

BASIC HOME MAINTENANCE TIPS – GENERAL

Safety Devices

- Regularly test battery operated smoke detectors by pushing the test button.
- Test “GFCI” (ground fault circuit interrupter) sockets in the bathroom, kitchen, basement, garage, and exterior outlets. (See winter checklist for how-to). This outlet “trips” to prevent shocks and electrical accidents
- Check fire extinguisher gauge annually, to determine if it is fully charged. Review instructions for the use of the extinguisher. Have extinguisher recharged after any use. Note the expiration date.
- Check that first aid kit materials are stocked and available in a convenient location.

Electrical

- Know the location of the fuse box or circuit breaker panel. Label outlets, lights, and appliances on each circuit. Know how to turn off the electricity at the box or panel.
- If any switch or socket creates a shock, tingling feeling, smoke, burned smell or spark, shut off current to that circuit breaker or fuse box, call a professional repair service. Don’t use until it is fixed.
- If fuses blow or breakers trip frequently, or if lights dim when large appliances are turned on, call an electrician to locate the cause and repair.
- If you have a fuse box, keep a supply of appropriate size fuses on hand; buy type “S” fuses, which prevent the use of the wrong size.
- Make sure paper and cloth items are not too close to light bulbs or electrical appliances that create heat and a fire hazard.
- Replace fluorescent tubes that flicker or have darkened ends. If there is a long delay before tube lights up, the starter needs to be replaced. If there is humming sound, the ballast (a small unit that starts and stabilizes the electrical current) in fluorescent fixture needs to be replaced.
- Clean and oil electric motors as needed. Check motor belts for cracks and appropriate tightness.
- Remove extension cords that are used for substitute outlets and extension cords under rugs or carpets.

Plumbing

- Fix dripping faucets; for units with separate handles for hot and cold water, replace the faucets washer, and if necessary replace the washer “seat.” For newer single handle faucets, drips may indicate a worn cartridge O-rings. When taking apart a single lever faucet, be sure to lay out the parts in order of removal to make reassembly easier.
- Check for drips and leaks around and under sinks, toilets, showers, and bathtubs; find the source and correct the problem.
- Check your water bills for an unusually large increase in water usage; this can indicate a leak or drip somewhere.

Kitchen

- If you have a gas range with pilot lights, learn how to re-light the pilot, if it goes out. If the pilot light goes out repeatedly, check whether cooking spills have clogged the opening.
- Clean gas range’s burners as needed.

Basement

- Check for signs of excessive moisture or leakage following wet weather; find and eliminate the source.
- Drain a small bucket of water from the water heater about every 6 months to remove sediment.

HOME MAINTENANCE BY THE SEASON

Weather (especially Minnesota weather!) and daily use will gradually and continually wear down the materials, mechanical systems, and appliances of your house. To catch small problems before they become big problems make a habit of inspecting your home several times a year from attic to basement. Personal inspections help you locate a problem or conditions that could lead to failures or emergencies. Inspections, maintenance, and repairs are often related to specific seasons. To guide you with your seasonal maintenance checks, you can use the checklists that appear on the following pages. You may want to make a photocopy of the current season's checklist and use it to mark what's done and what needs to be done. Remember, not all the items will apply to your situation or house. Our Minnesota weather demands a lot of you and your home. Four times a year, make an inspection of your house and its systems. Use this guide to help you, and make a list of what needs to be done. Search YouTube for How-To videos.

SPRING HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Spring is the time to get your yard in shape and take care of any exterior problems that developed over the winter.

Safety Devices

- When you change your clocks to daylight savings time, put new batteries in smoke alarms.

Doors and Windows

- Check the paint or other finish on doors, windows, and trim. Paint or refinish as necessary to protect and seal.
- Check windows for broken glass and damaged screens. Repair as needed.
- Install screens on windows and doors.
- Check windows for loose putty (window putty is the material that surrounds the frame to hold it in place).
- Check caulking around window and door frames any other areas where different materials meet (like where wood meets brick).
- If window sashes (sliding units) rely on sash cords (ropes) and hidden weights to hold the window open, replace any broken or missing cords.

Attic

- Check the underside of the roof for water stains or dampness- if you see any, find how the water is penetrating the roof and eliminate the leakage.
- Check roof rafters for sags or boards that have split.
- Remove anything that blocks air from passing through the attic vents and louvers.

Interior

- Check all painted and natural finished surfaces for damp spots, mildew, discoloration, cracks, or bulges caused by leaks or condensation of water (including ceilings in closets). If ceilings show any of these problems, determine whether water is coming from above or condensing from humidity within the living space.

Basement

- Check for signs of excessive moisture or leakage following wet weather on walls and floors, support beams, and posts for moisture stains and rotting.
- Check foundation walls and floors for large cracks.
- Be sure the clothes dryer vent is properly carrying exhaust to the outside. Remove built up lint.

Exterior Walls

- Check foundation for loose or missing mortar, and for cracks or crumbling.
- Check wall surfaces for loose or peeling paint, cracks, loose siding, or stucco damage.
- Check trim surfaces for peeling paint and for loose or rotting boards.
- Check exterior faucets for leaks.
- Check condition of weatherproof covers on exposed outlets, light fixtures, and switches.
- Check masonry (brickwork) for cracks and loose joints.

Roof, Gutters, and Chimney

- Check fascia (outward face) and soffit (downward face) of the “overhang” at the low edge of the roof for any rotting wood or flaking paint. Paint or repair as needed.
- Check roof for damage or wear; use binoculars; look for shingles missing, cracked or curled; look at chimneys, valleys, and metal flashings to see if the metal is rusting or bricks are loose or flaking.
- Check to see that chimney bricks, mortar (cement), and cap are not broken or flaking. Is there a water-tight seal where the chimney meets the roof?
- Clean and check gutters for leaks, loose areas, damaged or disconnected downspouts.
- Make sure downspouts empty on to splash blocks or extensions directing water away from the foundation.

Yard, Garage, and Sidewalks

- Contact Power Company if tree branches interfere with the power line to the house.
- Check garage door hardware. Lubricate moving parts and door opener as the manufacturer suggests.
- If you live on an alley, put your house address clearly on the alley side of garage or fence.
- Check trash cans and lids. Replace damaged cans or add more if needed.
- Check and repair all steps, sidewalks, and railings.
- Clean out window wells; a matted layer of leaves or other debris in window well could allow water to accumulate, then seep around the window and into the basement; bottom of window well should be gravel or other porous material, well below the bottom of the window frame.
- Check any retaining walls for signs of cracks or movement due to water pressure. Clean out weep holes that allow water to drain through the retaining wall.
- Patch worn sections of driveways and coat asphalt with sealer.
- Wait to clean up perennial beds or to add new mulch until daytime temperatures consistently reach above 50°F for at least seven consecutive days.



SUMMER HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Summer is the time for taking care of those big exterior projects such as painting, carpentry, and cement repair.

Electrical System

- Check condition of lamp cords, extension cords, plugs, and outlets. Replace at the first sign of wear or damage.

Cooling System

- With whole house air conditioning, check the filter monthly and replace when dirty.

Appliances

- Remove dust from condensing coils on the refrigerator (if the coils are exposed on the back).
- Clean the filter of the kitchen range vent fan.

Interior

- Check the fireplace firebox and flue (inside the chimney) for creosote build-up: scrape the black soot with a knife; if it's more than 1/8th inch thick, hire a chimney sweep to clean the fireplace and leave chimney damper open in summer for improved ventilation if the house is not air-conditioned.

Basement

- Check the water heater for any signs of leaks.
- While away on vacation, save money by lowering water heater temperature setting and moving it up again when you return. Water hotter than 140 degrees can scald or burn the skin. A setting that heats water about 120 degrees is more efficient.

Exterior

- If the only vents allowing circulation in the unheated attic are louvers at the peaks, consider adding vents in the soffits (the downward faces of the overhang). Air flow from soffit vents must not be blocked by insulation or other materials.
- Paint siding if needed. (Wood siding needs paint about every five years). Prepare the surface before painting by scraping or sanding away loose paint, blisters, etc. Avoid painting in bright, hot sun – it will dry the paint too fast, causing blisters.

Yard, Garage, and Sidewalks

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FALL HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Fall is the time to wrap up those summer projects and get your house ready for winter.

Safety Devices

- When you change your clocks to standard time, put new batteries in smoke alarms.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector, following the manufacturer's direction.

Plumbing

•If you do not know for sure that your exterior water faucets are the "freeze proof" variety, each water line to the exterior should be shut off at the valve inside the house. Once the inside valve is shut off, open the faucet on the outside, let it drain and leave in the open position. This will avoid having water in the pipe that could freeze and burst the pipe.



Heating System

- For gas- and oil-burning furnaces and water heaters, check for "back drafting": find the draft hood (looks like an upside-down funnel) which is between the top of the furnace or water heater and the bottom of the flue (the duct or chimney); while the heater or furnace burner is operating, hold a burning candle near the bottom of the vent hood; if the smoke is pushed away from the vent hood, there is a "backdraft" - dangerous gases may be staying in your house instead of going up the chimney- in this case, call the gas company service department immediately.
- Clean dirt and dust from around the furnace or boiler, and from around heat vents.
- Check humidifier for leaks; clean or replace the filter screen or sponge, if it has one.
- For a forced air system, put in a clean filter for the winter.
- Move furniture, drapes, or other obstructions away from radiators or heat registers.
- Check your wall thermostat to make sure it's not clogged with dust.
- Close the fireplace damper tightly; open it when the fireplace is in use.
- Remove window air conditioners; if a window unit must be left in place, use a weather-proof cover and seal any air passageways around the unit.
- Have furnace or boiler checked and cleaned by a qualified service person.
- Have pumps or fan motors lubricated as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Have the burners checked.
- Check hot water system for leaks around boiler and pipe fittings.
- Check the furnace fan belt, look for cracks or frayed edges, replace if needed.
- Bleed (release) air from hot water radiators: hold a pan under the air vent valve on one end of radiators; open the air vent valve with the vent key or a screwdriver; let any air escape; when water starts to come out, close the valve.

Doors and Windows

- Check caulking around window and door frames and any place where different materials meet (like where wood meets brick); if you can see an opening or feel draft, caulk or otherwise seal the hole to prevent heat loss and cold drafts.
- Check weather stripping – doors and windows should fit tightly to avoid heat loss.
- Check for and replace cracked window panes, and loose or missing window putty; if putty is loose or missing, winter air may slip past the edge of the glass and into your home.
- Clean the "weep holes" in combination storm/screen windows. (These little holes in the bottom edge of the frame let any moisture drain out rather than collecting on the window sill.)
- Put storm windows in place; use "V-seal" weather-stripping to make them fit snugly.

Attic

- Check the underside of the roof for water stains or dampness- if you see any, find how the water is penetrating the roof and eliminate the leakage.
- Check the depth and type of insulation; increase if less than R-38.
- Remove anything that blocks air from passing through the attic air vents and louvers.
- Check and fill gaps in caulking around pipes, chimneys and other things that pass through the ceiling (to prevent heated air from the house from moving up into the attic).
- Check and fill gaps in caulking around pipes, vents, and things that pass through exterior walls.
- Are all overhead wires securely fastened to buildings and at least 10' above ground? (12' above driveways.) Contact Power Company if problems are visible.
- Spot-paint areas of painted siding and trim where paint has flaked or blistered.

Roof, Gutters, and Chimneys

- Clean the gutters and downspouts (after nearby trees have dropped their leaves).
- Be sure that downspouts and splash blocks carry water away from the house.
- Seal any holes in gutters with gutter patch material available from hardware stores.
- Make sure the tops of vent pipes are not blocked by birds' nests or debris.
- Make sure rain caps on the tops of vent pipes and chimney flues are firmly in place.
- Check metal vent pipes on the roof for rust; paint with rust stopping paint if needed.
- Check to see that there is a good seal between the roof shingles and the "flashings" (metal skirts) at the base of each roof vent; seal with roofer's cement if needed.
- Check to see that chimney bricks, mortar (cement), and cap are not broken or flaking. Is there a watertight seal where the chimney meets roof?

Yard, Garage, Driveway, and Sidewalks

- Patch worn sections of driveways and coat asphalt with sealer.
- Pull weeds out of sidewalk joints and cracks (it will make shoveling snow easier).
- Prune branches of trees growing near the roof.
- Lubricate garage door rollers and opener if needed.
- Drain and store hoses to protect them from damage due to water freezing inside.
- Leave leaf litter on soil as natural mulch and nutrients as well as habitat for overwintering beneficial insects.

WINTER HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Winter is a good time to take care of interior problems or do fun decorating.

Electrical

- Clean kitchen range hood filter.
- Check ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) sockets that may be present in kitchen, bathroom, and basement. To test, push the button, push the "T" button, then push the "R" button to reset.

Plumbing

- Occasionally flush water down seldom-used showers or sinks (such as basement bathrooms); if the water in a drain trap evaporates, dangerous sewer gases can enter your house.
- While on vacation, have someone check the house every few days to make sure the heating has not stopped; if the house gets too cold, water pipes could freeze and burst.



Windows

- If excessive moisture forms on windows, reduce the humidity, check the furnace vents, and the snug fit of storm windows; consider installing (or using more often) kitchen and bathroom ventilation fans.

Basement

- Buy a "long term" radon test device, place it in the basement, and mail it according to directions to receive its report.

Roof

- After the first snowfall or two, look at your roof for warm spots where the snow has melted. Warm spots on the roof indicate that warm air is leaking into the attic.
- Watch for "ice dams," which are areas of ice built up near the edge of the roof. If ice dams form, it means that warm air is leaking into the attic. Ice dams can cause melting snow to penetrate under the roof shingles and dip into the attic; water dripping into the attic can ruin insulation, damage roof boards and supports, and damage the ceiling of the living areas. If you have ice dams, do not try to shovel snow from the roof- it's dangerous for you and may damage the roof shingles.

Sidewalks and Driveways

- Remove snow as soon as possible, before foot or car traffic makes it hard to remove.
- Avoid using salt on sidewalks and driveways to melt ice, because it corrodes the concrete. Sand is a better alternative.

HOME REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE RESOURCES

Even if you brought a brand new or completely rehabbed home, you should build up a special savings account for major repairs and replacements. If your furnace breaks down next winter or your roof needs new shingles next spring, will you have the several thousand dollars required to pay for these repairs?

Financial management experts recommend that you set aside at least 1%, or if possible 2%, of the purchase price of your home each and every year. What you don't spend each month should be added to your "Home Repair" savings account so that you are prepared when the big expense items do need replacement. Some banks offer Money Market accounts that pay more interest than a regular savings account and still give you access to your money when you need it.

After you have been in your home for a number of years, you may have built up some equity by paying down your mortgage balance and hopefully by seeing the value of your home appreciate. If necessary, you will be able to borrow against that equity to obtain funds for major repair expenses like a new roof. However, in the early years of your mortgage you will not have enough equity to borrow against, so to be able to pay for expensive repairs, it is especially important that you build up savings for maintenance. Of course, this fund could also be used for other family emergencies. But, once you have these maintenance savings, try not to give in to the temptation to use it for non-emergency uses.