

Hot to trot

Just because the air temperature might be cooling down doesn't mean you should stop enjoying your pool. Today there is a range of effective, energy-efficient heating solutions designed to extend your swimming season.

BY GRACE LAKIS

CREATING AND MAINTAINING THE ideal pool temperature doesn't come naturally – while most pool water hovers around the 18-20 degree Celsius mark, it takes a designated heating system to bump it up to where we like it most: a balmy 25-26 degrees.

Installing the right pool heater can extend your swimming season by up to four months, thus increasing the return on what was undoubtedly a fairly large investment in your pool.

There are three main heating options to choose from – gas, heat pumps and solar – enabling you to select the best one for your budget, location and lifestyle.

Gas

The increased availability of natural gas and LPG has inspired a lot of property owners to choose gas as their preferred mode of pool heating. The fact that it is readily obtainable and can be closely regulated makes it ideal for heating pools and spas where particular temperatures are required.

Gas heating can quickly and efficiently heat your pool to a cosy temperature, and the various models come in a range of configurations to suit all types of installations.

Selecting the right size gas heater depends on three key factors: the amount of water to be heated (litres), how long you are prepared to wait for your pool to heat up, and your preferred swimming temperature. Also, most people want to be able to heat their spa quickly and to a much higher temperature than their pool, so a gas heater should be selected with this in mind. Many offer dual control, which

allows you to set separate temperatures for your pool and spa.

Be sure the heater you choose is the one most suited to your requirements, i.e. if your pool is situated indoors, you will require special fluing as well as additional ventilation designed to suit the size and type of heater you opt for. It also is advised that all gas heaters be fitted with thermostatic controls; however heaters connected to spas must have a thermostatic control with a maximum temperature of 40 degrees.

Heat pumps

Like gas, heat pump pool heaters can be regulated to suit your needs or can be operated by a thermostatically controlled, automatic timing device. The great thing about such heating systems is that they are not weather dependent and can be operated throughout the year.

Waterco heat pumps, for example, are made from marine grade, corrosion resistant stainless steel and feature a high limit temperature control to prevent overheating.

Heat pumps work like a reverse cycle air conditioner by extracting heat from the atmosphere, which is then transferred to the pool water. A highly efficient, low cost option, heat pumps come in a number of different sizes ranging from 2kW to 200kW output.

"There's really no contest when it comes to the difference in running costs between a heat pump and a gas pool heater. In fact, you can save up to 80 per cent over LPG and 50 per cent over natural gas," says Bryan Goh, group marketing director at Waterco.



Main pic: Extending your swimming season has never been easier, with a range of heating solutions available.

Top right image: Solar has been particularly well accepted for heating swimming pools, says Peter Haddon from Heliocol Solar.

Bottom image: Automatic controllers have given pool and spa owners greater freedom in operating equipment.

Solar

Undoubtedly the most environmentally friendly option of all, solar heating seizes the sun's natural energy via a series of tubes – known as the collector – which is usually mounted on the (preferably north facing) roof of your house.

Using the existing pool pump, water is diverted up to the solar system, which is then heated by the sun's radiant energy as it passes through the collectors. The water is then returned to the pool to repeat the cycle until the pool has been warmed.

The amount of heat absorbed and the subsequent increase in temperature depends on three key criteria: the size or area for the collector and the number of tubes per square metre; the location of the collector; and the quality of the control system. Ultimately, though, the major influence on the effectiveness of any solar system is its exposure to the sun.

While you cannot control when the sun will shine or for how long, solar controllers allow you to operate the solar pump only when heat can be

harnessed. This ensures that maximum heat gain is acquired.

Pool heating trends

"The emergence of heat pumps has definitely been the key trend in pool heating over the past five to ten years," notes Bryan Goh. "While the technology itself hasn't improved, vast improvements have been made in terms of quality and reliability, which both help to lower price points." Solar pool heating had taken a large portion of the market, Bryan explains; however solar isn't always ideal for houses without adequate roof space, or those that face in the wrong direction, or find themselves in constant shade regardless of the season.

"Traditionally, these pool owners would opt for gas but now heat pumps sit in between gas and solar as a viable option," he adds. "You don't need roof-mounted solar panels and heat pumps are a lot cheaper to run than gas."

While utilising solar energy has gained acceptance and popularity over the past 30 years, advancements in technology and installation have elevated a few products over their competitors.

Take Heliocol Solar, for example, which boasts ISO 9002 Approval Green Certification from the world's largest developer of international standards. Its riser tubes and header pipes are factory moulded and packaged in modular, pre-made panels, eliminating



the need for installers to perform hundreds of low pressure joins on-site. "What this also means for the home owner is that they own a product that only has ten joins instead of, for example, 510," says Heliocol Solar director, Peter Haddon.

"And, instead of using some form of adhesion to hold the product to the roof and hoping for the best, we've developed special brackets that fasten firmly to the roof," Peter explains, adding that his solar systems all survived with minimal damage during Queensland's cyclone season.

Developments in interactive technology have also carved a new niche in the pool industry, with smarter, smaller, user-friendly systems giving owners the freedom to operate equipment from one hand-held device. What was once the domain of dad, typically speaking, is now easily manageable by the whole family.

Automatic controllers like the Viron Connect and Zodiac Aqualink allow people to operate pool and spa heaters, among other things, via an interactive LCD touch screen.

Environmental awareness is also on most pool owners' lips, with companies developing products that conserve energy and water, and reduce the dreaded carbon footprint.

AstralPool features a range of pool and spa heating products that significantly reduce operating costs while simultaneously conserving valuable resources like water and electricity.

"The Viron Gas Heater uses revolutionary technology to heat your pool quickly and accurately to the temperature you select," explains Lauree Brewster, AstralPool marketing executive. "Heat on demand technology not only saves approximately 20 per cent on operating costs over conventional gas heaters but also helps reduce the CO2 emissions produced."

Whichever heating option you select, using a pool cover or blanket after dark will help retain the warmth generated during the day. This not only will reduce the time it takes to re-heat your pool the next day but also will prevent leaves and debris from blowing into the pool on those cold, wintry nights. ~