

Winter can be tough on your home -- even if you live in an area that receives little or no snowfall. Here's the springtime homeowner's maintenance checklist to ensure your home is ready when spring flowers begin to bloom:

- **HVAC checkup.** It's a good idea to have your system tuned up before air conditioning season arrives. Always use a trained professional for this. Many companies offer discounts to those who sign maintenance agreements for spring and fall tune-ups.
- **Roof inspection.** Winter snow and ice can damage shingles which could lead to leaks. You can inspect your roof with binoculars, but don't go up there. Roof repairs are best left to a qualified contractor.
- **Check gutters.** Ice buildup during the winter months can cause gutters to loosen and sag. Gutters that don't drain properly may create drainage issues -- left for a season or two, an unstable gutter can spill enough water to damage the foundation.
- **Inspect sidewalks and driveway.** Cracks and buckles caused by freezing temperatures should be repaired before they become a major issue.
- **Check seals around doors and windows.** Check for drafts again. Cracked caulking should be touched up to prevent the loss of cooled air all summer.



SPRING

Your Grounds

- **Spring cleanup.** Start outside, raking up any remaining leaves that survived the winter, and laying down mulch in your flowerbeds and beneath the hedges. A thin layer of mulch will protect plants from drought and keep weeds at bay. Turn your outside faucets back on, checking for damage. If you plan on hiring a lawn care service to maintain your property and mow your lawn, now is the time to renew your annual contract.
- **Trees.** If your property has any trees, have them inspected by a certified arborist, who can check for signs of illness or any dead branches and catch problems before they escalate and kill a tree. The untrained eye could miss signs of damage, and a dead or dying tree poses a safety hazard to you, your home and neighboring properties.
- **Lawns and hedges.** Reseed your lawn, filling in bald patches before the summer heat. Plant your perennials and give them plenty of water. Later in the spring, when the grass turns bright green again and the lilacs bloom, it is time to fertilize the lawn, although you may not need to fertilize as much as you think.
- **Goodbye snow blower, hello lawnmower.** With the last of the winter snowstorms behind you, early spring is the time to store your snow blower (if you have one) for the summer. You'll need to drain the fuel or add a stabilizer, check and clean the motor and parts. Later, pull out the lawnmower and give it a checkup before the grass gets too long. Mowers get a lot of use, but not a lot of love. Send it out for a tune up annually, where a small-engine repair company could sharpen the blades, change the spark plug and do any other necessary maintenance. Expect to spend \$50 to \$75.



SPRING

The Outside of Your Home

- **Inspect.** Walk around the outside of the house: Are there cracks in the concrete? Is the driveway in good condition? Check the roof for signs of loose or broken shingles. Look up at the chimney for signs of wear. Check the facade and foundation for cracks or signs of water pooling.
- **The gutters.** Your gutters control the flow of rainwater on your house, protecting your roof, siding and foundation. Clogged gutters can cause a roof to leak or water to infiltrate your house. Clean them at least twice a year (or more frequently, depending on how many trees surround your property and hang over your roof). Also, check for damage.
 - If you clean them yourself, be careful on that ladder, as more than 630,000 Americans needed medical treatment in 2015 for ladder-related injuries, according to the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission. You can also hire a professional gutter cleaner, a service that can cost \$75 to \$225, depending on the size of your home.
- **Paint.** Exterior paint looks nice and protects your shingles from water damage and rot. Look for signs of peeling or chipping paint. You may need a touch-up or a fresh coat. If you plan to hire a professional, schedule the job in the spring so the work gets done by the end of the summer.
- **Give the house a bath.** Spring is a good time to give the house a good scrub, washing all the winter away. Take the storm windows off and wash the windows, inside and out. The house can get grimy, too. Grit stuck to the facade can damage paint and masonry over time. Wait for a warm, dry day and get to work. Here's how to clean your house's exterior:
 - Close all windows and doors and cover the ground and hedges with plastic sheeting.
 - Avoid the instinct to rent a power washer, as it may not be necessary, and it could damage siding or masonry, depending on your building materials. In most cases, an ordinary garden hose will do.
 - Attach a siding cleaning kit to the hose and get to work.
 - Spot-clean heavily soiled areas. Use detergent sparingly, as it can harm your plants.
- **Patio or deck.** You may not use your deck all winter; chances are it has a layer of winter grime across it. Sweep it clean. Inspect your deck, looking for signs of cracked wood and loose nails. Pull out any leaves or debris from between the boards. Then clean it thoroughly.



SPRING

Inside Your Home

- **HVAC systems.** For homes with central heat and air, call your HVAC technician to schedule the system's biannual checkup and servicing. A technician should check the ductwork for signs of damage, and clean and service the furnace and A/C compressor. Clean the bathroom vents, too. Cleaning ducts and vents costs homeowners an average \$348.
- **Steam heat.** For those of you with steam heat, drain your boiler to clear out any accumulated sediment.
- **Plumbing.** Give your pipes a good once-over, checking under sinks to make sure there are no signs of leaks. Look up at your ceilings too for telltale water stains – a sign of a leak in the wall. Check faucets for drips and the flapper in the tank of your toilet to make sure it has not worn out (once the flapper starts to go, expect your toilet to run more frequently.) Fix what you can yourself; call a plumber for what you need help with.
- **Sump pump.** Spring often brings rain. Check your sump pump to make sure it's draining properly. You do not want to wait until a major snow thaw or rainstorm to find out that the pump's motor is shot.
- **Chimney.** Even if you do not regularly use the fireplace, the chimney still needs a regular checkup. A chimney carries dangerous gases from your fireplace, wood stove or furnace out of your home, helping to keep the air inside breathable. Your chimney should be inspected annually, and cleaned periodically depending upon how often you use it, according to the [Chimney Safety Institute of America](#).
- **Check your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detectors.** Between 2007 and 2011, almost two-thirds of home fire deaths were in homes without working smoke detectors, [according to the National Fire Protection Association](#). Change batteries on your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors once a year. The switch to daylight time is a good day to choose for the job. Another good option: Mother's Day. You may also want to consider so-called smart detectors that are linked throughout your home and give voice alerts, not just alarms.



SPRING

Vacations, golf outings or lounging by the pool may be on your schedule this summer, but save a little time for your home. Relax with the knowledge that your house is ready for summer by taking care of these chores before hitting the links:

- **Trim around outdoor HVAC units.** Grass and weeds growing around the units can affect their efficiency and could even cause expensive damage.
- **Inspect your decks.** If the wood is beginning to show its age, summer can be a good time to apply a coat of stain or sealant. Take the time to tap down any protruding nails and sand any rough areas to ensure safety throughout the seasons.
- **Check siding.** Warm weather is ideal for pressure washing vinyl or fiber cement siding. Pay close attention to each piece of siding as you clean it, looking for cracks, soft spots and any other signs of trouble.
- **Inspect foundation and crawlspace.** Look for cracks that may need repair. Check the crawlspace right after a heavy rain to make sure there's no water getting in there.
- **Test lawn irrigation** skyrocket. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) offers excellent tips for maintaining your irrigation system. **system.** If you have an underground lawn irrigation system, leaks in the pipes or connections can cause your water bills



SUMMER

Your Grounds

- **Garden.** By summer, you and your mower should be close friends. Set your mower on the highest setting so you do not cut the grass too short and expose it to drought and weeds. Dig up the weeds (this should be a weekly affair). Water the plants and deadhead flowers that are past their bloom. These steps will keep your garden looking tidy, and your neighbors content. If you hire a professional landscaper, check local ordinances, as some communities restrict the use of some equipment during summer.
- **Water plants and foliage.** Make sure your foliage gets plenty of water during hot summer days. Water early in the day, but not necessarily every day. Plants prefer a good soaking a few times a week rather than a light, daily drizzle.
- **Sprinklers.** Once spring showers end, your plants will need extra water from your sprinklers. Check your system. Hire a landscaper if you can't do it yourself:
 - Turn the sprinklers on manually, one station at a time.
 - Walk around the yard and check to make sure sprinkler heads are upright.
 - Look for clogs and clean the valves out with water from the hose or a brush. Leaky valves probably need to be replaced.
 - Make sure the spray is wide enough, and not blocked by any foliage. You may need to prune plants or adjust the flow on the valve.
 - Check the timers.
 - If you notice leaks, pooling water or low pressure, it could be a sign that underground pipes are cracked, a problem that usually means it's time to call a plumber.
- **Pool.** Do your best to keep it clean. Skim the surface frequently to keep leaves and debris out of the water. Scrub the sides once or twice a month to keep algae growth under control. Check the filter basket and chemical levels weekly. And keep an eye on the water level.
- **Exterior repairs.** If you plan to paint your facade or repair your porch, summer is a great time to get that done.



SUMMER

Inside Your Home

- **Ceiling fans.** Reverse the setting on your ceiling fans to counterclockwise. This pushes the air down, creating a nice breeze.
- **Air-conditioning.** Whether you have central air-conditioning or window units, you should clean your filters at least once a month, particularly if you've been running the A/C a lot..
- **Plan for extreme heat.** Heat waves are inevitable in summer, so prepare your home before the harsh weather arrives. Check the weather stripping around doors and windows to keep the cool air in. Cover windows that receive morning or afternoon sun with drapes. Check on your neighbors, particularly older ones who live alone. Heat waves can strain power grids, causing brownouts and blackouts. Check your disaster supply kit to make sure it's fully stocked with items like batteries for flashlights, canned food, bottled water, medicines, a battery powered radio and a first-aid kit.
- **Establish a family emergency plan.** Where will you meet if you need to evacuate quickly and not everyone is at home? What are the best escape routes from the house? Discuss the plan with everyone in the family. Choose a contact person outside the family whom everyone can call, and make sure everyone has that person's number. Teach your children when and how to call 911. Review this plan with your family annually.
- **Bugs and other pests.** You're not the only one who loves your home. Termites, ants, carpenter bees and mice like it, too. Some infestations, like a single trail of ants, may be resolved with a spray can and a thorough cleaning of the area. Others, like termites, demand professional assistance. A single visit from a pest control company could cost \$300 to \$550. But if you have a continuing pest problem, like mice, consider an annual contract, with a monthly fee of around \$40 to \$45. Discuss the details of the contract carefully, as not all services are included in a standard contract. But you also need to be diligent and take steps to reduce the risk of infestation. Seal holes where mice and roaches can get in. Protect mattresses against invaders like bedbugs — if you go on a trip and think you may have brought unwanted stowaways home in your luggage, unpack in the garage and wash all your clothes immediately. Check the attic regularly to make sure a family of, say, raccoons has not taken up residence. If you have a specific bug infestation.
- **Consider home improvement projects.** Many contractors are focused on outdoor projects in the summer months. Now is the time to lock them in for your fall and winter indoor ones. If you plan to paint a few rooms or update a bathroom, get bids now so you can schedule the jobs for the cooler months ahead.



SUMMER

Before you get too caught up carving pumpkins or watching football, reserve a few weekend hours to take care of these autumn home maintenance tasks:

- **HVAC system inspection.** Have a qualified HVAC mechanic inspect your system to ensure it's ready to heat your home all winter.
- **Turn off outside hose bibs.** If you don't have frost-free exterior faucets, shut off their water supply and drain the lines to prevent freezing. While you're at it, roll up hoses and get the outside of your home tidy for winter.
- **Inspect the fireplace.** Always have a professional inspect wood stove and wood burning fireplace chimneys prior to starting the first fire of the season. The [Chimney Safety Institute of America](#) reports an average of 22,300 chimney fires each year; a good fireplace and chimney cleaning can help keep your home from becoming a statistic.
- **Clean gutters and check roof.** Remove all debris that can trap snow and water during the winter. If you live in a one-story home, this can be a DIY-project for you and a partner.
- **Check exterior grade.** Fill in any depressions near the foundation that can trap water or snow. These water issues could eventually lead to damp basements, settling or foundation damage.



FALL

Your Grounds

- **Garden.** You may be weary of gardening by early fall, but it is a great season to plant perennials, like peonies, columbine or hydrangea. Fall is also a good time to plant trees and shrubs and reseed your lawn. Be sure to give new plants plenty of water before they go dormant, and by spring you may get a first bloom, depending on the variety. Plant bulbs such as tulips, daffodils and hyacinth anytime before the ground freezes. Those hours spent digging little holes and burying bulbs will be well worth your sore knees when they bloom in all their glory in early spring.
- **Raking leaves.** If fall could be summed up in a word, it would be “leaves.” Once the leaves start falling, the season of raking begins. Aside from annoying your neighbors, a thick bed of leaves atop your grass could smother your lawn and lead to mold growth. But do you need to scorch the earth clean of any remnants of leaves? No. A light layer of leaves under your shrubs and trees will provide a natural mulch, protecting the roots over the winter and providing refuge for insects and wildlife. If you plan to rake and bag the rest, enlist the kids to help, luring them with a chance to jump on the pile when they’re done. But there are alternatives to raking. Researchers have found that mowing over the leaves once a week breaks them down, provides nutrients and does the job. Some communities now encourage mowing rather than bagging leaves.



FALL

The Outside of Your Home

- **Gutters.** Once the leaves fall, call your gutter company to get those gutters cleaned and inspected. Any repairs that need to be done on the gutters or downspouts should happen before winter sets in. Your workers should also inspect the roof for any loose or broken tiles. Schedule the job before you get a heavy snow, which could leave frozen leaves and debris in the gutters. Faucets and hoses. Before the first freeze, drain and shut off your outdoor faucets so that they do not freeze. Roll up your hoses and store them for winter.
- **Sprinklers.** If you live in a cold climate, you need to shut your sprinkler system off for the winter to protect it from harsh weather. Skip this step now and come springtime you could have a hefty repair bill.
 - Shut off the water supply to your irrigation system before freezing weather arrives.
 - Insulate the main shut off valve and any above-ground piping.
 - Shut down the timer, if you have an automatic system.
 - Drain the remaining water from the system.
- **Firewood.** If you plan to use your fireplace this winter, stock up on seasoned firewood in the fall. Stack it on pallets, so it does not sit on the moist ground. Don't pack the wood too tightly, or fungus could grow. Cover the wood with plastic sheeting, making sure it does not touch the ground, either. Wood can be stored in an unheated garage, but don't keep logs in your house for more than a week, as they could attract insects.
- **Pool.** Once the sweaters come out of the closet, it is time to accept the fact that pool season is over. Clean, close and cover your pool for winter, or call your pool maintenance company to do the job for you.



FALL

Inside Your Home

- **Air-conditioning.** If you have central air, get the system serviced (you can do this at the same time that you service your furnace). Window units can stay in the window year round if they are sealed with no gaps. Cover the inside and the outside of the appliance to prevent drafts, provide insulation and protect the equipment from the elements. There are even some decorative options out there. But if you'd like your window back, or have concerns about drafts, remove the unit and store it for the winter. A window unit is heavy and unwieldy, so take it slowly. Store it upright, not on its side.
- **Furnace and HVAC.** Get your furnace and ductwork serviced. A clean system will be more energy efficient, and an inspection will alert you to problems. Check and replace air filters, as necessary. Test your thermostat to make sure it works properly. Make sure heating vents are open and nothing is blocking them.
- **Boilers and radiators.** For homes heated with steam heat, the boiler is the tank that holds and heats the water. Call the plumber for its annual checkup. You should also drain water from the boiler to remove sediment that has collected and settled in the tank. Make sure the tank is refilled before you turn it on. A plumber or heating specialist can also check your radiators to make sure the valves are working properly and have not worn out. Check your thermostat, too.
- **Chimney.** If you did not get your chimney cleaned and inspected in the spring, call a chimney sweep now and have it done before you start using your fireplace or your furnace.
- **Windows and doors.** Walk around the house and check windows and doors for drafts. Caulk door and window frames where necessary. In late fall, install storm windows and the glass panel on storm doors to keep the heat in and the cold out.
- **Dryer vent.** Clothes dryers cause 2,900 fires a year, with many fires happening in the fall and winter, according to the United States Fire Administration. Lint is a major culprit, so have your dryer vent inspected and cleaned annually by an HVAC specialist who specializes in ductwork or dryer vents.
- **Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.** There's no harm in checking your detectors twice a year, so when you turn your clocks back to standard time, check your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, too. Change the batteries as needed.
- **Inside projects.** Planning to update the bathroom, or paint the living room? Fall is a good time to get moving on those projects: The temperature is usually moderate and many contractors have wrapped up their outdoor projects for the year.



FALL

Unless you're a fan of cold weather, your natural inclination might be to hunker down during the winter and wait for spring's arrival. However, before going into hibernation mode, there are a few winter home maintenance chores you should attend to:

- **Watch for ice dams.** An ice dam is a ridge of ice that builds up at the bottom of a roof, trapping snow and melting water behind it. This can allow water to infiltrate the roof. Get in touch with a contractor to fix the problem so it never happens again. Here's a good overview of ice dams from the [National Weather Service](#).
- **Check for drafts.** Cold air slipping in around doors and windows can cause higher heating bills. Use this simple trick: light a stick of incense and slowly move it around the seams of doors and windows. When the smoke blows around instead of rising in a straight line, you've got a draft. Many gaps can be eliminated by applying a little caulk.
- **Test your sump pump.** If you have a basement sump pump, make sure the switch is on and pour a little water in the crock to ensure it starts. Many basement leaks occur during upcoming spring thaws, so check it now to be safe. Check the backup battery, too.
- **Close foundation vents.** Crawl space ventilation is good for your home during the spring, summer, and fall. However, during the winter months, closing the vents can help lower your heating costs.
- **Cover outdoor air-conditioning units.** Snow and ice can damage outdoor air-conditioning units if they aren't protected. Covers are available at most home improvement stores, but even a secured canvas tarp will do.



WINTER

Your Grounds

- **Bring out the snow blower.** Make sure your snow blower is in good working order before it snows. You do not want to be caught in the first major storm with only an orange shovel to dig you out. Send the snow blower to a small-engine repair company for a tune-up. Some companies will pick up and drop off your equipment for you. Expect to spend \$60 to \$200, depending on the size of your blower. Make sure you have gasoline and motor oil.
- **Stock up on supplies.** Stock up on ice melt before the Weather Channel tells you a storm is coming. Pet owners and parents should shop carefully, as the chemicals in ice melt can harm pets and people alike, if ingested. Look for brands free of salt or chloride. But even products billed as “pet safe” can still harm your pet, so wipe their paws and don’t let them lick treated snow. Ice-melting products can also damage your foliage, so use sparingly. Make sure your shovel survived last winter because you will need to dig out of stairways and narrow pathways, even if you have a blower.
- **Ice dams.** When ice accumulates along the eaves of your roof, it can cause a dam that can damage gutters, shingles and siding. As water leaks into your house, it can wreak havoc on your paint, your floors and your insulation. Throughout the winter, inspect the exterior of your home regularly for signs of ice dams. Look for icicles, because the same forces create dams. Consider buying a roof rake. The \$30 tool will help keep ice off your roof in the first place by removing fresh snow from your roof after a storm. Do not hack away at the ice, as that could harm you or your roof



WINTER

Inside Your Home

- **Heating systems.** Check and change filters on your heating system, as filters need to be replaced anywhere from twice a year to once a month. Keep an eye on the water levels in your boiler to make sure they do not fall too low.
- **Frozen pipes.** When water freezes in pipes, it expands, damaging or cracking the pipes. When the ice melts, and the pipe bursts, your home fills with water. Pipes near the outside of your home are at greatest risk, like outdoor faucets, pipes in an unheated garage or swimming pool supply lines. A few tips:
 - Shut off and drain outdoor faucets before the cold weather hits.
 - Insulate pipes where you can.
 - On cold days and nights, keep the cabinets below sinks open to let warm air in.
 - You can also run the faucet at a drip to keep water moving.
 - Keep the thermostat set at a steady temperature.
 - If you go away, set the thermostat to a minimum of 55 degrees, [according to the American Red Cross](#).
- **Generator.** A portable generator can provide you with a lifeline in a blackout. Power it up every three months, and have it serviced twice a year (even if you never use it). Keep fuel and motor oil on hand in the event of a storm. Do not let fuel sit in the tank for long periods of time, as that can damage it. Check it regularly for corrosion and wear.
- **Winter storm prep.** A heavy winter storm can leave you housebound for days. Stock up on wood for the fireplace, gas for the snow blower and canned food and bottled water, in case you lose power. Check your emergency supply kit for batteries, a radio, a first-aid kit and any medicines you may need. Check in on neighbors who may need help shoveling out (a little camaraderie in a storm goes a long way).



WINTER