few minutes is normal (dust burning off), but persistent odours or no heat at all warrant a call to a technician.

Fall is also the ideal time for an annual furnace tune-up before the heating season hits. A licensed technician will inspect your heat exchanger, check gas pressure, test safety controls, and make sure you're running efficiently heading into an Ottawa winter. Tune-ups typically run **\$150–\$200** and can catch problems before they become expensive mid-January breakdowns.

If your furnace hasn't been serviced recently, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers fall maintenance tune-ups — it's the best \$150–\$200 you'll spend before winter arrives.

Q2

When should I turn on my AC in Ottawa?

In Ottawa, you can typically start using your air conditioning when daytime temperatures consistently reach 20-22°C (68-72°F) and nighttime temperatures stay above 15°C (59°F). This usually happens in late May or early June, though Ottawa's unpredictable spring weather means some years you might need it as early as mid-

May or not until mid-June.

The key is watching for **sustained warm weather rather than just a single hot day**. Ottawa's spring can swing from 25°C one day to 10°C the next, so resist the urge to fire up the AC for just one or two warm days. Your system works most efficiently when outdoor temperatures are consistently warm, and you'll save money by waiting for truly sustained heat.

Before turning on your AC for the season, take a few important steps. Check that your outdoor unit is clear of debris, leaves, and winter buildup. Replace your furnace filter if it's been more than 3 months, as a dirty filter will make your AC work harder and less efficiently. Make sure all vents inside your home are open and unobstructed.

In Ottawa's climate, many homeowners find that **setting the thermostat to 24-25°C (75-77°F) during the day and 22°C (72°F) at night** provides good comfort while keeping hydro bills reasonable. Remember that your AC removes humidity as well as heat, so you might feel comfortable at slightly higher temperatures than you'd expect.

If your AC hasn't been serviced in the past year, consider scheduling a tune-up before the peak summer season. This ensures optimal performance during Ottawa's hot, humid summer days and can prevent breakdowns when you need cooling most.

Q3

Should I run my fan continuously in summer?

Running your fan continuously in summer can provide better air circulation and comfort, but it comes with trade-offs in energy costs and filter replacement frequency. The decision depends on your specific comfort needs, home layout, and energy priorities.

Continuous fan operation helps eliminate hot and cold spots throughout your home by constantly circulating air. This is particularly beneficial in Ottawa's humid summers, as moving air feels cooler on your skin and helps maintain more consistent temperatures between floors. Many homeowners find they can set their thermostat 2-3 degrees higher while still feeling comfortable, which can offset some of the increased fan energy costs.

The main drawbacks are increased electricity usage and more frequent filter changes. Your fan motor will consume an extra 300-600 watts continuously, adding roughly \$30-60 to your monthly hydro bill in Ontario. You'll also need to change your furnace filter every 30-45 days instead of every 90 days, since it's working constantly to clean the air.

For Ottawa homes with multiple levels or rooms that tend to get stuffy, continuous fan operation often provides noticeable comfort improvements. However, if your home already maintains even temperatures and you're focused on minimizing energy costs, using the "auto" setting where the fan only runs during cooling cycles may be more economical.

Consider your air conditioning system's age and efficiency as well. Newer variable-speed fan motors use significantly less energy than older single-speed models, making continuous operation more cost-effective. If you're unsure about your system's efficiency or want to explore options like a programmable thermostat with smart fan scheduling, a professional assessment can help you optimize both comfort and energy usage for your specific home.

How do I keep my house cool without AC?

There are several effective ways to keep your house cool without air conditioning, especially during Ottawa's hot summer days. The key is using a combination of ventilation, shading, and heat reduction strategies.

Natural ventilation is your best friend for cooling without AC. Open windows on opposite sides of your home to create cross-ventilation, allowing hot air to escape and cooler air to flow through. Use this strategy during cooler evening and early morning hours when outdoor temperatures drop. Box fans placed in windows can dramatically improve airflow - position them to pull hot air out of upstairs windows and draw cooler air into lower-level windows.

Block the sun's heat before it enters your home. Close blinds, curtains, or drapes on south and west-facing windows during the day. Light-colored window coverings reflect more heat than dark ones. If you have awnings or can install temporary shade cloth over windows, this creates an additional barrier. Trees and shrubs on the south and west sides of your property provide excellent long-term cooling benefits.

Reduce internal heat sources during the hottest parts of the day. Avoid using the oven, dryer, or dishwasher between 11 AM and 6 PM. LED light bulbs produce much less heat than incandescent bulbs. Cook outdoors when possible, or use smaller appliances like microwaves or slow cookers that generate less ambient heat.

In Ottawa's climate, these strategies work well during typical summer conditions, but during extreme heat warnings (35°C+), they may not be sufficient for comfort or safety. Many Ottawa homeowners find that combining these techniques with a properly sized air conditioning system provides the best balance of comfort and energy efficiency.

If you're considering adding AC to your home, a free consultation can help you explore options like central air, heat pumps, or mini-split systems that work efficiently in Ottawa's climate. For immediate cooling needs, ensure your current HVAC system's fan is working properly to circulate air throughout your home.

When is the best time to buy a new furnace?

The best time to buy a new furnace is during the shoulder seasons - late spring through early fall - when demand is lower and you can take advantage of better pricing and scheduling flexibility.

Spring and summer offer the biggest advantages for furnace replacement. HVAC contractors are less busy during these months, which means you'll get better availability for installation dates, more time for the technician to do quality work, and often better pricing. Many manufacturers also offer rebates and promotions during off-peak

seasons. You won't be dealing with the stress of a broken furnace in -30°C weather, and you can take time to research options and get multiple quotes.

In Ottawa's climate, timing is especially important because our winters are harsh and furnace failures often happen during the coldest months when systems are working hardest. Waiting until your furnace breaks down in January means you'll likely pay emergency rates, have limited contractor availability, and potentially face uncomfortable nights waiting for installation. The shoulder season also gives you time to explore high-efficiency options and take advantage of government rebates like the Canada Greener Homes Grant.

However, don't wait if your current furnace is showing warning signs like frequent repairs, rising energy bills, uneven heating, or if it's over 15-20 years old. Strange noises, yellow pilot light flames, or rust around the unit are safety concerns that require immediate attention. Carbon monoxide safety should never be compromised for timing convenience.

For the best experience, start planning your furnace replacement in late spring when you can research options, get quotes, and schedule installation for early summer. This ensures your new system is ready and tested before Ottawa's heating season begins in earnest.

Q6

What temperature should I keep my house when on vacation in winter?

Set your thermostat to 15-18°C (59-64°F) when away during Ottawa winters. This temperature prevents freezing while significantly reducing your heating costs compared to normal living temperatures.

Why this temperature range matters: Keeping your home too cold (below 15°C) risks frozen pipes, especially in older Ottawa homes where plumbing may run through exterior walls or unheated basements. Water pipes typically freeze around 0°C, but the temperature inside walls and near exterior plumbing can drop much faster than your main living areas. At 15-18°C, you maintain enough heat circulation to protect your plumbing while cutting your heating bill by 20-30% compared to normal 20-22°C settings.

Ottawa-specific considerations: Our harsh winters with temperatures often dropping below -20°C mean your furnace will still run regularly even at vacation settings. If you have an older home with poor insulation or a basement that tends to get cold, consider staying closer to 18°C for added protection. Homes with good insulation and newer windows can safely go to 15°C. Many Ottawa homeowners also shut off their main water supply and drain their pipes if leaving for extended periods (2+ weeks), but this requires professional guidance.

Important safety steps before leaving: Change your furnace filter before departure, as a clogged filter can cause your system to overheat and shut down, leaving your home without heat. Ensure your carbon monoxide detectors have fresh batteries, and consider having a trusted neighbor check on your home every few days. If your furnace fails during extreme cold, pipes can freeze within hours.

Smart thermostat advantage: If you don't have a programmable or smart thermostat, this is an excellent upgrade that pays for itself through energy savings. You can monitor and adjust your home's temperature remotely, giving you peace of mind during winter vacations.

How do I prepare my HVAC for winter in Ottawa?

Start preparing your HVAC system for Ottawa's harsh winters in early fall - ideally by October - to ensure reliable heating when temperatures drop below -20°C. The key steps include furnace maintenance, filter changes, and system testing before you actually need the heat.

Schedule a professional furnace tune-up with a licensed HVAC technician before the heating season begins. This service typically costs \$150-\$200 in Ottawa and includes cleaning the heat exchanger, checking gas connections, testing safety controls, and ensuring proper combustion. Your technician will also inspect the venting system and test for carbon monoxide leaks - critical safety checks that only qualified professionals should perform.

Change your furnace filter and stock up on replacements for the winter months. Ottawa's dusty conditions during construction season and winter heating cycles mean filters need changing every 1-3 months. A clean filter improves efficiency and prevents your system from overworking during those long Canadian winter nights when your furnace runs continuously.

Test your heating system early by running it for several hours on a cool fall day. Listen for unusual sounds, check that all vents are blowing warm air, and ensure your thermostat is responding properly. Clear any debris from around your outdoor heat pump (if you have one) and ensure vents and intakes aren't blocked by leaves or other obstructions.

Ottawa's extreme winter temperatures put extra strain on HVAC systems, making preventive maintenance essential. Carbon monoxide detectors should have fresh batteries, and you should know the signs of CO poisoning - headaches, dizziness, or flu-like symptoms that improve when you leave the house.

If your furnace is over 15 years old or you've noticed higher energy bills, consider having a professional assess whether a high-efficiency upgrade would save money over Ottawa's long heating season. For a comprehensive pre-winter inspection and tune-up, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro to ensure your system is ready for whatever winter throws at us.

What is the best temperature for sleeping in winter?

The ideal bedroom temperature for winter sleeping is between 60-67°F (15.5-19.5°C), with most sleep experts recommending around 65°F (18°C) for optimal rest.

Your body naturally drops its core temperature as you prepare for sleep, and a cooler room helps facilitate this process. When your bedroom is too warm, it can interfere with your body's natural temperature regulation and lead to restless, interrupted sleep. The 60-67°F range allows your body to cool down properly while still maintaining comfort under blankets.

Individual preferences vary within this range. Some people sleep better at the cooler end (60-62°F), while others prefer it slightly warmer (65-67°F). Factors like your bedding, sleepwear, and personal metabolism all play a role. If you share a bed, you might need to compromise or use separate blankets to accommodate different comfort levels.

In Ottawa's winter climate, maintaining consistent bedroom temperatures can be challenging with our extreme cold snaps and fluctuating outdoor temperatures. A programmable thermostat can help you automatically lower the temperature at bedtime and raise it before you wake up. This approach can also save on heating costs - lowering your home's temperature by just 7-10 degrees for 8 hours can reduce your heating bill by up to 10%.

Keep safety in mind - never let your home get so cold that pipes could freeze (generally below 55°F). If you're having trouble maintaining consistent temperatures in your bedroom, or if some rooms are much colder than others, this could indicate issues with your heating system, ductwork, or insulation that should be addressed by an HVAC professional.

Consider using extra blankets or adjusting your sleepwear rather than cranking up the heat, as this approach promotes better sleep while keeping energy costs manageable during Ottawa's long winter months.

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