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Home Maintenance Guide for  
Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring.



# Home Maintenance Guide

A home inspector will help you to maintain one of the largest investments in your lifetime. Your home has value in a financial sense, but more importantly, it delivers security and comfort to your family on a day to day basis. To keep the house in peak condition there are certain elements that need regular inspection and certain home maintenance tasks required. Some of these are seasonal, others year round; some can be completed on your own and others will require a trained professional to help you out. Partner with a home inspector and other industry professionals to ensure your home is safe, running efficiently and offering the maximum amount of comfort.

Your home is made up of different parts or sectors. From the surrounding landscape to the exterior finish and from the mechanical workings to the interior furnishings and appliances, a house is basically a network of systems working together. Be sure to pay attention to each sector on its own as well as have an overall view of how things are connected and support each other within and around the house.

It's a good idea to keep an ongoing list of scheduled home maintenance tasks as well as a record of when they were last completed. This record will help you make sure that no task gets overlooked. When a home inspector is called in, they will use that record to better gauge the condition of your house. Create a list for each sector (exterior, interior, mechanical) or each season of the year, depending on what helps your schedule the most.

Working through these tasks on a regular basis will make them easier to handle. Also, seasonal maintenance will often protect your home from major problems, excessive wear and even accidents. Keep every system in your home working properly with general maintenance and you will also keep the repair bills down. You might want to take pictures of major elements in your home to have a visual record of the conditions before and after maintenance tasks have been completed. These can be used by technicians, contractors and your home inspector to make better decisions and handle any difficulties in the best way.



## Essential Seasonal Maintenance

Most people focus on their landscaping when they think of seasonal maintenance. But there is a lot more to it than simply cutting the grass, pulling weeds, and shoveling snow. While all of these are important, changes in the climate means changes in how your house works for you. Those require monitoring and support to work well

### Fall Checklist

When the summer ends and the weather is beginning to cool, there are important home maintenance tasks to tackle.

#### To Do Yourself

- ✓ Clean out gardens and trim back trees and shrubs as necessary
- ✓ Plant trees and turn over soil in vegetable garden
- ✓ Fertilize grass and reseed as necessary
- ✓ Inspect the chimney cap and vents for your fireplace and dryer to remove any debris
- ✓ Open septic tank and check the level - if it's high or approaching a high level, call a pumping contractor (this should be done every three years regardless)
- ✓ Clean out gutters and drainpipes and ensure that downspouts are working well
- ✓ Drain and store outdoor hoses and hose bibs and turn off interior valves leading to outdoor faucets
- ✓ Cover the air conditioner and set to "off"
- ✓ Remove screens and check the weather stripping around all windows and doors, repair and replace if necessary
- ✓ Disconnect the furnace power and inspect the forced-air fan belt for signs of wear and looseness
- ✓ For central air systems, check that the drain pan under the cooling coil in your furnace plenum is clean and working well
- ✓ Change your furnace filter – this should be done each month during the winter as well

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## Fall Checklist Continued - To Do Yourself.

- ✓ Remove the floor grilles and vacuum out the ducts
- ✓ Vacuum around and in electric baseboard heaters to remove dust and debris
- ✓ Test your furnace by turning it to heat (don't forget to light the pilot, if necessary) and raising the temperature until the system comes on – turn down to the desired level afterward
- ✓ Check that your sump pump is operating well and clean out any debris in the pit
- ✓ Check that your bathroom and range hood exhaust are working well and that the dampers open properly outside
- ✓ Test your smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and security systems, replacing batteries as needed

### Call In The Pros

- ✓ Have your furnace serviced every two years (forced air) or annually (oil), as per the manufacturer's instructions
- ✓ Schedule a well water test if applicable – this should usually be done twice each year
- ✓ Have your chimney cleaned by a licensed chimney sweep and your fireplace, wood stove or insert inspected and serviced

### Have a Home Inspector review the property before repairs.

Fall is also a great time to call in the services of a home inspector. Whether you're putting your home on the market or not, the services of a home inspector add value to your home, make your daily life safer and more enjoyable, and give you peace of mind. Complete the home maintenance tasks that you can then rely on the expertise of a home inspector to direct you on which (if any) major service or repairs need to be done. The process is similar to a regular vehicle service; what you find out will help to head off any major problems and allow you to take better care of your investment.



## Winter Checklist

Once you have battened down the hatches in the fall, winter is a more restful time. Besides changing your furnace filter on a monthly basis, you need to do a few other things on a regular basis throughout the cold months. It's also a good time to look at the plumbing and safety systems and the air flow in your home.

### To Do Yourself

- ✓ Remove snow and ice as they build up in front of vents, gas meters, on walkways, and near basement windows and emergency exits
- ✓ Shovel driveway and keep clear of ice
- ✓ Watch roof for ice dams and dangerous icicles
- ✓ Furnace air filters need to be changed monthly, ventilation system filters can be done every other month
- ✓ Check your firewood supply and remove ash buildup in a wood burning appliance as necessary
- ✓ Clean your humidifier
- ✓ Pull out the refrigerator and freezer, vacuum out the radiator grilles and clean the floor underneath
- ✓ Go over the fire escape routes with your family and make sure the emergency exits are not blocked
- ✓ Replace washers on leaky faucets and replace any faucets necessary
- ✓ Clean out all the drains in your house
- ✓ Keep basement floor drain trap filled with water
- ✓ Run water through pipes that are used infrequently to prevent freezing and problems
- ✓ Inspect windows and doors for excessive condensation and ice buildup
- ✓ Note any drafts or cold air leaks that you find for repair in the warmer weather

### Call in the Pros

- ✓ Take your fire extinguishers for service and a recharge
- ☑ Don't forget to monitor your holiday lighting system carefully and be sure not to overload any electrical circuits when hanging out decorations. Enjoy the winter months and stay warm and cozy in your well maintained home.



## Spring Checklist

As the seasons change and the nice weather returns, more home maintenance tasks crop up.

### To Do Yourself

- ✓ Clean out winter debris from the gardens and de-thatch the lawn
  - ✓ Fertilize the grass, trees and the garden as necessary
  - ✓ Mulch the gardens to reduce weeds and maintain moisture levels
  - ✓ Watch for pests, their nests, and any damage that they may be causing around the home
  - ✓ Clean out drains and ditches of debris
  - ✓ Clean out gutters and drainpipes and ensure that downspouts are working well
  - ✓ Level out any heaved deck or fence posts, as well as patio stones and stairs
  - ✓ Stain or paint any wood decks or fences once they have had time to dry out, but before the heat sets in
  - ✓ Inspect the foundation for cracks, splits, leaks, and any other damage
  - ✓ After the last threat of frost has passed, open up hose valves and bibs and reattach the hoses
  - ✓ Take off storm windows and put in screens, replacing or repairing wherever necessary
  - ✓ Turn off the gas furnace heat and extinguish pilot light if applicable
  - ✓ Clean the air conditioning filter or replace if necessary
  - ✓ Switch on the air conditioning system and test in a similar fashion to the furnace test done in the fall
  - ✓ Check dehumidifier and drain if necessary
  - ✓ Turn off, clean out, and drain furnace humidifier if applicable and close the damper if you have central air
  - ✓ Test your smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and security systems, replacing batteries as needed
  - ✓ Change the furnace filter (monthly)
  - ✓ Check that your sump pump is operating well and clean out any debris in the pit
- Spring Guide continued on next page.



## Spring Checklist - continued from previous page.

As the seasons change and the nice weather returns, more home maintenance tasks crop up.

### Call in the Pros

- ✓ If it didn't happen in the fall, have your chimney cleaned by a licensed chimney sweep and your fireplace or wood stove inspected and serviced
- ✓ Have your hot water heater inspected and tested
- ✓ Schedule a well water test if applicable – this should usually be done twice each year
- ✓ Have your air conditioning system serviced every two to three years
- ✓ If there are pests, call in an exterminator to take care of the issue

### Spring Overview and Home Inspector checkup on HVAC system.

Spring is another perfect time to call in a home inspector. After your heating systems have worked hard through the season and before your home has to endure the summer temperatures, a thorough examination by your home inspector is an investment in the stability and durability of your house.



## Summer Checklist

You want to enjoy the hot sun of summer and not be stuck doing home maintenance, but many of these jobs are fast and are best done in the warmth of this season.

### To Do Yourself

- ✓ Repair or replace driveways, patios, and walkways
- ✓ Repaint wood frames on doors and windows
- ✓ Maintain the gardens, ensuring vines, roots and branches are not growing dangerously close to the house
- ✓ Keep vegetable garden, trees, flower gardens, and potted plants watered and fed
- ✓ Inspect the roof for any damage, wear and problems that may have arisen over the winter
- ✓ Inspect the siding and repair or replace as necessary
- ✓ Lubricate garage door openers and repair any hinges, handles, and locks on all doors
- ✓ Check all caulking and weather stripping around mechanical and electrical services, paying special attention to the main door in the garage
- ✓ Check the stability of railings and guardrails
- ✓ Check the operation of all windows
- ✓ Deep clean rugs, carpets, and draperies
- ✓ Monitor the humidity in the basement, maintaining it at 60 percent
- ✓ Change the furnace filter (monthly)
- ✓ Keep basement floor drain trap filled with water

### Call in the Pros

- ✓ Have your attic insulation refreshed or refilled
- ✓ Repair or replace damaged shingles
- ✓ Repoint bricks

### Take care of the outdoor tasks in the Summer.

Outdoor home maintenance tasks are more enjoyable in the warmth of summer. Take advantage of the opportunities and make your home a safer, more secure place to live.



## Year Round and Occasional Maintenance

Some home maintenance tasks are not necessarily seasonal. They may be monthly tasks (such as changing the furnace filter) or sporadic tasks, like sealing the driveway. There are also jobs that are specific to the appliances and systems in your home.

It's worth your time to read through the manufacturer booklets of each appliance and unit in your home, from the dishwasher to the laundry and ceiling fans. Add all of the specific tasks that you discover to your seasonal maintenance lists, scheduling them in at a convenient time of year.

Also, consider the tasks that are not done regularly, but make a big difference in your home. Occasional jobs like repainting the walls, refinishing wood floors or sealing porous surfaces like stone countertops will need to be done at some point. Marking those on your maintenance task list and tackling one job or one room each year is a simple way to get them done.

### Energy Efficiency

There are plenty of small home improvements that can make big differences in your home's energy efficiency. By installing green products throughout your home you can contribute to a healthier planet and a more efficient house.

A home inspector can help you to pinpoint which areas of your house have room for improvement. Some municipalities have programs in place to help you make these improvements, including tax rebates and other incentives. Do some research ahead of time and make a list of possible jobs while you are taking care of your seasonal maintenance tasks.

When replacing your light bulbs, upgrade to Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs) and use less energy. Add a programmable thermostat to maintain more control of your heating and cooling costs. If your house is tied to time-of-use gas or hydro meters, using timers for lights and appliances can save some money on your utility bills.

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## **Energy Efficiency - continued from previous page.**

In the bathroom, you can upgrade to energy efficient shower heads that use less hot water. Even turning down the temperature setting on your hot water tank can make a difference in energy usage.

Replace your appliances with Energy Star rated models as the time comes and enjoy lower bills and a cleaner planet. Be sure to read through the manuals carefully to include any necessary maintenance tasks on your master list.

## **Value and Comfort**

Home maintenance costs can add up. If you think of those costs as an investment in your family's comfort, they can seem as less of a hardship. For security and the safe operation of all the systems in your house, maintenance is required. You can save a lot of money by doing things yourself. But when you don't have the training, equipment or time to tackle something, hiring a trusted contractor to do the job is the wise choice.

Also, remember that by maintaining the structure, operation, and appearance of your home, you are supporting or even increasing the value. When time comes to sell, the buyer will have a home inspector on-hand to examine the fruit of your labors. All of that hard work, time, and money you put into the house will be reflected in the inspection report and ultimately in the price paid.

Every house needs maintaining, no matter the size or location. Different climates dictate different jobs, but there is something to be done all year round. With a few basic tools, you can get the family involved and learn to enjoy these tasks together. There is simple work that the kids can handle and more complicated, physical labor that is best left to the adults. But regardless, completing your home maintenance tasks leaves you with a sense of accomplishment and allows you to truly enjoy the beauty and comfort that your home delivers.

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