Heat Pump Basics: A Homeowner's Quick Guide

What the system does, its main parts, and questions worth asking before you buy

What a Heat Pump Does

1. **Heats and cools**
   A heat pump moves heat rather than burning fuel, and the same equipment can run in reverse to cool a home in summer.
2. **Runs on electricity**
   Instead of burning natural gas like a furnace, a heat pump uses electricity to move heat from one place to another.

The Main Parts

1. **Outdoor unit**
   Sits outside the home and contains the compressor and the coil that exchanges heat with outdoor air.
2. **Indoor unit**
   Distributes conditioned air through ductwork or a wall-mounted head, depending on the system type.
3. **Reversing valve**
   Switches the direction of refrigerant flow so the same equipment can heat in winter and cool in summer.

Questions to Ask Before You Buy

1. **Is this a ducted or ductless system**
   Ask how the equipment will connect to your existing ductwork, or whether a ductless head makes more sense for your layout.
2. **What backup heat does the system pair with**
   Ask whether the installation includes a backup heat source and how the two systems are set to work together.
3. **Who services this equipment locally**
   Ask about maintenance access and parts availability before you commit to a brand or model.

Bring this guide to your first conversation with an installer so you know which questions to ask.

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