

Get your home ready for spring with these ten easy tips

By Erin K. Witt

This spring, homeowners in central Indiana and across the nation will be mowing grass, trimming trees and planting flowers to ready their home for warmer weather. But homeowners also must not forget the importance of regularly scheduled seasonal home maintenance to keep systems and structures in top condition and prevent costly repairs.

Despite the hassle and time scheduled repairs can take, quarterly home maintenance and preventative measures can keep all areas of the home in good condition for years to come. To help homeowners accomplish this goal, the Web site *Homestore.com* recommends the following summer maintenance tips.

Tip #1: Clean and seal decks. Winter can leave exterior surfaces stained from fall leaves and dirty from snowmelt runoff. Ideally, three consecutive warm, sunny days will be needed. On the first day, dry out the deck. Apply deck cleaner and scrub the deck on the second day, and let it dry 24 hours. On the third day, apply deck sealer. This will keep your deck water-repellant, damage-free and aesthetically attractive for all the barbecues in the months ahead.

Tip #2: Wash the exterior of your house using ordinary garden hose pressure and a mild detergent. Pressure washers are not always the best idea—they are powerful enough to force water under the siding, where it can encourage mildew and rot. If power washing is truly in order, hire a professional.

Tip #3: Have a certified chimney sweep inspect and clean chimneys. Taking care of this task in the spring or summer—rather than in the peak autumn season—allows plenty of time for repairs before the next heating season. It's also easier to schedule a sweep than during the fall cleaning season, and sometimes, rates can be lower as a result of off-season discounts.

Tip #4: Caulk exterior joints around all windows and doors. Caulking keeps the house weather-tight and will help reduce high summer energy bills. It can also help keep insects and vermin out of the house.

Tip #5: Clean lint from the entire clothes dryer vent system, from the dryer to the exterior vent cap. Because lint is incredibly flammable, this common build up can create a fire hazard. And if a gas clothes dryer is not properly vented, it can even force deadly carbon monoxide back into the home.

Tip #6: Check the operation and condition of attic fans and roof-mounted turbine vents. Also make sure that bathroom and kitchen vent fans are working properly and are not blocked or obstructed. This can impede the intake of fresh air and removal of stale air from the home. These fans run on little energy and can greatly reduce cooling costs—not to mention increasing comfort inside the home during a hot and humid Hoosier summer.

Tip #7: Change air conditioner filters—especially if the home was vented with outdoor air during the spring. Consider using a pleated media filter for better dust trapping, or for additional savings, a web element filter that can be washed periodically instead of being thrown out. Also, be sure to clear overgrowth and weeds away from outdoor air conditioning units—if the necessary airflow is blocked, the air conditioner will not be able to operate properly and could even suffer an expensive failure.

Tip #8: Clean any lingering fall leaves from gutters. For clogged downspouts, try using barbecue tongs to reach in and remove leaves. This is also a good opportunity to repair loose gutter nails or other gutter damage before the heavy spring and summer rains.

Tip #9: The heat and humidity of an Indiana summer can cause wooden windows and doors to swell and stick. Before this becomes a problem, remove the door or window, and carefully remove any excess material with a hand plane. For sliding windows, the surrounding trim is often the culprit. Usually, it must be removed and reinstalled to allow for greater movement. To keep windows and doors from sticking in the first place, make sure that they are sealed with a good coat of paint, including the tops and bottoms. Be careful not to paint the channels where windows need to slide, though—instead, use a light coat of linseed oil as a sealer.

Tip #10: To prepare for summer, make sure attics are well insulated and ventilated. Excess heat in the upstairs area of a two-story home, or the sensation of a ranch-style home feeling “hot from above” could indicate insufficient attic insulation and poor ventilation. The age of the home could be a culprit—home inspectors frequently cite poor attic insulation in houses built prior to 1984. In the Midwest, attics should have between 9 inches to 12 inches of insulation.