



## Shopping for a Fireplace Insert

By Tom Lienhard, PE, CEM

Fireplace inserts can enhance the appearance of a room and could make your home more energy efficient, but there are a few questions you need to ask before you start shopping.

*How do you plan to use the insert – decoration or primary heating source?* If for decoration, a small air-tight unit that uses very little fuel and produces an aesthetic flame would work, plus you'll have the added benefit of closing the fireplace stack that may be losing energy – winter and summer – and costing you money.

If it's for a heating source, consider the type of fuel you want to use – natural gas, propane, wood, pellet or coal – then size the insert and heat output to match the room. Regardless of the fuel type used, too much heat in the room may cause you to feel colder when you move to other rooms in your home that aren't at the same temperature. Also, if the thermostat for your home's central heating system is in or near the room with the insert, the heat from the insert could cause the thermostat to register warmer than other rooms in your home actually are. You could be tempted to turn up your thermostat to compensate, causing your home to use even more energy. A good option could be moving the thermostat to another location in your home where it wouldn't be affected by the insert's heat output.

*What measurements do you need?* Fireplace inserts come in many sizes, so getting the right size for your space will save time, money and frustration. Key measurements you'll need when shopping are the opening height and width of your fireplace, rear width (many existing fireplaces are narrower at the back) and depth. Also, measure the depth of the hearth, noting whether it's raised or flush with the floor.

*What else do you need?* Look for inserts approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which are the most energy efficient.

For more information on inserts and to find a certified installer in your area, visit <http://nficertified.org/>. Having your fireplace insert installed by anyone other than a certified installer may void your home insurance.

You'll receive the greatest benefits from your fireplace insert by doing your homework, evaluating your space and factoring in any additional installment costs prior to shopping.

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