

Home Maintenance Checklist for Fall and Winter

As the winter season approaches and the air become crisp, it's time to start thinking about preparing your house for the season. The winter season means spending more time indoors, hence roofs need to shed rain and snow, windows and doors need to reject the cold, and the heating system needs to keep rooms comfortable. If any of these components don't hold up, you might be faced with scrambling around in the wet, cold and dark to fix them.



By handling these important yet reasonably easy tasks now, you can avoid considerable grief later.

Outdoor Preparation

- **Check the roof** for cracked or missing shingles, bald spots on shingles, missing or damaged flashing, and other conditions that might allow leaks. Replace any roof shingles that are missing or damaged. Seal minor cracks or tears with roofing cement.
- **Check the gutters.** If they are clogged with leaves and debris, clean them. Gutters prevent basement and foundation flooding and water damage to siding, windows, and doors.
- **Check the siding** for cracks or damage and seal any leaky spots with clear caulking compound.
- **Windows and doors.** Make sure they are properly sealed with weather stripping and replace any damaged parts. Weather stripping prevents drafts and winter heat loss.
- **Trim trees and bushes** away from the house.
- **Cover air conditioner** and barbecue to prevent winter damage.
- **Store lawn and patio furniture** in a shed or basement. If space is limited, weather-resistant covers can protect outdoor furnishings.
- **Close your pool** before leaves start to fall, and night-time temperatures begin to drop and you risk an algae bloom.
- **Drain and shut off outdoor water faucets** and remove and store garden hoses.
- **Store kids toys** indoors or in an outdoor shed to prevent rusting and fading.
- **Check and repair exterior lighting** before daylight fades.
- **Scrape peeling paint** and apply touch up paint to your siding, trim and fences, and apply waterproofing sealer to your deck if necessary.
- **Examine driveways** and walkways for cracks. Larger cracks should be sealed to keep out water.

Lawn and Garden

- **Prepare planting beds** when the soil is relatively dry. By adding soil and mulch to your beds, you'll be a step ahead for spring planting.
- **Plant spring blooming bulbs** and perennials.
- **Protect roses,** saplings and small trees by sheltering them with a burlap screen.
- **Pull weeds** to reduce the number of seedlings next spring.
- **Mow grass short** for the final cut of the year by reducing the cutting height gradually to 3.5 cm (from 7.4 cm) until the grass stops growing.
- **Check ground grading** around the house. All surfaces next to the walls should be sloped to shed water away from the house. This is most important on warm winter days, as melting snow runs quickly across the surface of frozen ground. If the grading is incorrect, water will potentially flow into the house, causing basement leakage. Now is the time to use a shovel to re-slope the grass, or call a paving contractor to correct a negatively sloped walkway or driveway.

Indoor Preparation

- **Bring container plants inside** and make sure they are free of pests. Doing so may enable plants to survive the season and bloom again in spring.
- **Caulk around window** and door casings to keep out air and water. If your house has wood siding with window frames that stand out from the siding, caulk the top and sides of the frame. Don't caulk under the sill as this space should be left open to allow moisture inside the wall to escape. If your house is brick or stone, with window frames that are set into the finish material, caulk all four edges of each frame where the brick mould meets the masonry.
- **Clean or replace Furnace** filters as needed. Check and clean dryer vent, air conditioner, stove hood and room fans. Keep heating and cooling vents clean and free from furniture and draperies.
- **Ensure that all smoke detectors,** carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order. Replace batteries as needed, or at least twice each year.
- **Have your heating system checked** by a licensed heating/air-conditioning professional. Most furnace manufacturers recommend annual inspections.
- **Have your chimney(s) inspected** by a chimney service and, if necessary, cleaned. Cleaning is generally recommended at least once a year for an active fireplace.
- **Store plenty of salt or rock salt,** snow shovels, and any other items you will need during the winter.
- **Examine the basement floor and walls** for cracks or leaks; seal as needed.

If You Reside Elsewhere During The Winter Months

You may want to partially shut down your home. In addition to the tips above, consider the following:

- **Leave the temperature at its lowest setting,** usually between 5 to 7 degrees Celsius or install a low-heat thermostat to maintain the air temperature at approximately 5 degrees Celsius
- **Turn off and drain the water heater;** leave a reminder to refill before restarting.
- **Keep the electricity on** so lights will continue to function (put lights on timers).
- **Unplug** the microwave, clothes dryer, televisions and other appliances not in use.
- **To avoid large repair bills** and the hassle associated with breakdowns, take the time now to develop an action plan for the coming months. You'll feel secure in your warm home or while you're away from home.

Winter can be hard on a house, following the easy steps above will help preserve your investment and prevent any unnecessary chores or repairs that might be difficult to do during winter.