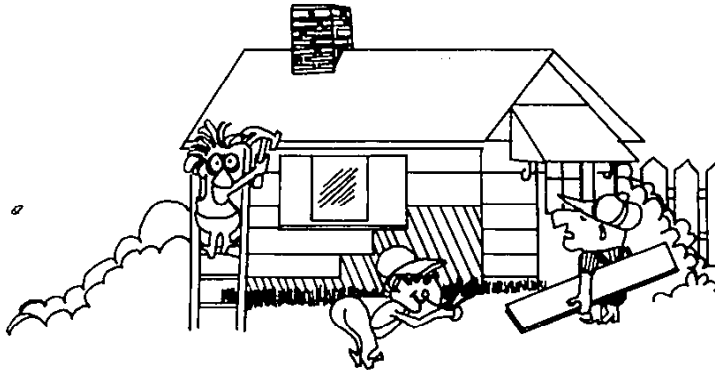


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Use sun power to heat pool

If you own a swimming pool or are thinking of building one, the National Swimming Pool Institute suggests you look into ways to harness the sun's energy to extend your swimming season.

With current technology, solar energy alone is not sufficient to heat pool in cold weather. But NSPI points out there are a number of ways the sun can be used to reduce the energy consumption of conventional pool heating systems.

For example, a pool can be kept an average of six degrees warmer if it's finished in a dark color which can absorb the sun's warmth.

Black, brown or dark green pigment or dark marble dust can be incorporated into the finishing coat on pool walls during construction, or at a later time when the pool is drained.

Solar energy systems using rooftop solar collector panels have become popular with pool owners in recent years.

Solar panels transfer the sun's heat to water pumped from the pool through pipes in the panels. The water then returns through the force of gravity and is continuously recycled by the pool's filter pump.

There's a bonus in the panel collector method, too. Since the

panels keep sunlight off an area of the house roof, less heat enters the house in the summer.

A new pool decking technique uses similar solar collecting technology on the ground. A dark concrete-like material is installed as part of the pool decking to absorb the sun's rays and transfer heat to water running through a system of interconnected pipes with the paving slabs. The pool's filter pump cycles water through the system and back into the pool maintaining water temperature an average of 10 degrees above what it would normally be.

Perhaps the most direct and inexpensive way to take advantage of the sun's energy is with a "solar blanket" pool cover. Such covers also cut water evaporation and keep out debris.

These covers are made of materials which not only help transmit the sun's energy to the water below, but also reduce the amount of heat that escapes back out. Some transparent covers can raise pool temperature 10 degrees to 15 degrees above average air temperature depending on the time of year.

There are several types of solar covers on the markets, and most can be made to order to fit any shape pool.

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