



AIR CONDITIONING

Hillside

HEATING + COOLING

AIR CONDITIONING BUYER'S GUIDE



OIL DELIVERY



HEATING



AIR CONDITIONING



SERVICE PLANS



COMMERCIAL FUELS



Keeping Your Paws
Comfy All Year Long!



Air Conditioning Buyers Guide

A Homeowner's Buying Guide for 2026

For over 70 years, **Hillside Oil Heating & Cooling** has been the trusted local expert for HVAC sales and service in New Castle County (DE), Southern Chester County (PA), and Cecil County (MD).

We offer energy-efficient **Air Conditioning** solutions for every home, specializing in **Central Air, Ductless Mini-Splits, and Heat Pumps**. Our certified technicians are trained to service top brands like Armstrong Air, Thermo Pride, Peerless, Mitsubishi, and Rinnai.

Call **302-738-4144** (DE/PA) or **410-398-2146** (MD) for reliable repairs or a **FREE QUOTE** on a new installation.

When Should You Buy a New Air Conditioning System?

Whether your air conditioner has unexpectedly failed, your cooling costs are rising, or you are planning a renovation or new installation, one question almost always comes up:

When is the best time to buy a new air conditioner and save money? The answer is not just about price. It's about timing, efficiency standards, and installation planning. Homeowners who approach replacement strategically, rather than reactively, often reduce overall costs while gaining access to better equipment options and more flexible installation schedules.

The Advantage of Planning Ahead

If your air conditioner is still operating but showing signs of age or declining performance, planning ahead is often the smartest financial move.

A proactive A/C replacement allows you to:

- **Shop during lower-demand seasons, such as early spring or late fall.** Contractors are less rushed during these "shoulder seasons," often resulting in competitive off-season rates and faster appointment availability.
- **Compare system types, efficiency ratings, and brands without pressure.** Avoid rushing during a breakdown, carefully evaluate features like SEER2 ratings and noise levels to find the perfect match for your home.
- **Take advantage of rebates, tax credits, and promotional pricing.** You gain time to qualify for federal tax credits or manufacturer incentives that can significantly offset the upfront cost of high-efficiency models.
- **Schedule installation at your convenience—not during a heat emergency.** Plan the work around your calendar to avoid the stress and potential "emergency fees" typical of after-hours or weekend service calls.

When an AC Breakdown Means It's Time to Replace

Not every air conditioning failure requires a full system replacement—but many do. When an A/C system stops working during peak summer heat, homeowners are often forced into reactive, emergency decisions with limited options and higher costs. Understanding when a breakdown signals the end of a system's useful life can help you avoid rushed replacements and unnecessary expense.

A full replacement is typically the right choice when:

- **The System is Aging Out (10–15 Years):** Even if it's currently running, a unit over 12 years old has likely lost significant efficiency and reliability compared to modern standards.
- **You Are in the "Cycle of Repair":** If you have needed multiple repairs in the last two years, or if the cost of a single repair approaches 50% of the value of a new system, it is time to stop throwing good money after bad.
- **Major Component Failure:** If the "heart" of the system (the compressor) or the evaporator coil fails, the labor and part costs are often so high that replacement is the only logical option.
- **Obsolete Refrigerant (R-22/Freon):** If your older unit leaks R-22 refrigerant, repair costs will be astronomical due to environmental phase-outs. A new system will use compliant, affordable refrigerants.
- **Declining Performance & Rising Bills:** If the system runs constantly but cannot maintain the set temperature—and your electric bill is spiking—the internal components have degraded beyond the point of return.



Heating and A/C maintenance plans are available with **Basic** and **Premium Coverage** options. To learn more, please visit www.HillsideHVAC.com/air-conditioning. Have a question or want to sign up for one our plans, call us at **302-738-4144** (DE&PA) or **410-398-2146** (MD).

Does the Time of Year Affect Prices?

HVAC pricing and equipment availability fluctuate significantly throughout the year. Approaching your purchase strategically can make a major difference in both cost and convenience.

The "Smart Buy" Window: Early Spring, Late Fall, and Winter. Purchasing during these off-peak seasons offers distinct advantages:

- **Higher Inventory Levels:** You have full access to the best models rather than settling for what is left in stock.
- **Easier Scheduling:** Contractors are not overwhelmed with emergency calls, allowing for flexible installation dates.
- **Promotional Pricing:** Manufacturers and dealers frequently offer incentives to keep crews busy during slower months.

The "Peak Season" Penalty: Summer Conversely, replacing a system during the height of summer triggers a "peak season" penalty, often leading to higher costs because high demand eliminates negotiation leverage. You may also face fewer choices, as supply chain strain forces you to settle for a less efficient unit, and longer wait times that leave you stuck without cooling while waiting for an opening in the schedule.

Types of Air Conditioning Systems & Estimated Costs

CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONING: A whole-home cooling system that uses a single, centrally located unit to remove heat and humidity from indoor air and distribute cooled air throughout the home via a network of ducts and vents. The system typically consists of an outdoor condenser, an indoor evaporator coil, and a blower that circulates conditioned air evenly to all rooms, providing consistent temperature control, improved comfort, and efficient cooling across the entire living space.

- **Budget (Basic Efficiency): \$5,800 – \$8,200**
Standard single-stage units; 13.4–14.3 SEER2; lower upfront cost but higher energy bills.
- **Mid-Range (Better Efficiency): \$8,500 – \$11,500**
Two-stage compressors; 15–17 SEER2; balances comfort with energy savings.
- **Premium (High Efficiency): \$12,000 – \$18,000+**
Variable-speed systems; 18+ SEER2; ultra-quiet and offers maximum humidity control.



DUCTLESS MINI-SPLITS: A flexible cooling system that uses individual, wall-mounted indoor units to deliver conditioned air directly to specific rooms or zones without the need for ductwork. The system consists of a compact outdoor condenser connected to one or more indoor air-handling units by refrigerant lines. Each indoor unit independently controls temperature and humidity in its designated space, offering precise comfort, high energy efficiency, quiet operation, and customized cooling for different areas of the home.

- **Single Zone (One Room): \$4,000 – \$6,500**
Includes one outdoor unit and one indoor wall-mounted head.
- **Multi-Zone (2–3 Rooms): \$7,500 – \$12,000**
One larger outdoor unit connected to multiple indoor heads for zoned cooling.
- **Whole Home (4+ Zones): \$14,000 – \$20,000+**
Comprehensive solution often comparable to or exceeding central air costs.



HEAT PUMP: A high-efficiency heating and cooling system that transfers heat rather than generate it, providing year-round comfort from a single system. A heat pump uses an outdoor unit connected to an indoor air handler to move heat out of the home for cooling in warm months and pull heat from the outside air to warm the home in colder months. Heat pumps deliver consistent temperature control, improved humidity management, lower energy consumption, and reliable, all-season comfort throughout the home.

- **Standard Efficiency: \$6,500 – \$9,500**
Single-stage; reliable cooling and heating down to roughly 35°F.
- **Mid-Range (Cold Climate Capable): \$9,800 – \$13,500**
Two-stage or inverter-driven; maintains efficiency in lower temperatures.
- **Premium (Variable Speed / Hyper-Heat): \$14,500 – \$21,000+**
Top-tier efficiency; can heat effectively even in sub-zero temps.



Choosing the Right Sized Unit

Price is only part of the equation—proper system sizing is critical to comfort, efficiency, and long-term performance. Air conditioners are sized in “tons,” a measure of how much heat the system can remove from your home. When it comes to sizing, bigger is not better.

- **Oversized systems** cool the air too quickly and shut off before it can properly remove humidity. The result is a cool but clammy home, uneven comfort, and frequent “short-cycling,” which puts unnecessary strain on the compressor and shortens system life.
- **Undersized systems** on the other hand, struggles to keep up during hot weather. It runs continuously, drives up energy costs, and still may never reach your desired indoor temperature.

The Professional Standard: Manual J Load Calculation: To achieve proper comfort and efficiency, system size should never be guessed based on square footage alone. A reputable contractor will perform a Manual J load calculation, the industry standard for sizing residential HVAC systems.

This detailed analysis evaluates factors such as insulation levels, window size and orientation, air leakage, ceiling height, home layout, and local climate conditions. The result is a system sized precisely for your home’s actual

Understanding Energy Efficiency Ratings

Energy efficiency plays a major role in both comfort and long-term operating costs. Air conditioning systems are rated using **SEER2 (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio)**, which measures how efficiently a system cools your home over an entire cooling season—higher SEER2 ratings indicate greater efficiency and lower energy use. While high-efficiency systems often carry a higher upfront cost, they can significantly reduce monthly electric bills, particularly in homes that rely heavily on air conditioning during extended periods of summer heat.

- **SEER2:** Measures air conditioner efficiency over an entire cooling season. Updated U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) standards now require SEER2 ratings for all newly manufactured systems, using testing procedures that better reflect real-world operating conditions than the previous SEER metric.
- **EER2:** measure efficiency at specific indoor and outdoor conditions, calculated by dividing the cooling output (BTUs per hour) by energy input (watts). A solid EER ensures reliable performance under peak conditions.

Modern residential systems generally range from 13.4 SEER2 to 21+ SEER2. Higher efficiency ratings typically translate to lower energy consumption, improved humidity control, quieter operation, and better overall comfort.

ENERGY STAR® Certified Systems

ENERGY STAR® is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) that identifies high-efficiency equipment meeting strict performance standards. ENERGY STAR®-certified HVAC systems use less energy without sacrificing comfort and may help lower utility bills and qualify for rebates.



When selecting HVAC equipment, use the ENERGY STAR® label as a baseline, then compare SEER2 and EER2 ratings for efficiency differences. Proper professional installation is essential, as even high-efficiency systems will underperform if incorrectly sized or installed.

The 7 Steps to Investing in a New Air Conditioning System

Whether you're planning ahead or facing an unexpected breakdown, investing in a new air conditioning system is an important decision. The right approach helps ensure reliable comfort, energy efficiency, and long-term value—while avoiding costly mistakes. At Hillside, we guide homeowners through a proven, step-by-step process to make confident, informed choices.

Step 1: Choose the Right HVAC Contractor

Installation quality is just as important as the equipment itself. A qualified contractor should be properly licensed, bonded, and insured; follow ENERGY STAR® Quality Installation standards; employ NATE-certified technicians; and provide clear, itemized proposals. Choosing the right contractor ensures your system is designed and installed correctly from the start.

Step 2: Understand Your Budget & Financing Options

Before selecting equipment, it's important to understand your budget and comfort priorities. Hillside helps homeowners compare upfront costs, long-term energy savings, and available options. We also offer flexible financing programs to make upgrading to a reliable, energy-efficient system more manageable—especially during unexpected replacements. To learn more, visit <https://www.HillsideHVAC.com/financing>

Step 3: Select the Right Type of System

Choose the system that best fits your home—central air conditioning, heat pumps, or ductless mini-split systems—based on layout, usage patterns, and comfort needs.

Step 4: Size the System Correctly

Proper sizing is critical. A professional Manual J load calculation ensures your system is neither oversized nor undersized, delivering consistent comfort, proper humidity control, and efficient performance.

Step 5: Choose the Right Efficiency Level

Select from budget, mid-range, or premium efficiency systems by balancing upfront cost, SEER2 and EER2 ratings, ENERGY STAR® qualifications, and expected energy savings.

Step 6: Confirm Installation Quality & Home Readiness

Your home must be ready to support the new system. This includes evaluating ductwork, airflow, electrical capacity, thermostat compatibility, and verifying proper setup and performance testing after installation.

Step 7: Plan for Long-Term Performance & Protection

Understand manufacturer warranties, labor coverage, maintenance options, and ongoing service support. Routine maintenance and professional care help protect your investment and extend system life.

Why Choose Hillside For Your Home Comfort Needs

Hillside offers a full range of air conditioning services, including installation, maintenance, and repair of all major brands of central air conditioning, heat pump and ductless mini-split systems. From selecting the right HVAC system to delivery, installation, ongoing maintenance to award-winning customer service, we're committed to ensuring your comfort year-round. You can count on a knowledgeable, experienced, and trusted team.

Call Hillside today at **302-738-4144** (DE&PA) or **410-398-2146** (MD) for an **FREE & HONEST estimate**. We'll visit your home, assess your needs, and provide expert advice and service for any AC system.



THE TRUSTED LOCAL COMFORT EXPERTS

Guided by three generations of family attitudes, Hillside has earned over **3,000 certified 5-star reviews** from our heating and cooling customers.



"Techs are always friendly and give great explanations of issues or things to look out for and even a detail of what they did and why. Customer Service is awesome as well. I've been a customer for many years...I believe it's over 25 years now and I wouldn't change companies for any amount of money. Thank you for keeping my house warm in winter and cool during the summer. "

Review by M.P. from Newark, DE

Keeping your paws comfy all year long!

Hillside Oil Heating & Cooling is a proud to be an award-winning HVAC, full-service heating oil delivery, and commercial fuel company successfully servicing our communities and costumers for almost 70 years.

We know what it is like to be a customer and how we like to be treated. We take pride in thinking like a customer when dealing with our customers. We'll do everything we can to make sure you have an exceptional customer experience. **It's our promise to you.**



Jim Sellers, President



Our mission:

To keep you warm in the winter
and cool in the summer
while doing customer service right.



Address: 40 Brookhill Drive • Newark, DE 19702

Telephone: 302-738-4144 (DE & PA) 410-398-2146 (MD)

Email: contact@hillsidehvac.com

Hours of Operation: Monday–Friday: 7:30AM–4:30PM | Saturday: 9:00AM–1:00PM (Winter)