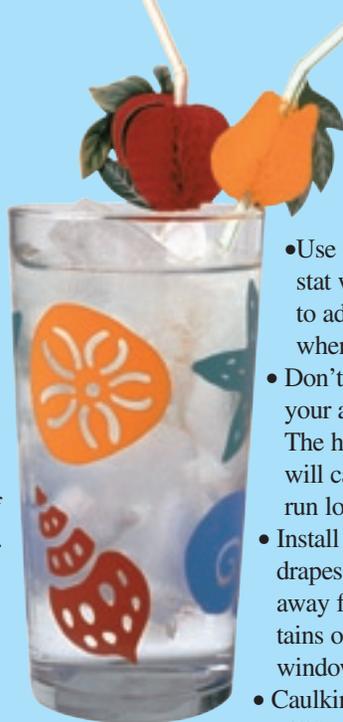




# Chill Out

**W**ant to keep your electric bills from going through the roof this summer? Here are a few environmentally friendly steps you can take to keep things cool.

- Open windows and use portable or ceiling fans instead of operating your air conditioner. Even mild air movement can make you feel three or four degrees cooler.
- Use a fan with your window air conditioner to spread the cool air through your home.
- Without blocking air flow, shade your outside compressor. Change air filters monthly during the summer.



- Use a programmable thermostat with your air conditioner to adjust the setting at night or when no one is home.
- Don't place lamps or TVs near your air conditioning thermostat. The heat from these appliances will cause the air conditioner to run longer.
- Install white window shades, drapes or blinds to reflect heat away from the house. Close curtains on south- and west-facing windows during the day.
- Caulking and weather stripping will keep cool air in during the summer.
- Turn off your computer and monitor when not in use.

# Counter Intelligence

**G**ranite is so 2006. Concrete, glass and stone are gaining ground as popular materials for countertops. Concrete's biggest advantage is that it can take any shape, and it's not as pricey as some other natural stone materials. Because it is cast in molds, it can include subtle texturing and decorative objects such as pieces of metal, fossils or glass. If you are using concrete in the kitchen, consider placing raised strips of metal cast into countertops to support pots and pans near the sink and cooking area.

For those who crave ultra-modern design, another option is glass, which comes in nearly limitless colors, shapes, thicknesses and textures. And because it is nonporous, it is stain-proof and hygienic and can handle hot pots without cracking. Since it's translucent, it can be combined with other design elements, such as glass over aluminum or decorative tile embedded into the slab. Installing lighting under the counter creates added drama and elegance.

Finally, consider engineered stone, which is slightly cheaper than granite. It's made from quartz crystals and polymer resin, so it's nearly maintenance-free. Plus, it's heat- and cold-resistant, mildew-free, stain-resistant and harder than most things you put on it, so it won't scratch. Finally, it comes in dozens of colors — some mimic the real thing while others are made to match a designer's palette. The cost ranges from \$70 to \$120 per square foot with installation.

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