

Step by Step: A fall home maintenance checklist

By Erin K. Witt

Although spring cleaning is heralded by every house and garden magazine, getting your home ready for fall and winter is equally important. The cold winter months can wreak havoc on your home—preventative measures can minimize the risk for damage, conserve energy and make it easier for you to welcome the warm weather again next year. The following checklist will take you through fall home maintenance from top to bottom.

Roof:

- Check roof and around vents, skylights and chimneys for leaks. Repair as necessary.
- Repair roof shingles

Attic:

- Close vents to conserve heat.

Gutters:

- Clean gutters and drain pipes so leaves won't clog them and be sure they drain away from the house.

Fireplace:

- Clean fireplace of ashes.
- Check chimney for loose or missing mortar.
- Have chimney professionally cleaned.
- Make sure damper closes tightly.

Filters:

- Remember to clean or replace filters once a month, or 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.

Safety Equipment:

- Ensure that all smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order.
- Replace batteries in appropriate devices as needed, or at least twice each year.

Air Conditioner:

- Remove window air-conditioners, or put weatherproof covers on them.

Refrigerator:

- Make sure your refrigerator door seals are airtight. Test them by closing the door over a dollar bill. If you can pull the bill out easily, the latch may need to be adjusted or the seal may need to be replaced.

- ❑ If you have a coil-back refrigerator, vacuum the coils at least twice each year. Your refrigerator will run more efficiently with clean coils.
- ❑ Stock up! A full refrigerator uses less energy than an empty one.

Faucets:

- ❑ Check for leaky faucets in kitchen and bathroom(s).
- ❑ Replace washers as necessary.

Windows and Doors:

- ❑ Seal drafty doors and windows. If you added up all of the small cracks where heating and cooling escapes from a home, it would be the same as having a window open. Replace seals as needed.

Storm Windows and Screens:

- ❑ Take down screens (if removable type) and replace with storm windows.
- ❑ Check and patch all door and window screens.

Siding and Paint:

- ❑ Look for cracks and holes in house siding or paint.
- ❑ Replace caulk if necessary. A carpet knife can work well for cutting away old caulking from house siding. Slice down alongside it from both directions with the hook-like blade, then use the knife to lift out the old caulk bead intact.

Basement:

- ❑ Check basement walls and floor for dampness.
- ❑ Be sure to clean dehumidifier regularly, if you have one.

Heating System:

- ❑ Have heating system serviced.
- ❑ Change filters.
- ❑ Bleed air from radiators, if they do not have automatic air valves.

Hot Water Heater:

- ❑ Drain hot water heater.
- ❑ Remove sediment from the bottom of the tank.

Exterior:

- ❑ Cut brush back from around your home.
- ❑ Remove fallen leaves from concrete and wood surfaces to prevent staining.
- ❑ Clean and store outdoor furniture.
- ❑ Clean and store grill (unless you use it year-round).
- ❑ Have pool drained and professionally serviced.
- ❑ Drain outside faucets.
- ❑ Cover outside spigots with foam covers or wrap with newspaper.
- ❑ Drain and store garden hoses.