



Fall Maintenance Tasks

Protect your investment with a little bit of work

With fall here, it's time once again to prep your home for the coming winter months. No matter where you live, seasonal changes in temperature and moisture levels will require special maintenance tasks.

It is important to periodically monitor the overall condition of a home. Simple wear and tear from weather and age occurs in every home. It is wise to fix any problems before they lead to extensive and costly repairs. And more importantly, routine maintenance could mean ensuring your family's safety when it comes to things like your heating appliances. Having a professional inspection of your fuel-burning heating appliances is the first line of defense against the silent killer, carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can be produced by burning any fuel. The initial symptoms are flu-like, including headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea and dizziness. Exposure to high levels of carbon monoxide can cause death. Each year, CO poisoning from heating systems and water heaters kills about 160 people in the U.S. Many of these tragedies could be prevented by having a professional check your heating system and water heater annually for CO leaks.

Here's a comprehensive list of the top chores to tackle before the weather turns on your home:

Tips For Your Home's Exterior:

1. **Maintain your gutters**
Remove all debris so water can properly drain. Clogged gutters can cause landscaping, lawn and shrubbery, walls, foundation, basement, crawl spaces and existing gutter system damage. Consider installing "gutter guards," which are screens that prevent debris from entering the gutter and direct the flow of water away from the house and into the ground.
2. **Trim your trees and remove dead branches**
Inclement weather can cause weak trees or branches to break and damage your home, car, utility lines or someone walking on your property. Keep an eye out for large dead branches in trees; detached branches hanging in trees; cavities or rotten wood along trunks or major branches; mushrooms at the base of trees; cracks or splits in trunks; leaves that prematurely develop unusual color or size; and trees that were previously topped or heavily pruned. If you see any signs of hazards, call a professional tree service.
3. **Maintain your steps and handrails**
Repair broken stairs and banisters so nobody falls and hurts themselves.
4. **Inspect your roof**
Be proactive and prevent emergency and expensive repairs. Things to look for include damaged or loose shingles; gaps in the flashing where the roofing and siding meet vents and flues; and damaged mortar around the chimney (especially at the joints, caps and washes). If you see any signs of damage, call a professional to repair the damage.

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5. **Inspect your home's exterior walls**

Look for possible weather-related damage, like cracks and loose or crumbling mortar. Wood trim and siding can suffer from deteriorating paint or become loose. Windowsills may be cracked, split or decayed.

Tips For Your Home's Interior:

1. **Check your home's insulation**

Your attic should be five to 10 degrees warmer than outside air.

2. **Maintain your pipes**

Insulate unfinished rooms, such as garages, if they contain exposed pipes. Check pipes for cracks and leaks and have any damage repaired immediately to prevent costlier repairs later.

3. **Check your heating systems**

Be sure to maintain your furnace, fireplace, boiler, water heater, space heater and wood-burning stove and have your heating system serviced every year. Check smoke and fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors and change your heating and air conditioning filters. Have your appliances inspected for gas leaks and adequate ventilation.

4. **Know your plumbing**

Learn how to shut the water off and know where your pipes are located. Check weather stripping and caulking around windows and doors and replace or repair as needed. Caulking helps keep your house weather-tight, lowers your heating and cooling bills, and can also help keep insects and rodents out of your house. Also look for chipped or peeling paint around window frames and trim. Repair broken glass and loose or missing putty. When needed, use a modern glazing compound instead of putty for a waterproof seal.

5. **Clean and vacuum dust from vents, baseboard heaters and cold-air returns**

Dust build-up in ducts is a major cause of indoor pollutants and can increase incidences of cold-weather illnesses. Check all your faucets for leaks and repair any you find. Replace washers if necessary.

By setting aside a few weekends now, you'll be saving you and your home a lot of hassle later. Once your home passes your fall inspection, you and your family can relax and enjoy the coming months.

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