

# HOW TO OPERATE YOUR HOME

So you own a home—and you're not sure what to do next?  
Here's your operating instructions!

## Filtering Your Home's Air

Easy maintenance helps keep it clean

Equipment for home heating, cooling and ventilation uses filters to clean the air that's moving through the system. While these filters are designed to protect the equipment from lint and dust, you're probably more concerned with filtering the air for health reasons.

You should know what kind of air filters exist on your home equipment. You'll find these filters on the forced air furnace or air conditioning return duct (see illustration).

You will also find a filter on an air-to-air heat exchanger, window air conditioner and kitchen exhaust fan. Locate instructions for the equipment in your home and follow specific directions for filter maintenance. For instance, you can vacuum the filter of a window air conditioner, and the filter on the kitchen exhaust fan often can be cleaned in a dishwasher.

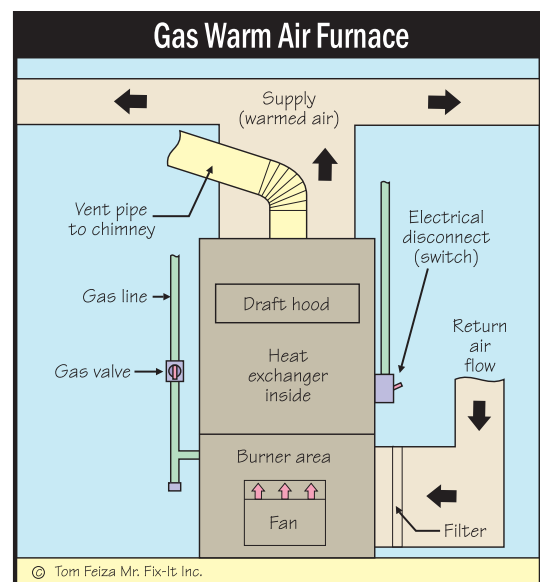
Let's talk through your filter options for typical heating and cooling equipment. You can change and clean these filters, and you can also upgrade to a better filter if you are concerned about the air quality in your home.

The standard on most forced air systems is a nominal **1"-thick media filter**, typically made of fiberglass. The filter should be changed when it is visibly dirty – usually every month or two, depending on the quality of the filter and the amount of dirt in your home's air. Children, pets, plants, and activity tend to produce more dirt that finds its way into the system.

Filters are designed to be installed with one particular side facing the air stream (see illustration). Most filters include directions telling you which side should be installed toward the furnace. If there is an arrow on the filter, it should point toward the furnace.

Remember: the furnace filter is also used when you operate the fan and/or central air conditioning, so you should check the filter during the summer, too.

*(Continued, next page)*



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Featured in this issue:

**Filtering Your Home's Air**

**Keep Grout Looking Great**

**Lighten Up: Paint Over Dark Paneling**

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This newsletter contains basic information on homes not wholly applicable to every situation. Seek professional advice prior to acting on information contained herein. To reprint any article, please contact our office.

You could try one of the **pleated paper filters** if you want a filter that performs better than fiberglass. Pleated paper filters catch more dirt than inexpensive fiberglass filters. Some even have a static charge to attract dirt. Others have carbon content to help with odors. Paper filters cost between \$3 and \$15 and can be found in most hardware stores.

You will need to change this type of filter more often because it collects more dirt and does a better job of cleaning the air. Just match the size to that of your current filter, and install it with the arrows in the direction of air flow.

**Washable filters** can be made of foam or woven synthetic fiber. They are about as effective as inexpensive fiberglass filters. You can improve the efficiency of a foam filter by spraying it with a special filter coating; this oily/waxy spray helps the filter hold dirt better.

A big improvement over the standard 1" filter is the thicker **4"- 6" pleated fiberglass or paper filter**, but if your equipment is set up for a 1" filter, the ductwork will need to be modified for the larger filter frame.

Often, the pleated paper filter is housed in a 4"-thick frame. The paper filter is very fine, and it catches smaller particles of dirt and dust. This type of filter is normally changed once per year, and you replace only the paper element.

A pleated fiberglass filter or paper filter can also be mounted in a throwaway paper frame. The entire unit is replaced about once a year.

**Electronic filters** use electrically charged metal plates and wires that attract dirt. These filters can remove tiny particles from smoke and pollen which aren't caught by standard filters. If you have respiratory problems or are sensitive to dust or pollen, you may want to use this type of filter.

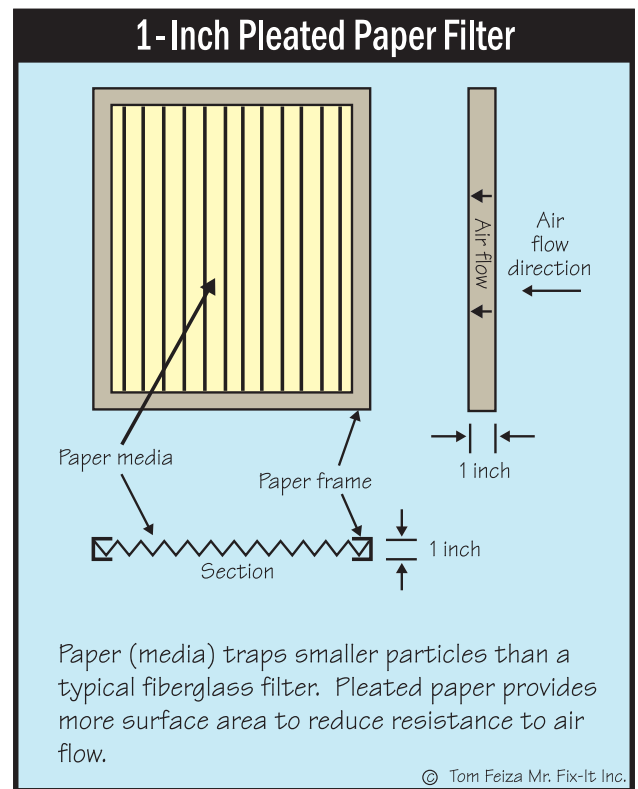
Electronic filters cost more than \$600 to install and will require ductwork modifications and an electrical supply. Maintenance involves washing the interior frame and metal plates and wires with detergent or running them through a dishwasher. Most electronic filters have a metal pre-filter that also must be washed. Follow the maintenance requirements for the specific filter you select.

Many types of washable filters have multiple layers of filtering material; vendors claim these layers contain an electrostatic charge that attracts and traps dirt more effectively than a standard media filter.

Several companies also make a 1"-thick **electrostatic/electronic filter** as a direct replacement for throwaway filters. This filter may have an electronic power supply and may require particular maintenance procedures.

I have not seen any independent evaluation of these specialty 1" filters, so you do need to be wary of the filtering claims.

Overall, just remember to clean or replace the filter as required by the equipment manufacturer. This protects the equipment and increases efficiency. You could consider a better filtering system, but remember that you'll need to maintain it properly; it will catch more dirt and require more maintenance while it protects your equipment.



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### Mr. Fix-It Quick Tip

## Keep Grout Looking Great



Grout around ceramic tile is relatively porous, and once mildew and stains have penetrated deeply, re-grouting is the only solution. To prevent problems, seal the grout with a special silicone-based sealer, available from any large hardware or tile store. Follow the directions for the particular brand and type you purchase. The sealer will prevent stains from penetrating the grout.

The Honey-Do List – Tom and Gayle Feiza

## Lighten Up: Paint Over Dark Paneling

Gayle: Don't you think this family room looks awfully drab?

Tom: No. From the couch, the football game *and* the room both look great.

Gayle: But it's so gloomy in here.

Tom: The better to view the TV picture, my dear.

Gayle: These walls are dark as a cave.

Tom: Uh-oh, I feel a fix-it job coming on.

Gayle: You read my mind. Finally!

Tom: I don't suppose I could get away with just putting higher-wattage light bulbs in the lamps?

Gayle: Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of removing that dark paneling.

Tom: Yikes! Do you have any idea how much work that is? We'd have to pry off the paneling, which is a real mess. Then we'd need to repair the damage to the dry-wall – if there is any drywall behind the paneling. I'd also have to rework all the wood trim around the windows and doors.

Instead, how about just painting over the paneling?

Gayle: You can do that?

Tom: No, Gayle, *you* can do that. Or, we can do that.

Gayle: Fine. I'll do it! Just tell me how.

Tom: If the paneling is dusty, vacuum the surface first. Then wash the paneling with a strong detergent like MEX, TSP, or Spic and Span. That will remove accumulated grime and also slightly roughen the glossy surface.

If shiny smooth areas are still visible after you clean, scrub them with a deglosser solvent.

Gayle: I don't recall seeing anything called "deglosser solvent" in our paint supplies in the basement.

Tom: You can get it at any hardware store. Or use fine sandpaper to lightly sand the paneling.

By cleaning first, and roughening any shiny surfaces, you'll be helping the new finish to stick to the paneling. While you're cleaning, re-nail any loose areas you find with finishing nails set below the paneling surface.

Gayle: I suppose I'll need to prime before painting?

Tom: Right. You should prime the surface with a combination stain killer/primer like Bin or Kilz. You'll want to use shellac- or oil-based products to ensure good penetration and sealing. They're specially formulated to cover problem materials, and they also provide a white base for the finish coat. The Bin has less odor because of its shellac base, and it dries in about 45 minutes.

Gayle: What about these old crayon marks near the floor?

Tom: As you wash that area with strong detergent, you'll be removing most of the wax and stain. Then, as you seal the paneling with Bin or Kilz, it'll cover the stain and keep it from bleeding through.

Gayle: Once I've cleaned and primed the paneling, what kind of paint should I use?

Tom: For your finish coat, buy a top-quality 100 percent acrylic latex paint. You may have to apply two coats. Most high-quality interior paint will work.

Gayle: That's all there is to it? That doesn't sound so hard.

Tom: It's not. And once you're done, the family room will be lighter and brighter. Light walls make any room appear larger.

Gayle: I can see it already. And the texture and grooves in the paneling will add character to these walls.

Tom: *(under his breath)* And I don't have to remove the paneling!

*Tom Feiza, "Mr. Fix-It," is a professional home-improvement expert. His wife, Gayle, keeps track of the couple's lengthy to-do list.*