



HOW CAN I INSULATE MY HERITAGE HOUSE?

I have single pane windows and my walls are not insulated. What can I do to keep out the cold without having to replace my beautiful original windows and lath and plaster walls?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions by homeowners who are being pressured by commercial interests to replace their single pane windows with double-glazed sealed units and to remove their plaster walls and install batt or blown insulation. However, given the high cost of new windows and insulation, you are unlikely to ever save enough energy to pay back your investment. Fortunately, there are far less expensive and destructive way to improve the energy efficiency of heritage homes.

In terms of insulation, the key is to focus on the attic. As heat rises, this is where most of the heat is lost. Don't worry about insulating the walls of your house - focus on the attic. That is where you will get the greatest return on your costs. Another consideration is that blown insulation can cause serious problems as it can settle over time, introducing a super-insulated band around each floor, which will retain moisture in the walls - a very bad thing!

The Foundation DOES NOT ENDORSE the replacement of original windows but rather encourages a rehabilitation approach through upgrading the thermal efficiency of the existing window sash.

The introduction of double-glazing will cost you more over the life of the house than you will save in energy, as the sealed units fail and have to be replaced about every fifteen years. The original windows have lasted for decades if not centuries and with some maintenance will likely last at least that much longer.

When trying to gain energy, look for major drafts around windows and doors. For the air pockets around windows you can remove the trim on the inside and put in rigid insulation. This can be held in place with Tuck Tape and will not interfere with the operation of the sash pulleys. In so doing, however, the trim is likely to be damaged as fir splits easily. Thin spring metal weather stripping is

also ideal for insulating traditional windows and doors. Storm windows are the traditional way that windows were protected during winter, and would represent a huge improvement in the thermal efficiency of your house.

Another neat trick for double hung windows is to seal the inevitable air passages on the sides and where the pulleys are with a small piece of insulation or even sash cord. If you string a piece of fiberglass insulation in under the sash cord so that the sash cord holds part of it against the pulley, you can then easily remove it by pulling on the cord in the spring and not have it pile up inside the window trim.

A few last general suggestions on gaining energy efficiency in old houses is to think about hanging lined, full-length drapes and to make sure that your doors are drop-sealed and that proper weather stripping is in place. If you have hot water radiators do not rush to get rid of them. They provide efficient and inexpensive heat.

In a nutshell, keep your original windows and gain energy efficiency by adding insulation around the frames and by re-hanging the sash. Heavily insulate your attic and ensure that you have proper weather stripping around your doors. Consider hanging full length drapes and keep your hot water radiators.