

## THE NORTH BAY HEAT PUMP BUYER'S GUIDE

Marin • Sonoma • Napa Homeowners

### How to Choose the Right Heat Pump and the Right Installer for Long-Term Comfort & Savings

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Why More North Bay Homeowners Are Choosing Heat Pumps

Heat pumps are quickly becoming the preferred way to heat and cool homes across Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties.

Unlike traditional furnaces and air conditioners, heat pumps:

- Provide heating and cooling in one system
- Use electricity instead of burning gas
- Deliver 200 to 300% the efficiency
- Improve indoor air quality
- Reduce long-term energy costs
- Future-proof homes as energy codes evolve

The biggest difference in performance isn't the brand; it's how the system is designed and installed.

This guide focuses on what truly matters: comfort, reliability, and lifetime value.

#### 2 - WHY HEAT PUMPS WORK BETTER

Why Heat Pumps?

The smallest gas furnace even on its lowest setting is often still too powerful for the average home. That oversizing causes temperature swings, noise, and wasted energy.



**Heat pumps are different.**

They can be precisely sized to match what your home actually needs, delivering steady, efficient comfort instead of bursts of hot air.

1. Comfort  
Even temperatures with fewer hot and cold spots.
2. Health  
No combustion, no exhaust fumes, no carbon monoxide.
3. Safety  
All-electric operation eliminates gas leaks and combustion risks.
4. Sustainability  
Runs on electricity and pairs well with solar and battery systems.

**3 - AIR QUALITY BENEFITS**

Heat pumps don't just improve comfort they can significantly improve indoor air quality, which is especially important in the North Bay.

**Cleaner Air, Healthier Homes**

1. No Indoor Combustion  
No gas burning inside the home means no carbon monoxide or combustion byproducts.
2. Advanced Filtration Options  
Many systems support higher-performance filters (often MERV 11–13+) that reduce dust, pollen, and allergens.
3. Wildfire Smoke Protection  
During wildfire season, properly designed systems can improve filtration and reduce smoke infiltration a major benefit in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties.
4. Improved Humidity Control  
Some heat pump systems offer enhanced dehumidification, improving comfort and reducing musty conditions.

**4 - START WITH THE INSTALLER (NOT THE EQUIPMENT)**

Heat pumps are designed systems, not off-the-shelf appliances.

In the North Bay, homes vary widely by age, layout, and microclimate installation quality matters more than brand name.

### **What to Look for in an “electric” Heat Pump Contractor**

- C10 – ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR
- C20 – HVAC CONTRACTOR
- C46 – SOLAR & BATTERY CONTRACTOR
- B - GENERAL BUILDING CONTRACTOR
- Local experience in Marin, Sonoma, or Napa
- In-home evaluation of furnace and AC equipment
- Professional Manual J load calculations
- Clear explanation of system design
- Long-term service and warranty support

### **5 - QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INSTALLER**

A professional installer should welcome these questions.

Ask your installer:

- “Will you perform a Manual J load calculation and share it with me?”
- “What’s your plan for my existing ductwork?”
- “How will you size the system for my specific microclimate?”
- “What is your warranty and service response time?”
- “Can you show examples of similar installations in my area?”

*If a contractor seems uncomfortable answering these questions, that’s valuable information.*

### **6 - PROPER SIZING & MICROCLIMATES (MANUAL J)**

One Region. Many Microclimates.

**The North Bay is not a single climate zone.**

- Coastal Marin and western Sonoma are cooler and foggier
- Inland Napa and Sonoma valleys experience hotter summers
- Heating vs. cooling dominance can change within 20 miles

### **Why This Matters**

A system sized for Napa heat may be oversized for a fog-belt home.

### **How Manual J Solves This**

A professional Manual J load calculation accounts for:

- Your exact location
- Local design temperatures
- Home orientation and exposure
- Heating vs. cooling dominance
- Insulation, windows, and air leakage

**Result: a system that's quieter, more efficient, and more comfortable.**

## **7 - EFFICIENCY & SYSTEM TYPES**

Understanding Efficiency

- SEER2 -Cooling efficiency
- HSPF2 - Heating efficiency

Higher ratings mean more comfort per dollar spent.

Recommended for the North Bay:

- SEER2: 16–20+
- HSPF2: 8.5–10+

### **Ducted vs. Ductless Systems**

Ducted Heat Pumps

- Ideal for homes with existing ductwork
- Clean, hidden appearance
- Whole-home comfort
- Ductless (Mini-Split) Heat Pumps
- No ducts required
- Room-by-room control

- Great for remodels or uneven comfort

Many homes benefit from hybrid systems combining both.

## **8 - INCENTIVES & ELECTRICAL READINESS**

Heat pumps may qualify for:

- California electrification incentives
- Utility rebates
- Regional programs

Incentives vary by location and system efficiency and should be reviewed before installation.

### **Electrical & Space Considerations**

- Electrical panel capacity
- Outdoor unit placement and clearance
- Indoor equipment space
- Noise considerations
- Future plans (solar, battery, EV charging)

Good design plans for today and tomorrow.

## **9 - RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

WARNING:

- “We’ll just swap it out.”
- Refusal to perform or share Manual J calculations
- Pressure to decide the same day
- No duct evaluation on ducted systems
- One-size-fits-all pricing
- Avoiding discussion of electrical panel capacity

**A heat pump is a long-term investment.** Clear answers matter.

## 10 - HEAT PUMP FAQs

### **Will a heat pump keep my home warm in winter?**

Yes. Properly sized systems provide reliable heating even on the coldest North Bay nights.

### **Do heat pumps work in older homes?**

Yes. Many older homes work well with heat pumps when properly designed.

### **Will my energy bills increase if I switch from gas?**

In most cases, no and often they decrease.

### **Why is proper sizing so important?**

Oversized systems waste energy and reduce comfort. Manual J ensures accuracy.

### **What's the difference between ducted and ductless systems?**

Ducted systems condition the whole home; ductless systems allow room-by-room control.

### **How much does a heat pump cost?**

Typical system replacements range from \$15,000 - \$22,000, though complex installations requiring new ductwork or electrical panel upgrades may run higher.

### **Are rebates available?**

Yes. Many systems qualify for state and local incentives.

### **How long does a heat pump system last?**

Typically 15–20 years with proper design and installation.

## 11 - FINAL CHECKLIST

- ✓ Licensed local installer
- ✓ Manual J load calculation
- ✓ Climate-specific system sizing
- ✓ High-efficiency equipment
- ✓ Service and warranties
- ✓ Duct and electrical evaluation
- ✓ Incentives reviewed upfront
- ✓ Focus on comfort and lifetime value



**A professional heat pump consultation should be:**

- Educational
- Pressure-free
- Tailored to your home and climate

**Schedule a Heat Pump Assessment**

**(415) 382-7717 | (707) 778-0568 [SolarCraft](#)  
Serving Marin, Sonoma & Napa Counties**

**Questions?** Reply to this email or reach me at [dkelly@solarcraft.com](mailto:dkelly@solarcraft.com) or (415) 299-4532.

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