



Homes smart enough to save you money

FAMILY & LIFESTYLE

When it comes to smart home technologies, there is an abundance of options. Here are some we think are worthy investments.

It's been reported that Oprah Winfrey has a high-tech ski home in Telluride, Colorado, that boasts a radiant heat system that allows her to skip shoveling snow from the driveway. And Mark Zuckerberg has an AI-powered home system that acts as his personal butler.

While the technology in this article might not be as lavish, there are some that may be worth the investment (and may even save you money in the long run). Certainly, they can elevate your space and make your life easier.

Smart technologies that impress

There are options for every taste and purpose when it comes to smart home technologies. According to research, the worldwide smart home industry is expected to grow almost 12% by 2025. Here's a list of some worth considering.

Cleaning robots – We're not just talking about a Roomba vacuum or mop here. There are many options in the robot-cleaning category, like automatic grill cleaners and window scrubbers. Interest in this category has been skyrocketing since the pandemic. These gadgets are perfect for saving time when it comes to certain cleaning jobs or in between visits from your cleaning service. Remember Rosie the Robot from The Jetsons? We might be closer to that than you think!

Central air purifiers – In the vein of cleanliness, research shows the air purifier market size is predicted to grow 10% by 2028. Central air purifiers in homes reduce contaminants like dust, smoke, pet-dander, and pollen. Some systems even offer medical grade filtration. Depending on the size of your home and factors like brand, quality, and capabilities, they can cost up to \$10,000 – which is on the higher end of the spectrum.

Custom lighting – Creating an ambiance with lighting is the perfect way to set a tone in your home. Smart lighting has come a long way, with Lutron systems coming preprogrammed with settings optimized for cooking, dining and entertaining for the kitchen, as an example, or "home" and "away" settings for your entryway. Additionally, companies like Nanoleaf manufacture smart color-changing light panels for the wall with music-sync and screen-mirror features to take design and experience in your space to the next level.

Integrated security systems – The latest in surveillance systems is equipped with facial recognition technology. While surveillance cameras are not guaranteed to save you money, the feeling of security is something that doesn't

have a price tag. (And insurance companies do sometimes provide discounts to premiums as well.) The technology has gotten so advanced that some residential systems can recognize family members and will only send an alert when unapproved visitors approach. These higher-end systems produce fewer false alarms than motion sensors without facial recognition.

Smart thermostat – Heating and cooling can account for half of a home’s energy costs, so automating your thermostat will certainly save on costs. Especially if you do a lot of traveling – you can adjust a smart thermostat from afar. They’re reasonable in cost (premium models can sell for \$250) and some electricity companies may even give you credit for them. This simple solution will lead you to a more energy-efficient home.

Solar energy systems – Maybe one of the most popular renewable energy additions to a home right now, solar energy systems are often eligible for tax credits. (This includes solar water heaters and solar panels.) These systems capture light energy from the sun and convert it directly into electricity. Some energy companies will “buy back” the excess energy you produce and give you metering credits for future bills.

PRO TIP: Learn more about a federal tax credit that’s being offered by the government for residential solar photovoltaics at energy.gov. Some states are also offering specific credits for energy efficiency and renewable energy programs, including solar panels. To see what your state offers, visit dsireusa.org, which is the official Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency website. You can filter by state, technology category and financial incentive.

Other renewable energy systems – Through 2023, there are other residential federal tax credits available for geothermal heat pumps, small wind turbines, fuel cells and biomass fuels cells. You can find additional information on energystar.gov. There are some nuances to qualifying for credits, but they are available for existing and new construction homes alike.

High-performance windows – Surprisingly, windows can account for 50% or more of lost energy in a home. But nonconductive framing materials and higher-quality, air-tight construction are changing that. Premium windows also reduce the risk of wind damage from hurricanes and block UV light with double glazing and other protective coatings. Here’s where you’ll save money: Some insurance companies give discounts for premium windows. A bonus? High-performance windows will typically reduce noise in your home as well.

Consultants who can help

If you’re not sure where to start when it comes to being more eco-friendly, there are professionals who offer energy efficiency assessments. Even your energy provider may offer an energy audit. There are several government resources to help find qualified individuals, including Residential Energy Services Network and Home Performance with Energy Star. An energy efficiency assessment may help you see where you should look to improve first and where you would get the biggest bang for your buck.

On that same note, smart home consultants are becoming increasingly more common, especially for new builds. These professionals can advise on smart home technology and design, including lighting controls, automatic window shades, audio and video systems, security systems, temperature controls and more. Once you’re using a company for one eco-friendly improvement, they can integrate more beneficial products throughout your home.

While all these smart technologies require an upfront investment, they offer incentives – financial and otherwise – for using them in our home. One thing’s for sure – we’re a bit closer to replicating a Sky pad-Apartments-type home like the Jetsons these days. Next stop, Orbit City!

Next steps

If you're thinking about upgrading your home with the latest smart technologies:

- Speak to a smart home consultant or energy efficiency professional to determine what would be the best investment for your goals
- Consult your advisor on how you can budget for the addition of smart technologies within your home
- Prioritize your home improvement investment based on what will bring you the most joy

Sources:

nanoleaf.me; northwesternmutual.com; energystar.gov; cnet.com; homeadvisor.com; grandviewresearch.com; cnet.com; prnews.wire.com; homeadvisor.com; smarthomeperfected.com; lutron.com; warnerbros.fandom.com; thejetsons.fandom.com