



# Warm encounters

When choosing bathroom heating, strike the perfect balance between style and function and you'll enjoy your space whatever the weather

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**W**hen it comes to creating a relaxing and comfortable bathroom space, careful planning will play a large role in your success and will pay off in spades. This is especially true when it comes to heating. And while there are different routes to achieving this, not all will be suitable for your project. Here's how to choose what will work efficiently for your daily comfort.

## Doing the maths

Making sure that you achieve comfortable temperature levels is essential, and it needn't be difficult, as either you or your plumber can perform a heating calculation using the British Thermal Unit (BTU) Calculator. This system estimates the amount of BTUs required to heat a space. It factors in the size of the space, insulation levels and your desired temperature levels. This will ultimately help you choose a radiator with the

correct heat output and size, so that you only use the energy you need to. Instead, you'll be able to save money by ensuring that the heating system you choose for your bathroom is just right. You can also work out how many BTUs you need for your space using free and handy online tools from companies such as Victoria Plumbing and Plumbnation.

## Towel warmers

Once you've calculated how many BTUs are needed, you'll have a good idea of the options available to you. A BTU rating is assigned to all towel warmers: as a rough guide for a well-insulated modern home, you should allow 400 BTUs per sq m of floor space in a typical bathroom with a small window and an outside wall. "If you are fortunate enough to have a luxuriously large bathroom, then your towel rail will need to have a higher BTU rating to ►

**Previous page (p85):** The Chime towel radiator from Bisque is made of high-shine stainless steel and its chunky, wide-spaced rails give plenty of space for towels. It is priced £768 from West One Bathrooms, a red-gold version is also available.

**Right:** If you're short on space then Intrra from Vogue UK is the perfect design for you. It can be tucked neatly into a corner and costs £1320 for the 1240 x 500mm version in chrome.

radiate the heat effectively, or alternatively you'll need to install more than one," explains Faye Froy of Crosswater.

A well-sized towel radiator can be more efficient if it features thermostatic controls instead of the traditional on/off switches, as they allow you to manage the system better and decide on how warm you want the space to be. At any given time you'll be able to pre-set the heating for exactly when you need it to come on, or, if you're on holiday during the winter months, you can use an anti-freeze function that turns the system on should temperatures drop below freezing.

With towel warmers, you also have to make a choice between plumbing them in to the central heating system or using electricity. "Plumbing in is still the most popular option, as it allows you to manage its operation via the central heating system," says Barbara Payne of Bisque. However, dual-fuel units offer great flexibility. "These systems come with electric heating elements that can be turned on when the central heating is off – so you can have warm towels all year round," Barbara continues. Electric-only radiators are useful when there is no central heating connection available, however, they can be more expensive to run if you don't install efficient controls that are linked to a timer.

When it comes to style, stainless steel is a common choice for heated towel rails. "Its superior thermal conductivity and resistance to rusting makes it the ideal choice of material for high-moisture environments such as bathrooms and wetrooms," explains Faye Froy. Cheaper alternatives include mild steel – usually chrome-plated – and aluminium, which is a favourite because it can be recycled at the end of the radiator's life.

### Underfloor heating

This is a heating option that makes the entire floor surface a radiant heat emitter. These systems operate at a lower temperature than



radiators and cover a larger area to generate a comfortable, even spread of heat underfoot. An electric (dry) mat or loose-cable system could be the most cost-effective solution in a bathroom, as the floor area is often quite small. In contrast, a hydronic (wet) system, that carries warm water through pipes, has higher installation costs and is designed to create even heat over larger areas. On the plus side, a wet system costs less to run and can be plumbed into an existing central heating system, so it may be worth considering one if you are replacing or installing an entire central heating system.

Obviously, installing underfloor heating is more disruptive than installing wall-mounted towel rails or radiators, as it entails removing floor tiles and carefully planning where to place your bathroom furniture, bearing in mind that future repairs may necessitate taking up the entire floor again. "Installing underfloor heating with a towel radiator means you have the best of both worlds," says Adam Jannece of JCJ Construction. "You can dry towels but also eliminate the risk of condensation and associated damp issues."

Both the underfloor heating and towel radiator can be thermostatically controlled to complement each another. Installing a wet underfloor heating system is a specialist job, so make sure you use a well-established company, for example Warmup or The Underfloor Heating Store.

Underfloor electric heating mats are relatively inexpensive, easy to install and now have very competitive running costs, so may be your DIY option. "Having both will allow you to choose something more practical with larger spacing to fit your fluffy bath towels, rather than a sole heater with multiple bars close together designed to pump out lots of heat," says Leanne Robey of Ripples.

Also, remember that you'll need to choose flooring that will optimise the effect of an underfloor heating system. Tiles made of materials such as ceramic and limestone are ideal for bathrooms, and when laid over underfloor heating they allow water to evaporate quickly. Hard-wearing and low-maintenance, concrete and resin are great heat conductors that also work well with underfloor systems. [\[KBB\]](#)



**Left:** The Schema Belt radiator from Ridea features a leather belt that serves as the towel holder. This stylish design is available in a wide range of colours or metallic finishes, including gold and silver leaf, for a truly opulent look. Price on application.

**Below:** Designed to replicate the architectural form of the Dubai skyscraper, the Burj towel warmer from Frontline Bathrooms is available in two sizes, either 1200 x 500mm or 900 x 470mm, with prices starting from £380.



**Left:** The Kudox Vectis towel rail is a sleek-looking unit from B&Q that costs just £285. Measuring 1500 x 500mm, it can be plumbed into your central heating system, or it can run on electricity.





## Style and function

When it comes to your towel heater there are options to suit all of your needs as well as your tastes.

**1 Traditional radiators** are the first choice for period homes, select from refurbished cast-iron or modern reproductions. The Aquarius from Albion combines a classic radiator with useful chrome towel rails (a nickel finish is also available). It costs £1080 and can be powered by your central heating, by an electric element or a combination of both.

**2 Vertical panel radiators** are perfect for providing a high-heat output but don't take up as much wall space as traditional horizontal radiators. Svelte by Bisque is made of recycled aluminium – a great thermal conductor – and uses 90% less water than most ladder rails. Aluminium also responds efficiently to temperature adjustments. The sleek design is available in a range of colours to suit different zones and schemes. Prices start from £670. Svelte is shown here in a bathroom by Ripples.

**3 Ladder towel rails** are the standard for the bathroom because they are so practical, but you don't just have to go for a dull and functional design. Ellipsis from The Radiator Company is formed of oval steel tubes that offer a contemporary twist on a bathroom favourite. Shown in a stylish matt platinum finish, the 1385 x 500mm model is priced around £524.

**4 Sculptural designs** add real wow to the bathroom and often, as shown here, can make an efficient use of space. White steel has been effectively employed to create a striking designer radiator that can be hung vertically or horizontally. The Tubone by Antrax is an award-winning, stylish unit that's perfect for a truly contemporary bathroom space. Shown in white, it is available in a range of colours including black and orange, either as a plumbed in or electric unit. Prices start from around £777 from MHS Radiators.

**5 Statement radiators** can more resemble an artwork than a functional piece, and can therefore be used to make a striking focal point for your bathroom. Here, powder-coated steel has been used to form a circular towel warmer that is available in a range of colours. Shield by Hom is priced from £320.



**Far left:** Gold is a bold but fabulous option for a luxury bathroom, this Caesar design by Caleido adds the wow factor to the ladder-style towel warmer. This modular design consists of round pipes connected by spheres. Price on application from The Radiator Centre.

**Left:** Drummonds heated towel rails are custom-made to order, hand-crafted from solid brass. This five-bar wall-mounted towel rail is available in unlacquered brass, polished chrome and polished nickel (shown), priced from £2502.

**Opposite page, bottom left:** Living up to its name, Bauhaus's Svelte towel warmer, £545, in a matt black finish is slim and chic. Made from high-grade mild steel, the clever asymmetric design means it can be mounted facing to the right or to the left.

**Bottom right:** The Urban Inca Ladder rail by CP Hart is a brushed stainless steel model that will provide your bathroom with ample heat output for comfortable use throughout the year. Priced at £1734, this modern design is ideal for a contemporary space.





### Installation advice

Take a few tips from the professionals when it comes to installation.

It's not impossible to replace a radiator or underfloor heating yourself, but it always pays to get advice from a professional installer, as they'll be au fait with any issues that may arise. For example, a towel radiator should ideally be located in the coldest place in the room. This is likely to be on an external wall, though be aware it will lose heat more quickly if placed there. "Also, if you are fitting a tall wall-mounted radiator – which may be slightly heavier when filled with water than a traditional model – you may need special fixing screws depending on the wall type," explains Barbara Payne of Bisque.

With underfloor heating, you should be aware that, if you are fitting an electric underfloor heat mat above a concrete floor, it is important to fit a layer of insulation under the mat to maximise its efficiency by preventing heat being lost to the floor. "Have a look at loose-wire systems," suggests Martina Valve of Warm Up. "They use heating cables that can be laid around fixed features in a bathroom, such as the basin or toilet. They are also ideal for irregularly shaped rooms.

When it comes to cost, be sure to get a range of quotes from at least three different suppliers. You should expect the installation cost of electric underfloor heating to be between £45 and £80 per sq m, depending on whether you're fitting mats or loose cables, and on the type of floor you have (suspended or solid). For a heated towel rail, Adam Jannece of JCJ Construction estimates, "Assuming it is a second fix to existing pipework, then the cost for a plumber to install it would typically be £100. For an electrician to add an electrical feed for a dual-fuel radiator would be approximately £120."

**Right:** Porcelain tiles are cold to the touch but work efficiently with underfloor heating, so they soon warm up. Urban Calacatta porcelain tiles from Lapidica are priced from £95 per sq m.

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