



Equity Increaser

YOUR MONTH-BY-MONTH GUIDE TO PRESERVING
& INCREASING THE VALUE OF YOUR HOME



CONTENTS

Equity Increaser calendar	5
Clear out dust and lint inside your dryer & duct	9
Dust your ceiling fan blades	10
Replace the batteries in your smoke & carbon monoxide detectors	11
Clean your refrigerator coils	12
Replace kitchen water filters	13
Test your sump pump	14
Check foundation vents & crawl spaces	15
Patch your driveway	16
Check your deck	17
Add new mulch to your landscaping	18
Outdoor pruning	19
Seal your windows before winter	20
Winterize your A/C units	22
Prep your garden & landscaping for winter	24

CONTENTS

Flush & close outdoor faucets	25
Schedule a furnace inspection	26
Test your snowblower	28
Drain and flush your hot water heater	29
Insulate your hot water heater	30
Winter storm must-dos	31
Repair caulking	32



Get proactive!

When you got the keys to your first home, it didn't come with a how-to manual.

[But we think it should have.](#)

Without proactive home maintenance, your home [can lose 10%](#) of its value (not to mention cost you a bundle in repairs). That's why we've created this month-by-month guide to DIY projects that preserve, and can even grow, the value of your home.

In this guide, you'll find a calendar of tasks organized by month, plus in-depth tutorials for completing each project so that you can decide if you should DIY or hire a professional to keep your home in tip-top shape.

Let's get started!

Winter

Focus on the tasks you
can complete indoors.



January

- ☐ Clear out your dryer vent
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Replace batteries in smoke detectors
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Repair your caulking
[Get Started](#)

February

- ☐ Clean your refrigerator coils
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Replace kitchen water filters
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)

March

- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check foundation vents & crawl spaces
[Get Started](#)



Fact:

Many chemicals and pollutants found in water have no taste. Water filters are designed to reduce chemicals, heavy metals, contaminants, and other impurities and should be replaced every two-to-three months.

Spring

Prep for the warm weather and the outdoor season.



April

- ☐ Patch your driveway

[Get Started](#)

- ☐ Check your deck

[Get Started](#)

- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries

[Get Started](#)

May

- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades

[Get Started](#)

- ☐ Add new mulch to your landscaping

[Get Started](#)

- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries

[Get Started](#)

June

- ☐ Complete outdoor pruning

[Get Started](#)

- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries

[Get Started](#)



Fact:

The longevity of your driveway is dependent on traffic, chemical use such as ice melt, maintenance, and material. How driveway materials compare:

- Asphalt - 20 years
- Concrete - 50 years
- Gravel - 100 years (replenished every 5 years)

Summer

Maintain your landscaping and curb appeal.



July

- ☐ Complete outdoor pruning
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Test your sump pump
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your deck
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)

August

- ☐ Add new mulch to your landscaping
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Outdoor pruning
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Clean your refrigerator coils
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Replace kitchen water filters
[Get Started](#)

September

- ☐ Clear out your dryer vent
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Do outdoor pruning
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check foundation vents & crawl spaces
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades
[Get Started](#)



Fact:

Does the exterior of your dryer get especially hot? Do your clothes come out still damp? These are warning signs that it's time to clean your vents.

Fall

Prepare your home and landscaping for winter.



October

- ☐ Seal your windows before winter
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Flush & close outdoor faucets
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Winterize your A/C units
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Prep your garden & landscaping for winter
[Get Started](#)

November

- ☐ Schedule a furnace inspection
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Test your snowblower
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Drain & flush your hot water heater
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Dust your ceiling fan blades
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check your smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)

December

- ☐ Insulate your hot water heater
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Check smoke detector batteries
[Get Started](#)
- ☐ Prep for winter storms
[Get Started](#)



Fact:

Sealing windows does more than benefit your heating bill. It can reduce allergens, prevent bugs from coming indoors, and elongate the life of your windows.

WINTER

SUMMER

Clear out accumulated dust and lint inside your dryer vent pipe and duct

Built-up dust and lint in dryer vents, coupled with heat from dryer cycles, can be a major fire hazard. Spend an afternoon safeguarding your home by removing this fire hazard from your laundry room.

BENEFITS

- **Lower electric bills:** If your dryer vent is clogged or blocked, it will have to run longer to fully dry your laundry, which uses more energy and could cause your electric bills to increase.
- **Elimination of fire hazard:** Dryer fires are one of the leading causes of house fires. Keep your family safe by eliminating the hazard from clogged dryer vents.

HOW TO DO IT

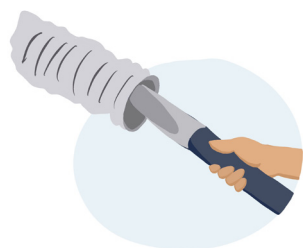
1. Find out how to access your dryer's venting system. Then, determine whether to clean it from inside the house or via the home's exterior.
2. Purchase and/or put together the flexible rods and brushes on your dryer cleaning kit (\$15-\$20 at most home improvement and hardware stores).
3. Unplug the dryer, then detach the dryer duct connection.

If you're cleaning your dryer vent from inside the house:

1. Using your flexible rods and brushes, reach into the dryer vent and brush out dirt and debris. Repeat until dust and lint are removed and the vent is clear.
2. Sweep up and dispose of all lint and dust. Reattach the vent pipe to the dryer and plug the dryer back in.

If you're cleaning your dryer vent from outside the house:

1. Prop open or remove the dryer hood. Use your dryer cleaning kit (with or without a drill) to clear all ducts.
2. Dispose of all debris. Replace the hood and plug the dryer back in.



Keep your family safe by eliminating the hazard from clogged dryer vents.

How Often To Do It

Keep your dryer vent clear and fire-hazard free by cleaning it at least twice a year.

What You'll Need

- Eye protection
- Dust mask
- Dryer vent cleaning kit (flexible rods, vent brush, lint remover)
- Screwdriver



Dust your ceiling fan for cleaner air.

How Often To Do It
Every other month.

What You'll Need

- Stepladder
- Pillowcase
- Dryer sheets or static-dust cloth
- Microfiber cloth
- Dust-repellent spray
- **Optional:** Extendable ceiling fan blade duster

WINTER

SPRING

SUMMER

Dust your ceiling fan blades

A clean ceiling fan means better air quality. There's less dust buildup on furnishings, rugs, and carpet, which means fewer allergens in your home.

BENEFITS

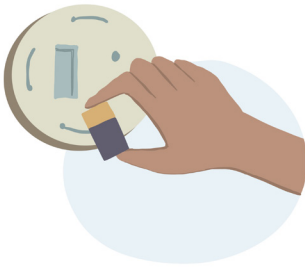
- **Cleaner air**
- **Cost savings:** With cleaner air, you can save an average of \$80 in electric bills compared to running an air purifier nonstop throughout spring and summer.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Set a ladder under your ceiling fan and climb to a step where you're not overextending your arms. (You don't want to lose your balance!)
2. Drape an old pillowcase over each blade, then pull the pillowcase across both the top and bottom to wipe it clean. The goal is to enclose all the dust inside the case so you're not sending dust across the room. If you don't want to use a pillowcase, a static-capture cloth like a dryer sheet can also do the trick.
3. To prevent future dust buildup, spray a clean rag with dust repellent and wipe both surfaces of each ceiling fan blade.

If you're doing it without a ladder:

1. Use an extendable fan blade duster (available at most home improvement stores) to clean each blade of your ceiling fan.
2. Position the duster so it can dust both sides of the ceiling fan blade at the same time.
3. Dust each blade in succession until all are clean.



We recommend setting a monthly calendar reminder so you don't forget to check the batteries.

How Often To Do It

- Replace the batteries at least once per year.
- Check the batteries every month.

What You'll Need

- Stepladder
- New batteries

WINTER

SPRING

SUMMER

FALL

Replace the batteries in your smoke & carbon monoxide detectors

Spending \$15 to \$20 on replacement batteries for your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors ensures that you'll be alerted to the first sign of a fire or dangerous gases, thus preserving your property and your health.

BENEFITS

Peace of mind: With functioning smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, you can have peace of mind that you and your family will be alerted at the first sign of a fire or dangerous gas.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Locate each smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector in your home.
2. Open each unit and identify the type of battery required. (**Hint:** Make a list for next time so you know exactly where each detector is and how many of each battery type you need.)
3. Remove each old battery and replace with a new one.
4. Press each smoke detector or carbon monoxide unit's test button to ensure the new battery is properly installed and that the detector is still in good working condition. Replace faulty devices as needed.

WINTER

SUMMER

Clean your refrigerator coils

With replacement compressors going for upwards of \$600 and new refrigerators costing between \$350 and \$2,000 (depending on the bells and whistles), taking a half-hour every six months to clean your refrigerator coils is a cost-effective use of your time.

BENEFITS

\$350+ in savings: New refrigerators are expensive. Extend the life of yours by cleaning the coils every six months.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Locate the power source for your fridge and where the coils are located. (Carefully pull the fridge away from the wall if necessary.)
2. Unplug your fridge, then remove the coil cover (if applicable).

If your refrigerator coils are on the bottom:

1. Use a refrigerator coil brush (\$5-\$20 at most retailers) to remove any dust, dirt, debris, and dander on and around the refrigerator coils, taking as many passes as necessary.
2. Sweep up or vacuum displaced dirt.

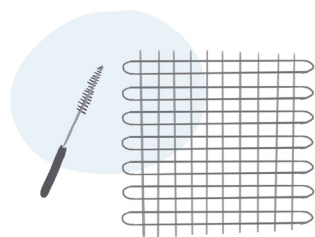
If your refrigerator coils are on the top:

1. Lift coil cover, noting any sharp edges, then reach in to wipe down coils.
2. Use vacuum attachment to gather up any residual debris from the coil compartment.

If your refrigerator coils are on the back:

1. Wipe away dirt and dust from your refrigerator coils with a refrigerator coil brush.
2. Sweep or vacuum any debris from the floor.

Lastly, replace your coil cover and plug your fridge back in. Gently push the fridge back into place.



Cleaning your refrigerator coils improves your fridge's efficiency — and, by extension, its duration/lifespan as a working kitchen appliance.

How Often To Do It

Twice per year.

What You'll Need

- Refrigerator coil brush
- Vacuum with hose attachment
- Gloves



Sediment, chemicals, and minerals will build up in water filters over time, making them less effective.

How Often To Do It

To ensure clean drinking water in every glass, change your water filters every six months or when your system indicates a new filter is needed (e.g., a red light or change filter alert).

What You'll Need

- New water filter
- Gloves
- Trash receptacle
- Mild cleaner
- Paper towels or sponge

Replace kitchen water filters

BENEFITS

Bottled water cost savings: Depending on your refrigerator model, replacement water filters start at \$15. Faucet filtration systems can range from \$15 to \$100 while under-the-sink filters can cost you between \$100 and \$600. With pallets of bottled water starting at \$275, getting a filter will save a lot of money for clean drinking water over six months (and also minimize waste).

HOW TO DO IT

Determine the specific water filter needed (e.g., make and model), then purchase the replacement filter.

For refrigerators:

1. Turn off the water supply and locate the water filter compartment.
2. Remove the old water filter and discard.
3. Wipe down compartment to remove any residue.
4. On the new filter, remove any seals or caps (if applicable), then place the new filter into its designated space.
5. Restore the water supply.

For kitchen sink faucets:

1. Open the filter chamber and remove the old filter.
2. Wipe down compartment area (if possible).
3. Replace with the new filter and close the compartment. Discard the used filter.

For under-the-sink filters:

1. Turn off the water supply and turn on the faucet to relieve any pressure.
2. Under the sink, remove the filter compartment, taking care not to spill any accumulated water.
3. Remove all ancillary hardware and the old filter cartridge. Note whether O-rings show signs of buildup or decay; clean or replace as needed.
4. Clean the compartment to remove all residue and grime.
5. Add new filter cartridge and replace all hardware. Discard the old filter.

Regardless of the system, once your water filter has been replaced be sure to run the taps for a few minutes to get filters up and running properly.



Avoid water damage, mold, mildew, and \$30,000 in cleanup costs by testing your sump pump once a year.

How Often To Do It
Roto-Rooter experts recommend testing your sump pump at least once a year and replacing it every 10 years.

What You'll Need

- 5-gallon bucket
- Gloves

Test your sump pump

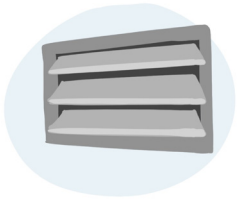
A working sump pump prevents water damage, mold, and mildew in your home's basement and foundation. Test your sump pump and preserve your home's structural stability, maintain your family's health, and save thousands in costly repairs.

BENEFITS

Savings up to \$30,000: Replacing your sump pump can cost up to \$475, which may seem steep at first, but it's much less than the potential costs of cleaning a flooded basement and removing mold from your home (\$2,000 to a whopping \$30,000 for cleanup alone, not to mention possible health-related costs).

HOW TO DO IT

1. Locate your home's exterior pipe that drains water away from the sump pump. Inspect it for any obstructions and clear away all blockages.
2. Go to your sump pump and identify its two power cords: the pump cord and the float cord plug. (They should be attached to each other.) Unplug both from the electrical outlet, then unplug them from each other.
3. Plug only the pump cord back into the power source. If the sump pump is working properly, you'll hear the pump start to run. Unplug the pump, reattach the two cords, then plug back in.
4. Fill a five-gallon bucket with clean water. Take the lid off the sump reservoir and slowly pour in some water from the bucket, keeping an eye on the sump pump switch. You should see the switch turn on and begin to pump water. Once the water has drained, observe to see if the pump turns itself off.
5. Once the pump turns itself off, add the rest of the water from the bucket to see if the pump turns on again and repeats the process.
6. If either the electrical or bucket test show any sign of damage, inefficiencies, or simply aren't working, call in a plumber to get your sump pump fixed and/or replaced.



A quick check of your crawl spaces can help prevent mildew and rot — and their pricey cleanup costs.

How Often To Do It

Twice a year

What You'll Need

- Work gloves
- Dust mask
- Tape measure
- Screwdriver & screws
- Screens & vent covers

Optional

- Automatic vents
- Power grinder
- Masonry hammer
- Barb spring
- Caulk
- Screwdriver
- Screws
- Screw anchors & retaining clips
- 6mm plastic sheeting

WINTER

SUMMER

Check foundation vents & crawl spaces

In summer months, you may be asking yourself which vents to close and when to open foundation vents to enable outside air to circulate under floors, preventing mildew and rot, which can cost up to \$6,000 to clean up. Check and update your vents to ensure your foundation has proper air flow (while also preserving your cash flow).

BENEFITS

Mildew and rot prevention, which can cost up to \$6,000 to clean up!

HOW TO DO IT

1. Count how many foundation vents you have across your entire home, measure their sizes, then decide if you want screens or automatic vents as replacements. Screen vents will need to be removed and closed for cold weather months while automatic vents use temperature sensors to open and close when needed. If your home has vents in the foundation, they'll most likely be accessible through crawl spaces (e.g., under porches or via basement access) or are visible from the home's exterior.
2. Purchase your new screens (\$3–\$50 each) or automatic vents (\$10–\$200 each) for each vent space.
3. Install new foundation vents by removing any existing closures (e.g., foam blocks or grates) and making any adjustments to the vent frame size to ensure a snug fit for your replacement.
4. Your new vents should fit snugly to allow air flow—while also keeping out pests and vermin. If your vents are in a crawl space that has a dirt floor, you can also put down plastic sheeting (\$25–\$60) to block extra moisture.



SPRING

Patch your driveway

Patching cracks and holes in your driveway promotes a smooth and uniform surface, preventing damage to your vehicle's tires and undercarriage.

BENEFITS

- **Increased curb appeal:** This preventive exterior home maintenance activity is a cost-effective way to preserve and protect your home for years to come. By filling cracks and holes, you'll also deter tree roots, weeds, and pests from settling in.
- **Accident prevention:** A patched driveway fixes tripping hazards, protecting you from hospital bills or liability claims.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Inspect your asphalt driveway and take inventory of any cracks and holes.
2. Check the weather forecast before beginning any driveway repair work. If rain is in store, hold off. If you have sun for the next 48 hours, you're good to go.
3. Remove all loose debris around the crack and/or hole.

For holes:

1. Create a uniform working area around the hole with a circular saw, then clear all unsettled debris. If you're working at the edge of a driveway, add a wooden board (cut to fit) to define the boundary.
2. Add a layer of gravel or crushed limestone as a base for the new asphalt, then smooth it out and tamp it down so the foundation is level and sturdy.
3. Fill the area with replacement asphalt, then spread it and tamp it so the surface is uniform with the rest of the driveway.
4. Place a layer of plywood on top of the filled hole, then drive over the spot to pack down the fill.

For cracks:

1. Fill driveway cracks less than half an inch wide with crack filler, taking care not to overfill and create a bump in the driveway.
2. If you do overfill, use a shovel to smooth and spread the filler. For driveway cracks wider than half an inch, use the same treatment for driveway holes.

Patching up your driveway once a year not only prevents accidents but also increases your home's overall curb appeal and value!

How Often To Do It

Once every year

What You'll Need

- Gloves
- Crack filler
- Gravel or crushed limestone
- Replacement asphalt
- Shovel
- Rake
- Plywood



SPRING

SUMMER

FALL

Check your deck

Take a weekend annually to focus on deck problems when they're small (like checking and maintaining your deck's lumber and fastenings).

BENEFITS

- **Increased deck longevity:** Preserve the integrity and longevity of your entire deck by checking it once per year.
- **Cost savings:** Save up to \$2,500 in new treated lumber boards by checking them regularly. It'll cost you much less time and money to address minor repairs now so you don't have to do a full replacement later.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Walk on and around your deck, looking for both structural and minor problems that need attention. You'll want to look for damaged wood (e.g., cracks, decay, holes, or rot) as well as loose hardware and/or signs of pests.
2. Check the ledger (e.g., the material that attaches the deck to your house) and your deck's connecting/support beams for any signs of rust or wear. Ensure that there are no gaps between the ledger and the house itself, and confirm all screws are solid and tightly attached. See if any support beams need new reinforcements.
3. Confirm all rails, balusters, and steps are sturdy and secure.
4. Consider aesthetics: Clear accumulated leaves, branches, and dirt on and around the deck, and decide whether to add new finish or a fresh coat of paint.
5. Determine whether to go DIY or call in a professional.

A yearly checkup on your deck can save you thousands in replacement costs.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Flathead screwdriver to test cracks and screws
- Caulk to seal minor cracks
- Wood glue or heavy adhesive to secure loose boards or balusters
- Replacement bolts & screws
- Gloves
- Trash bags



Keeping up with your home's landscaping results in better curb appeal, increasing its value.

How Often To Do It

Twice a year, spring through fall

What You'll Need

- Mulch
- Wheelbarrow
- Shovel
- Rake
- Garden hose

SPRING

SUMMER

Add new mulch to your landscaping

When used properly, mulch can provide nutrients to your plants and prevent weed growth while also making your landscaping more attractive. Whether your motivation is pride of ownership or to appeal to new buyers, mulch adds aesthetic and financial value.

BENEFITS

- **Increased home value:** A home with well-maintained landscaping and tidy curb appeal can increase your home's value by \$5,000 when it comes time to sell.
- **Weed prevention:** Mulch provides nutrients to plants while preventing weed growth to help increase your curb appeal.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Select which mulch—organic or inorganic—will work best for your gardens, both from a functional and aesthetic perspective. Organic mulch (compost, wood chips, grass clippings, etc.) provides nutrients to soil and plants, prevents weeds, and protects roots and will need to be replaced every year. Inorganic mulch (gravel, river rock, stones, etc.) can match the color of your home and will have a longer duration than organic mulch, although it may be less effective at preserving your plants.
2. Figure how much you'll need to cover your landscaping and purchase the correct quantity.
3. Remove any weeds and old decomposed mulch from your landscaped areas, paying close attention to the roots of flowers, trees, and shrubs.
4. Create an edge (e.g., line of stones or recessed line in the soil) around the area to be mulched.
5. Add any new plants to the area (if applicable).
6. Shovel small piles of new mulch into the cleared and edged area, then rake across the surface, aiming for one to two inches of cover across your landscaping in summer or four inches of cover for winter. Leave an inch of clearance around any tree trunks or plants.
7. Water the new mulched area to settle it, taking care not to overwater.

SPRING

SUMMER

Outdoor pruning

By keeping your yard tidy, pruning maintains your home's curb appeal and discourages vermin from building nests in your shrubbery. Prune regularly in late spring and fall to keep your yard and home spic, span, and safe.

BENEFITS

- **Home repair savings:** It stops plant growth near your foundation and roof, warding off pricey repairs (up to \$4,000) down the line.
- **Increased curb appeal**

HOW TO DO IT

1. Cut back areas where your hedges are overgrown, unshapely, or extending onto your neighbor's property.
2. Clear areas where greenery is encroaching on your home's foundation and/or roof as well as near sidewalks or your driveway.
3. Do the pruning yourself or hire a landscaper. If you go the DIY route, work in the morning or evening to avoid summer sun and midday heat.



Taking 20 minutes to prune throughout the warmer months steers off vermin and pests while increasing your home's curb appeal.

How Often To Do It

Regularly from late spring through fall

What You'll Need

- Pruning shears
- Loppers
- Eye protection
- Work gloves
- Heavy-duty trash bags



Taking one morning a year to seal your windows results in lower heating and energy bills.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Scrub brush
- Cleaning solution (e.g., dishwashing soap)
- Weatherstripping product of your choice
- Draft snake
- Curtains

Seal your windows before winter

Heating bills can be expensive, so the more you can do to keep your heat inside (and not escaping through drafty windows), the more budget-friendly (and energy-efficient) your home will be. Many DIY solutions cost \$10 or less at your local hardware store, so spending a little pocket money and taking a few hours to plug up those drafts could save you hundreds once winter storms start raging.

BENEFITS

Lower heating and energy bills: The more you can do to keep your heat inside (and not escaping through drafty windows), the more budget-friendly (and energy-efficient) your home will be.

HOW TO DO IT

Locate which windows are drafty, examine their problem spots (e.g., cracks, gaps, etc.), then decide which type of seal and/or insulation (caulk, weatherstripping, plastic shrink film, draft snake, etc.) would work best.

WINTERIZE WINDOWS: OUTSIDE

Caulk:

1. Scrape off any old caulk or peeling paint from the window frame, then clean off the frame with soapy water and a scrub brush.
2. Wipe dry.
3. Using exterior-grade caulk, apply a new, continuous line of caulk between the window frame and your home's siding, ensuring there are no gaps.

Rope caulk:

1. Pull off the amount you need, then mold the rope to fit into the drafty area or window frame gaps.
2. Press to seal.



Seal your windows before winter

Continued

WINTERIZE WINDOWS: INSIDE

Draft snakes:

Purchase draft snakes (e.g., fabric tubes filled with cedar chips or similar material that block drafts) or make your own. Place on drafty windowsills.

Foam weatherstripping:

1. Clean your window sashes to remove all dirt and grime.
2. For double-hung windows, cut adhesive-backed foam weatherstripping to fit the size of your sashes, then apply to the bottom edge of the lower sash and the top edge of the upper sash. Alternatively, you can place weatherstripping on the sill directly below the lower sash and the head jamb over the upper sash.
3. Close the window to seal and lock it. On casement or sliding windows, place the weatherstripping vertically along the side jamb or on the sash's vertical edge.

Insulated curtains:

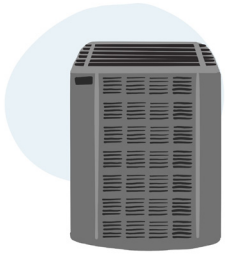
1. Measure your window sizes and purchase appropriately sized draft-blocking curtains. You can select regular curtains with heavy fabrics, layer up multiple thinner curtains, or go for specially designed insulating curtains constructed from thermal materials.
2. Hang with a rod that supports the extra weight.

Plastic shrink film:

1. Place over window and seal with double-sided tape.
2. Heat with a hair dryer until sheeting has shrunk to fit and is taut over the window frame, sealing out any cold air.

Rubber weatherstripping:

Cut to fit your particular window, then peel off adhesive strip and cover the frame to seal any drafts.



Prep your A/C units for winter now to prevent expensive replacement costs once spring and summer arrive.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Garden hose & spray nozzle
- Gentle cleaner (e.g., dishwashing soap or window cleaner)
- Soft towel or sponge
- Window-unit-sized covers (e.g., tarps, newspaper, burlap)
- Fasteners (e.g. bungee cords)

Winterize your A/C units

Making sure your air conditioning units are prepped for winter can prevent expensive replacement costs once spring and summer arrive. Replacing window units averages \$275 per air conditioner while replacing your central air conditioning can range from \$1,800 to \$10,000. Considering tarps and cleaners can cost less than \$20 combined, this preventive work provides a great return on investment!

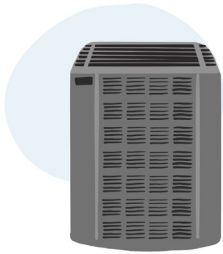
BENEFITS

Safeguard your air conditioning units during the winter months to boost their durability and operating life.

HOW TO DO IT

For central A/C:

1. Turn off the power to your central A/C unit.
2. Clean coils with a bristle brush, then use a garden hose to remove accumulated dirt and debris.
3. Wipe down hard-to-reach spots with a gentle cleaner (e.g., dishwashing soap) and a towel.
4. Clean the central A/C filter, which is typically found at the unit's return air duct (located inside your home, often in the basement). Open the front grill and remove the filter, then tap gently to remove accumulated dust and dirt; you can also vacuum or brush them clean if necessary. Rinse them clean and let them dry completely, then return to the unit.
5. Back outside, cover all exterior pipes to the central A/C unit. Your unit itself should be designed to withstand winter conditions and resist pests and doesn't need to be covered (as this can build up condensation and damage the system or create a safe haven for animals seeking shelter). If you're concerned about heavy storms, secure a piece of plywood to the top of the unit to protect from falling branches and the like.



Winterize your A/C units

Continued

For removable window units:

1. Unplug the window air conditioning unit and remove panels that hold it in place.
2. Remove the air conditioning unit from its window and clean out any accumulated debris such as dirt or leaves.
3. Check for and remove any bugs and mold. If the unit is particularly dirty, clean with a garden hose or a bucket of soap and water.
4. Allow the air conditioner to dry completely, including draining any residual water from the cooling unit.
5. Wrap or cover each air conditioner and store in a place that's warm, dry, and elevated to prevent condensation buildup and rust.
6. Repeat with each removable window air conditioning unit until all are cleaned and stored.

For permanent window units:

1. Unplug the in-window air conditioning unit, then hose it off, remove any remaining debris, and let dry completely.
2. Encase the air conditioning unit with burlap, a tarp, or a custom winter air conditioner cover.
3. Secure cover with bungee cords as needed.
4. Repeat with each in-window air conditioning unit around your home.
5. Monitor all covers regularly during winter months to ensure there are no breaches (e.g., fabric tears) and replace as necessary.



FALL

Prep your garden & landscaping for winter

If you live in a region where winters are harsh, take steps this fall to prep and safeguard your outdoor plants, lawn, trees, and shrubbery against freezing temperatures and inclement weather. Protecting your garden against winter weather preserves your landscaping and gardens while maintaining your property's curb appeal. Most basic preventive tasks can be covered by on-hand household items, but even if you do have to take a trip to the store, your costs will be minimal. For example, tree wrap costs less than \$10 for a 50-foot roll; and wire netting can run between \$10 and \$100, depending on how much you need. With a little prep work in the autumn, you can keep your garden gorgeous!

Take an afternoon to prep your yard for winter. You'll thank yourself come spring.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Gardening gloves
- Rake
- Shovel or trowel
- Lawn mower
- Garden hose
- Mulch
- Burlap
- Lawn disposal bags or compost unit
- Grass seed
- Fertilizer

BENEFITS

- Preserved landscaping
- Increased curb appeal

HOW TO DO IT

1. Clean up the yard, including raking all leaves, mowing the grass, weeding, removing dead annuals, and disposing of any fallen fruit. Generously water your gardens and lawn if you had a dry fall; you want to provide adequate hydration before winter settles in.
2. Cut back perennial plants that need freshening up (flowers like peony and phlox) but leave hardier ones (like ornamental grasses and mums).
3. Aerate your lawn and reseed and/or fertilize problem spots as needed.
4. Wrap any thin-bark tree trunks (which include redbuds, maples, and nearly all fruit trees) with tree wrap to protect the bark and insulate the trees. If you know certain shrubs or plants attract pests, surround them with wire-mesh screens or burlap to discourage nests during cold months.
5. Dig up your perennial bulbs (e.g., dahlia, gladiolus) after the first frost and dry the roots for a few days. Store for the winter in peat moss or sawdust in a cool, dry place.
6. Add a layer of mulch around your flower beds to protect the remaining plants.



Follow a few easy steps to avoid burst pipes and save thousands in repair costs.

How Often To Do It
Once a year

What You'll Need

- Gloves
- Rake

Flush & close outdoor faucets

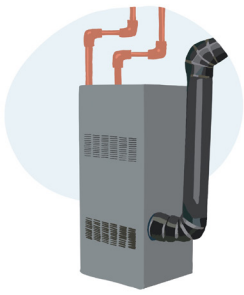
A burst pipe in the basement due to a pipe's residual water freezing and expanding can cost you hours of cleaning and a hefty plumbing repair bill. Here's how to avoid the frustration and cost.

BENEFIT

Savings up to \$3,800: With burst pipe repair costs ranging from \$500 to \$3,800, taking an hour or so to drain your exterior pipes will grant you peace of mind and save you money once freezing conditions settle in.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Identify each faucet around the exterior of your property and remove attached garden hoses (as applicable).
2. Drain remaining water from hoses, then roll them and store away for the winter.
3. Choose a faucet to address first (if you have more than one) and make sure it's in the off position.
4. Locate the water supply valves to each exterior faucet and shut them off. (They're typically found on or near the basement ceiling or next to the main water supply valve.)
5. Go back outside to the exterior faucets. Place a bucket under each and turn the faucets on to drain any residual water. Dump the bucket and leave the faucet in the on position.
6. Go back inside with your bucket to the interior pipe's water supply valve and locate the bleeder cap. Holding the bucket underneath the valve, unscrew the bleeder cap to drain the remaining water out of the pipe.
7. Replace the bleeder cap and fasten tightly.
8. Go back outside to drain the bucket and turn the faucet off.
9. Repeat this process with each exterior faucet around your property.



FALL

Schedule a furnace inspection

An inspected furnace is an efficient furnace, leading to a toasty home and reduced heating bills. Spending around \$100 (the national average, plus the cost of new filters) to get your furnace inspected and tuned up can provide incalculable savings to both your home and well-being.

BENEFIT

Preserved household health: An inspected furnace preserves your household health since clean filters minimize air particle buildup and well-sealed vents reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

HOW TO DO IT

In most cases, you should hire a professional to do a full furnace inspection and make any needed repairs. Beforehand, however, there are a few steps homeowners can take for a preliminary check.

For all furnaces:

1. Go down to your furnace and look at the burner flame. Ideally, the flame should be steady and blue. If the furnace is running, listen for any unusual noises or vibrations.
2. Turn off both the fuel supply (gas line or oil burner) and power source to your furnace.
3. Locate the air filter and determine if it should be replaced.
4. Purchase the appropriate size replacement filter from your local hardware store.
5. Carefully remove the old filter and replace it with the new one. Discard the dirty filter.
6. Check the furnace's flue pipe for any cracks or breaches. Minor breaches can be closed with foil tape whereas large cracks will require a full pipe replacement.

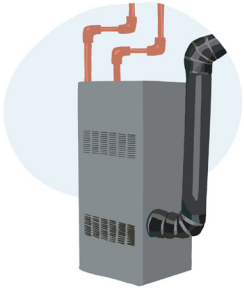
A furnace tuneup once a year provides incalculable savings to your home and your health.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Gloves
- Dust mask



Schedule a furnace inspection

Continued

For gas furnaces:

1. Smell the area around the furnace for any gas odors.
2. Check the batteries in your home's carbon monoxide detectors and replace as needed.
3. If anything seems off, call a furnace technician immediately.

For permanent window units:

1. Smell the area around the furnace for any gas odors.
2. Check the batteries in your home's carbon monoxide detectors and replace as needed.
3. If anything seems off, call a furnace technician immediately.

For oil furnaces:

1. Check to see when you last had your oil filter changed on your furnace.
2. If it's been a while or you can't remember, schedule a filter replacement as part of an inspection.

Restore the fuel and power to your furnace

1. If your heat is circulated through floor vents, remove their screens and vacuum out any collected dirt and debris.
2. Wipe down screens and replace securely.
3. Discard all collected dirt and dust.



An energy-efficient snowblower wards off pricey repair and replacement costs down the road.

How Often To Do It
Once a year

What You'll Need

- Snowblower
- Bike pump or tire pressure gauge
- Wrench

Test your snowblower

In many cases, replacing a worn part on your snowblower will cost much less than having to buy a new snowblower outright. Make sure your snowblower is in good working condition before winter arrives.

BENEFIT

Cost savings up to \$3,000: Regular checks and repairs can preserve the life of your snow blower, which can be as much as \$3,000 to replace.

HOW TO DO IT

All snowblowers:

1. Consult the owner's manual to locate every part that should be tested. Owners of gas snowblowers (versus electric) will have a few extra steps to check the fuel and change the oil.
2. Inspect the following snowblower parts for wear and tear and replace as necessary: belts, rotor blades, scraper bars, shear pins, skid shoes, spark plugs, and starter cord. For each replacement part, ensure you purchase the correct replacement size and/or model for your specific snowblower. If you have questions or lost your manual, look up your snowblower specs online on the manufacturer's website.
3. Check if your snowblower tires are low on air; if so, refill with a bike pump to the recommended pressure level.
4. Tighten all loose nuts and bolts with a wrench as many may have loosened up during the previous winter because of the snowblower's vibrations.
5. Check if cables or other moving parts need lubrication and add as needed.

Gas snowblowers:

1. Purchase the appropriate fuel and fuel stabilizer for your snowblower model.
2. Drain the gas tank of any residual fuel with a turkey baster or similar siphon and dispose.
3. Fill the tank with new gas and the recommended amount of fuel stabilizer. Close the tank securely.
4. Use the oil reservoir's dipstick to check the oil. If it looks dirty, purchase the recommended brand of oil for your snowblower model. Drain the old oil into a secure container and discard it properly. Add new oil and close the reservoir tightly.

Electric snowblowers:

Confirm that the snowblower is operational when plugged in and turned on.



Drain and flush your hot water heater

By removing built-up sediment, draining and flushing your hot water heater improves the heater's efficiency and extends its working capacity/operating life.

BENEFIT

Savings up to \$1,350: Servicing your hot water heater once a year can save you \$750-\$1,350 (the potential cost of installing a new hot water heater), not to mention the avoided expenses to clean up a leak!

HOW TO DO IT

1. Turn off the water source to your heater, then turn off the power source. (For gas heaters, turn the thermostat to "pilot." For electric heaters, turn the power off via its breaker switch in your home's electrical panel.)
2. Locate the water heater tank's drain valve and determine where you'll route the drained water and sediment (e.g., exterior drain, floor drain, lawn, etc.).
3. Attach a standard backyard hose to the water heater tank's drain valve and route the other end to the drain.
4. Go to the sink nearest to your hot water heater and turn on its hot water tap.
5. Return to the water heater, open the drain valve, and drain all water from the tank.
6. Turn on the cold water to dislodge any remaining built-up sediment.
7. Repeat these steps until the tank's water runs clear. (If the water doesn't run clear after repeated flushing or if the water drain is slow or nonexistent, you'll want to call in a plumber.)
8. Close the drain valve and remove the hose.
9. Turn on the cold water so the tank will begin to fill.
10. Return to the hot water tap and test it; once cold water begins to flow from it, turn it off.
11. Confirm that the drain valve is completely closed so you won't have any leaks.
12. Restore power to the water heater (via either gas valve or electricity breaker).
13. Check the drain where all the flushed sediment was routed to clear and dispose of any buildup.

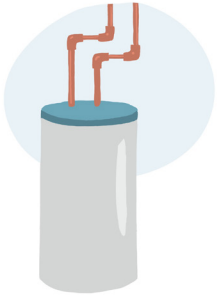
Taking a few hours to drain and flush your water heater can ward off thousands of dollars in repairs later.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Backyard hose
- Gloves
- Bucket



If you don't insulate your hot water heater, you can lose up to 45% of its heat, meaning higher energy costs to keep it running.

How Often To Do It

Once a year

What You'll Need

- Gloves
- Dust mask
- Measuring tape
- Marker
- Scissors
- Hot water heater insulated blanket or jacket kit
- Electrical tape

Insulate your hot water heater

According to the Department of Energy, insulating your hot water heater can minimize heat losses up to 45%, which means a more efficient heater and a warmer home. The installation costs are minimal, too: While insulators for hot water heaters can cost around \$20, your utility company may offer them for free or at a discount. While many new hot water heaters come pre-insulated, older models may need additional insulation to increase their efficiency and properly heat your home. If you have a hot water heater that's warm to the touch, it's a good idea to insulate it. For toasty rooms and lower bills this winter, head down to your basement and insulate your hot water heater soon.

BENEFIT

Up to 16% savings: With energy efficiency comes savings — potentially up to 16% off your heating bill.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Purchase an insulating blanket or heater cover or check with your utility company to see if they offer free or discounted blankets/covers.
2. Check your hot water heater for any leaks. (If it's leaking, you need to replace it outright.)
3. Turn off the power to the hot water heater. Measure the height of the hot water heater and cut the insulated blanket or jacket to fit.
4. Wrap the blanket around the heater, keeping the top of the unit clear. (On gas heaters, the vent is located on top.) Use electrical tape and secure the blanket just enough so it stays in place.
5. Note with a marker where the water heater's controls are. On electric heaters, they're typically found in side panels. On gas heaters, they're the gas valves, burner, pressure relief valves, and pipes.
6. Take scissors and cut corresponding holes in the insulating blanket so the water heater's controls are accessible. With gas burners, make each hole an extra inch wider than the control area (e.g., the holes shouldn't be snug).
7. Readjust the insulating blanket so the holes line up with the controls, then securely tape it in place.
8. Restore power to the hot water.



Proper storm prep can save you thousands of dollars in damages as well as helping with heating efficiency.

How Often To Do It

Before (when safe to do so) and after winter storms

What You'll Need

- Gloves
- Saw
- Hedge cutters
- Marker
- Pipewrap or tubular sleeve insulation
- Duct tape
- Faucet covers
- Pantyhose
- Ice melt

Winter storm must-dos

The last thing you want during a winter storm is a hole in your roof from a downed tree, flooding from burst pipes, or leaks from clogged gutters. Ice dams, which form when ice melts off your roof and refreezes at night in a clogged gutter, are especially concerning. This can force water to go places you don't want it to go, like under your roof. However, roofing professionals don't recommend knocking off the icicles on your home as it may take your gutters with them. Instead, take precautions before and after storms to ensure you minimize damages and the costly repairs that come with them.

BENEFIT

Savings: Avoid thousands of dollars in damage from roof leaks alone. Plus, save on energy costs with insulated pipes that offer more efficient heating.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Clean gutters and drains to prevent ice dams.
2. Install heated cables by attaching with clips along the edge of your roof.
3. If you can't install heated cables before a storm, you can deice dams and create a channel for water to move. Fill the leg of a pair of pantyhose with ice melt and place it across the ice dam and over the gutter. Before using rock salt, know that it hurts pet paws and can make your pet ill if ingested. The salt residue left behind can also damage your driveway and wood floors if tracked in on shoes into your house.
4. Trim tree branches that are dead, snapped, or could fall on your home during a severe storm.
5. Secure any loose items on your house like shingles and shutters.
6. Check insulation on your pipes in unheated areas of your house like the garage and basement. If you haven't already insulated them, consider doing so by installing pipewrap or tubular sleeve insulation to exposed pipes and securing with duct tape. For outdoor faucets, apply an insulated faucet cover.
7. Check your heating sources. If you only have one source of heat (electric, for example), consider installing a backup heating method like a wood-burning stove. Make sure all stoves are properly vented. If you have a fireplace, stock up on dry wood. If you have a generator, ensure your carbon monoxide detectors have fresh batteries and are working.



Reduce mold and mildew by taking time to recaulk once a year.

How Often To Do It
Once a year

What You'll Need

- Caulking gun
- Caulk remover
- Caulk
- Tweezers/Old toothbrush
- Rag

WINTER

Repair caulking

Shorter days and longer nights (a.k.a. more time spent inside) means winter is the perfect time to repair caulking around your kitchen and bathroom. Cracking, brittle caulk can provide homes for mildew to thrive in addition to leaving you vulnerable to water damage.

BENEFIT

Reduced mildew and mold

HOW TO DO IT

1. Apply a caulk remover and wait overnight as the caulk will come off that much easier. Remove old caulking using tweezers or an old toothbrush to remove the most stubborn bits. Avoid using blades and knives of any kind to limit any damage to tile.
2. Deep clean the tile before reapplying new caulking. Let tiles completely dry.
3. Tape area around the spot you're caulking to reduce caulk on areas you don't want it.
4. Cut the tip of the caulk cartridge at a 45-degree angle and hold the caulking gun at the same angle to get into the bottom of the crack. Apply in a continuous motion.
5. Smooth your work by using a damp rag to press and pull your finger along the caulking.



Looking to cash in on your home's equity?

Whether you're looking to sell in the next few years or cash in on some of your hard-earned equity, keeping up with your home maintenance tasks keeps you on track to maintain and grow the value of your home.

See if a Hometap Investment is right for you!

[TAKE THE QUIZ TO FIND OUT →](#)

