

Annual Home Maintenance Checklist

January

Organize your home improvement files. Review warranties and product manuals to check on recommended maintenance for furnaces, equipment, appliances and tools. Mark your calendar to track scheduled upkeep and service.

Inspect furniture, cabinets and vanities for loose knobs, pulls and hinges. Tighten or repair as necessary. Lubricate squeaky door hinges with lightweight machine oil. Free sticky doors by trimming edges or shimming hinges with thin pieces of cardboard.

Fix squeaks in floors and stairs by applying weight to the area (having a partner stand on it works) and driving an 8d or 12d galvanized finish nail through the flooring into a floor joist or stringer. If you have access to the floor from underneath, glue and screw backs to the floor or treads and to the joist or stringer.

Look for bargains on discontinued appliances and tools. Before buying, make sure that warranties are valid.

Make a room-by-room inventory of everything in your house. In the event of fire, flood or other disaster, it will be important in filing an insurance claim. Photographs or video of your possessions can also be helpful.

Don't close vents to crawl spaces. If you live where pipes can freeze and the floor becomes very cold, insulate pipes and under the floor. Vents play an important role in controlling condensation beneath a house.

Double-check insulation around exterior pipes that are exposed to freezing weather to be certain that water cannot seep under the insulation.

February

Remove drain traps under sinks and clean them thoroughly. Clean pop-up drain plugs. Inspect the linkage for pop-up drains to make sure they are set properly. To adjust the linkage, squeeze the finger-operated pressure lock to release it and slide it up or down as necessary.

Inspect grout and caulk around tubs, sinks and showers. Chip out cracked grout and replace missing grout. Stained, discolored and mildewed caulk should be cleaned with trisodium phosphate or other household cleaner. If the caulk remains discolored, remove it and replace it with fresh, mildew-resistant caulk.

Refinish furniture in a heated garage or workspace equipped with ventilation fans. Otherwise, use water-based strippers, paints, stains and varnishes that are especially formulated for low odors.

Musty closet odors can be reduced or eliminated by removing the closet's contents and washing walls with a diluted solution of chlorine bleach. In addition, try replacing solid doors with louvered doors. Note: If the mustiness is the result of moisture, find the source and correct it. Otherwise the problem will come back.

To keep valves from sticking and check for leaks, turn all water valves off and on. This includes outdoor faucets and valves to toilets, bathroom and kitchen sinks, laundry, bar, etc.

March

Review the contents of your medicine cabinets and throw away dated prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines. Be sure all medicines are out of the reach of children or contained in a cabinet equipped with childproof locks.

Celebrate spring by cleaning the garage. Hold a yard sale, or organize a community yard sale with neighbors. Dispose of paint thinners, household cleaners and pesticides properly. Contact your city's department of public works to find out the next scheduled collection of hazardous materials.

Clean the refrigerator, inside and out, with mild detergent. Remove all trays and shelves, wash, and allow to dry thoroughly before replacing them. Remove old ice from ice-making tray.

After heavy rains, inspect your basement walls for signs of moisture. If you detect wetness, run a portable dehumidifier. If condition persists, consult a waterproofing contractor. Check to make sure your sump pump works properly by pouring water into the pump silo to raise the float and activate the motor.

Test the pressure and temperature relief valve on your water heater by opening it and allowing some water to flow out. If little or no water flows out or it doesn't shut off, replace it. Bad valves can cause explosions.

Spring is a good time to build a doghouse. Make sure to provide adequate roof ventilation to allow hot air to escape. And don't use pressure-treated wood in any area where your dog might chew it.

Daylight Savings Time begins. Honor the occasion by replacing batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

April

Inspect screens (both house and vent screens to attic or crawl space) for tears and bent frames.

Check screens (both house and vent screens to attic or crawl space) for tears and bent frames. Clean window screens. Lay them flat on a picnic table or a pair of sawhorses and scrub them with a soft bristle brush and a mild detergent solution. Rinse with a garden hose and allow to dry thoroughly.

Inspect outdoor structures for deterioration – especially signs of rot. Use a small awl to probe posts, railings and window sills for soft spots. If you find any, plan to replace or repair them when the weather turns fair.

Prepare for the outdoor cooking season by inspecting gas grills. Remove cooking grills and thoroughly clean them with soapy water and a brush with brass bristles. Remove accumulated grease from lava rocks and ceramic briquettes by turning them over and igniting the burners. Allow 10 minutes on high heat to clean the briquettes.

Inspect garden hoses for leaks. Make temporary repairs with electrical tape. Pry out old washers and replace them. Don't leave hoses connected to outdoor spigots until the danger of frost is completely over.

Caulk open joints, particularly around windows and doors.

Inspect the crawl space or basement after rains for water accumulation or excessive moisture. Look for signs of water damage on the subfloor and joists beneath bathrooms, the kitchen and laundry. Find and fix leaks now or pay the price later.

Shut off the water to the washing machine, remove the water supply hoses and examine them and the washers. Replace worn and damaged ones.

Check fire extinguishers to make sure they are not outdated, have lost pressure or are damaged.

Check all weather stripping around doors and windows for wear, damage or loss of flexibility. Replace material that is no longer blocking air.

Clean your garbage disposal. Grind two trays of ice cubes made from a mixture of one cup white vinegar to one gallon of water.

May

Clean gutters. Inspect gutters to ensure all spikes, straps and clips are tightly fastened. Use a garden hose to flush debris from downspouts. Make sure downspouts or splashbacks direct water at least three feet away from the foundation.

Wash windows, inside and out, using a solution made from three tablespoons of non-sudsy ammonia to 1 gallon of water. Don't work in the direct sun – the solution will dry too fast and streak. To clean windows with real (not removable) grills, use a hacksaw to cut a squeegee so it fits the windowpanes exactly.

Have central air-conditioning unit checked according to the recommendations of the unit's manufacturer. Replace the filter in the forced-air system. Clean debris from condenser or heat pump located outside.

Remove mineral deposits from faucet aerators and shower heads by soaking parts in white vinegar and scrubbing with an old toothbrush.

Have swimming pools cleaned. Inspect and service pool liners and filters.

Shop for seasonal sales on air-conditioning units and window fans.

Dust ceiling fan blades.

Set thermostats and automatic sprinkler system to adjust for weather changes

Before placing metal patio furniture outdoors, coat it with auto polish.

June

Clean and seal decks. Ideally, you'll need three consecutive warm, sunny days. On day one, 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.

Hire a certified chimney sweep to inspect and clean chimneys. Doing this task now instead of the fall allows plenty of time for repairs before the next heating season. It's also easier to schedule a sweep.

Wash the exterior of your house, using ordinary garden hose pressure and a mild detergent. Beware of the pressure washers – they are powerful enough to force water under the siding where it may encourage mildew and rot.

Caulk exterior joints around window and doors.

Clean lint from the entire clothes dryer vent system, from the dryer to the exterior vent cap.

Inspect and repair or repaint all patio and deck furniture.

Check operation of attic fans and roof-mounted turbine vents.

July

Check all exterior walls for peeling or cracked paint. If you decide to repaint your house yourself, you can cut this job down to size by painting just one or two walls per year. Typically, paint on south and west-facing walls deteriorates faster and requires more frequent recoating than paint on north or east-facing walls.

Carefully inspect brick or masonry siding for cracks or missing mortar. Repair with fresh mortar or concrete caulk.

Inspect roofing material for cracks and loose or missing shingles and repair as necessary. If you have access to attic spaces, check underneath the roof for stains that indicate leaks, especially from "flashed" areas in roof valleys and around chimneys and vent stacks.

Inspect the operation of automatic light timers and motion-detector systems, especially if you plan a vacation.

Prune trees and shrubs so that branches do not come in contact with exterior siding.

Clean and repair cracks in concrete driveways using epoxy patching material. Repair asphalt driveways using asphalt patching material. Seal asphalt driveways every other year.

Inspect foundation walls for signs of termites — tunnels or dirt bridges. If you suspect termites, contact a professional exterminator.

August

Use a vacuum with a narrow nozzle to clean condenser coils on the back or underneath your refrigerator.

Check faucets for leaks and replace washers or repair the faucet as necessary.

Clean underneath range hood. Remove and clean or replace range hood filters.

Fix "water hammer" noises by draining the plumbing system. Open the uppermost faucet (or the one furthest from the water meter) and the lowest (or closest to the meter) and allow the water to flow to a lower-level sink or floor drain. Draining the system restores air to air chambers. Close the lowest faucet and refill the system.

Plan interior remodeling projects and get estimates. Plan for the work to be done in early fall.

September

Paint interior rooms while it's still warm enough to leave windows open. Ditto for shampooing or replacing carpets.

Check heating system including filters, pilot lights, and burners, and have the system serviced by a qualified professional.

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

Remove window air-conditioning units and store them. If they are not removable, cover them with plastic to protect them over the winter.

Tour the outside of your house to make sure that soils around the foundation are properly graded. Soil should slope four to six inches for a distance of three feet out from the foundation walls.

Watch for year-end close-out sales on lawn and garden equipment.

Inspect storm windows for any signs of deterioration and make necessary repairs.

October

Detach hoses in case of freezing temperatures. Remove all paints, caulks and liquid materials from garage or garden sheds.

Inspect weather-stripping around doors and windows and repair or replace if necessary.

Set thermostats and automatic sprinklers for winter.

Clean gutters after leaves have fallen. Make sure downspouts are in good repair.

Check gauges on home fire extinguishers to ensure a full charge. Replace if necessary.

November

When setting clocks back to Standard Time, change batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Inspect automatic garage door opener and lubricate according to the manufacturer's directions. Make sure all bolts and screws are properly tightened and secured.

Check for leaks around washing machine. A prime suspect for leaks are the water supply hose washers. Inspect hoses and replace if necessary.

Clean dishwasher, trash compactor and countertop appliances.

December

Check the operation of all ground-fault circuit interrupter outlets by pushing the "test" button. The "reset" button should pop out, indicating the receptacle is operating properly. Press in the reset button.

Check inside bathroom vanities and kitchen sink cabinets for moisture and other signs of leaks. Carefully inspect pipes for condensation or slow drips. Repair the plumbing system if necessary.

Review the family fire escape plan with every household member.

Unpack and test all electrical holiday decorations. Repair or discard any that do not function properly.

Watch for sales on tools before and after the holiday season.