



The most reliable central air conditioning systems

The brands most likely to keep you cool season after season

Published: May 2014

Big energy savings over older central air conditioning systems is one more reason to install a new one or replace an old one that broke. But you may want to give York, Goodman, and Amana central air systems the cold shoulder. These brands logged a greater percentage of repairs among owners than the three brands at the top of our Ratings: American Standard, Bryant, and Trane. Those are some of the findings from our latest reliability survey of almost 34,000 readers who bought a central-air-conditioning system or heat pump (see charts below).

Our readers also reported that when the more-repair brands of central air systems do break, they are more likely than most other brands to leave the home without cooling for at least a day, as reported by about one in 10 people who owned these brands.

With central heat pumps, not only is Goodman among the more repair-prone brands, it is also more likely than most other brands to leave a home without cooling for a day or cost more than \$150 to repair (this happened to 12 percent and 11 percent of Goodman owners respectively). Heat pump systems exchange hot air for cool air in summer and do the opposite in winter. The added complexity of these systems and the fact that they're used for more of the year may help explain why 21 percent of them needed repair compared with just 13 percent of central air conditioners. American Standard, Trane, and Carrier are some of the better choices.

The surveys, collected by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, also show that fixing any central air conditioning system can be a real hassle. Six percent of central air system owners and 8 percent of heat pump system owners reported that their system broke down to the extent that they were left without cooling for a day or more. In addition, 3 percent report that their central air system broke down completely and 4 percent said that their heat pump system broke down completely.

The good news: Choosing one of the more reliable brands in our survey can boost the odds that you will be comfortable. Here are some other steps that will help you minimize repairs and trim your cooling bill.

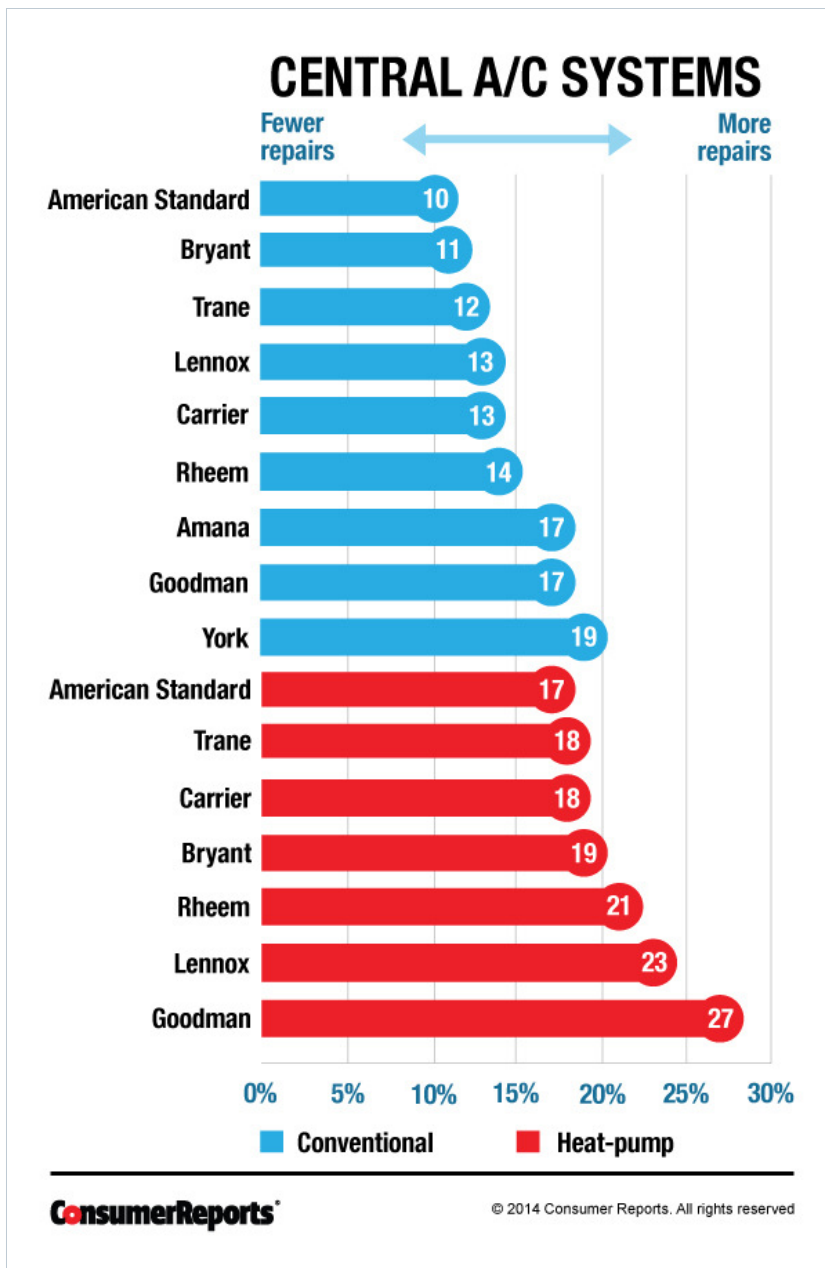
Hire your own installer. Our research showed a strong correlation between repairs and installation. For central air conditioning, 19 percent of systems installed by new-home builders failed compared with 12 percent installed by homeowners who hired their own contractor. The gap was even wider for heat-pump units, where 28 percent of the builder-installed units failed compared with 18 percent for owner-installed systems.

Keep it clean. Be sure hedges and plants are at least 2 feet away from the outside unit. Clean grills and filters monthly. Clear debris and dirt from condenser coils and check for blockages in the drain pipe.

Seal and insulate ducts. Up to 30 to 40 percent of energy can escape through leaks or when ducts aren't insulated. Sealing them will keep you cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.

For more information on cooling your home, check out our buying guides for [window air conditioners](#) and [central air conditioners](#).





Source: Consumer Reports Annual Reliability Survey. Findings are based on responses from almost 34,000 readers who bought a conventional or heat-pump central air-conditioning system from 2007 through mid-2013. Graphs show percentage of models for each brand that were repaired; differences of fewer than 5 points aren't meaningful, and data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to age and use.

Copyright © 2006-2014 [Consumer Reports](http://consumerreports.org). No reproduction, in whole or in part, without written [permission](#).