Our long Canadian winters demand that every home has a reliable and effective furnace. Today’s furnace systems are more efficient, intelligent, and affordable than ever before. This buying guide lists the top 5 questions you need to consider when shopping for a new furnace:

1. WHAT TYPE OF FURNACE DO I NEED?
2. WHAT SIZE DO I NEED?
3. WHEN SHOULD I REPLACE?
4. WHAT FEATURES SHOULD I LOOK FOR?
5. HOW DO I CONTROL MY FURNACE?
PORTABLE ELECTRIC ROOM HEATERS
There are many types of small portable room heaters available today. They are useful for the temporary heating of small rooms, and operate (like a hair dryer!) by using electricity to heat a metal coil and then using a fan to blow air through the coil and into the room. These can become expensive to operate, and can pose safety risks if positioned near curtains, furniture, pets or children.

BASEBOARD HEATERS
This second type of electric heater is commonly found in apartment buildings under windows and balcony doors. They are often used to supplement a forced air heating system. They usually feature a built-in thermostat, provide only local, single-room heating, and as they are also powered by electricity, can be expensive to operate.

FORCED AIR FURNACES
The most common way to heat a home is with a forced air natural gas furnace. In a modern, high-efficiency condensing furnace, natural gas is ignited in a ‘burner’, creating hot combustion gases which pass across a heat exchanger, mixing with incoming cooler air from your home’s return air ducts. The ‘blower’ component then pushes this heated air through your home’s ductwork — hence ‘forced air’. As the heat is exchanged, the combustion gases cool and condense (or liquify). This waste water is drained out of the furnace, while the remaining (now) cooled combustion gases are vented through a plastic pipe to the side of the home. Older low and mid-efficiency furnaces used chimneys and metal flues to vent the still hot (and wasteful) combustion gases out of the home.

BENEFITS OF A FORCED AIR FURNACE:
Modern natural gas furnaces boast efficiency ratings of over 90% AFUE (annual fuel utilization efficiency) which means that 90% of the natural gas used by the furnace is converted into heat. Older furnaces could only convert about 60%, wasting fuel and money.

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2 What size should my furnace be?

The required size of a furnace is determined by a number of factors, including the square footage of your home. It’s critical to properly size the unit to your home, a true science that can only be correctly calculated by a home comfort expert. And don’t forget that your furnace’s fan, or blower will be used year-round to circulate hot air from your furnace and cool air from your air conditioner.

A AFUE or BTUs?
The heating capacity of a furnace is measured in thousands of BTU (British Thermal Units). The amount of fuel energy consumed when running is called ‘input BTU’, while the actual heating capacity is called ‘output BTU’. These numbers vary depending upon the furnace’s AFUE (annual fuel utilization efficiency). For example a 100,000 BTU furnace at 80% efficiency will produce 80,000 BTU of heat while a 100,000 BTU furnace at 95% efficiency will produce 95,000 BTU of heat output.

B IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT THE SQUARE FEET
Common sense tells us that the more rooms we have to heat, the more powerful our furnace will need to be. But there’s much more to the science of furnace specifying than that. The most common calculation involves many factors, including Heating Degree Days, window position, construction material, insulation levels and more. Every home is different, and only a qualified home comfort expert has the tools to accurately calculate the proper sized unit for your home.

BENEFITS OF RIGHT-SIZING YOUR FURNACE
If you buy a furnace that’s too big, the furnace will turn on and off too frequently (short-cycling) losing efficiency and potentially damaging the unit. If it’s too small, your furnace will run continuously, and your home will not feel heated. A properly sized furnace should run for about 40 minutes every hour on the coldest day of the year. To find out more about the benefits of a high efficiency furnace, watch our video at: http://blog.reliancehomecomfort.com/?p=74

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When is the best time to replace my furnace?

The best time to replace your furnace will vary. If you are upgrading your air conditioner, you’ll save money and reduce energy usage by bundling a furnace at the same time. If you are building a new home, it will be easier to install the ducting and optimally position the furnace during construction, rather than afterwards. If you are upgrading just your furnace, be sure to check for available rebates.

FALL SALES OR SPRING SAVINGS?
When to replace your furnace frankly, depends on when you need it most. If your furnace has broken down and it’s 10 degrees below zero, then ‘tomorrow’ would be a good answer. Keep in mind that these days, most manufacturers typically don’t have seasonal sales, with their product development cycles measured in years, rather than months.

BUNDLE UP AND SAVE
If you are looking to maximize your savings when buying a new furnace, the best time to buy is probably when you need to purchase an entire Home Comfort system. Bundling a new furnace, air conditioner, air cleaner, humidifier and thermostat together brings many benefits, the largest being the opportunity to reduce the overall costs of the individual components. Other benefits include time and convenience. As each of the components will be installed, tested and optimized together, by the same technicians, the project will be completed faster, and more efficiently than if you were to spread out the project.

SUBSIDIES AND REBATES
Many local utilities, municipalities and Provinces have recently offered rebates and other forms of incentives to homeowners to upgrade to newer high efficiency furnaces and other home comfort equipment. These rebates can offer you significant savings. One resource you may want to review is http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca for availability and qualification details.
What furnace features should I look for?

While the safety, control and efficiency technology in today’s furnaces have evolved dramatically, there are also other features you can use to compare furnaces. On this page, we’ll review some of the most common differentiators, that can affect your budget.

Motor Speeds
Your furnace’s blower motor is the most common sound you hear when your furnace is running. It’s the element that pushes warm air throughout your home. Older furnaces have single or dual speed motors. A Variable-Speed motor spins at different rates, in response to the heating requirements of your home. They are much quieter and energy efficient than other units.

Stages
Single stage furnace burners simply turn on and run on full power until the temperature you requested has been reached. A two stage furnace has a high and low setting, which enables it to run on a low flame first and, if more heat is required, boost to a higher setting for more heat. This flexibility can save you money during the Spring and Fall when you need your furnace but not at its full Winter power.

Furnace Maintenance Tips
Furnaces are very low maintenance appliances. Simply clean or replace your furnace filter every few months, ensure the openings around the unit are not obstructed, and have it professionally serviced once a season. If you ever smell gas, leave the home and call your energy provider immediately.

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**TOTAL CONTROL**
Modern high efficiency furnaces are intelligent, micro-processor controlled marvels of technology. But fortunately, you don’t need to know how to program a computer to stay warm. All you need to know is how warm you want to feel. Your furnace is controlled by your wall thermostat. If you have a new digital programmable thermostat, you’ll have complete control over the temperature and schedule management. Most people set their thermostat to activate the furnace a few hours before they wake, or return home from work or school.

**GIVE YOUR FURNACE AN ASSIST**
There are many ways to keep your home warm during cold winter days and nights, in addition to turning on your furnace. Check and seal any air leaks around doors and windows - they can dramatically drain heat from your room. Consider closing off rooms that aren’t in use and don’t need heating. Dress sensibly, and wear a light sweater and socks indoors. Closing curtains will block temperature loss through glass.

**THE PERFECT TEMPERATURE**
Scientists have defined the perfect temperature as that at which a person wearing a normal amount of clothing feels neither too cold nor too warm. This "thermal comfort" point varies between 21C and 24C, depending upon relative humidity and your activity level. To find your perfect temperature, set your thermostat a little lower and then increase it if you still feel cold. The goal is to balance comfort with energy efficiency.

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