

Is Your Home Ready For Winter?

Fall is the time for cooler weather and shorter days. It's also the perfect time to prepare your home for the winter months that lie ahead. Performing regular maintenance of your home protects your home's value and can prevent major repairs.

Here is a list of common maintenance tips that you should perform each autumn.

Roof and Gutters

Ice, snow and wind can cause weak trees or branches to break. Part of your winter preparation should include trimming back all tree limbs and vegetation away from the roof. You also should remove debris, such as leaves and sticks from your gutters and downspouts. Clogged gutters don't allow water to properly drain away from the home, which can cause seepage in your ceilings and walls. You can also invest in gutter guards, a screen that prevents debris from entering the gutter and directs the flow of water away from the house and into the ground.

Water Heater

You don't want to find out that your water heater isn't operating properly when you need it most. So use this time to perform an annual inspection, which includes having your tank's pressure and temperature relief valve checked. In addition, remove sediment from the bottom of the tank by draining two gallons of water to improve heat transfer and the efficiency of your heater.

Heating and Cooling System

If you have a forced warm-air heating system, you should check the exhaust vent and air shutter openings for dirt and dust. Clean any lint and dirt from the blower blades, motor and burner (if you have a gas heater). Vacuum air passages and check and replace, if necessary, fan belts. To prevent airborne dirt from circulating throughout your home, wash out your reusable filter or replace it if it is disposable.

Doors and Windows

To help control heating costs, you want to make sure that your doors and windows are properly sealed. Now is the time to repair or replace weatherstripping around door bottoms and jambs and window frames. Check for loose or missing glazing putty and caulking for deterioration. If you have storm windows, install them.

Water Pipes

Frozen or burst pipes can cause major damage to your home and be an expensive to remedy. Before frigid weather hits, protect your pipes in unheated areas from freezing by adding insulation, which reduces heat loss from hot-water pipes and condensation on cold water pipes. This can be accomplished by wrapping the pipes with heating tape or blanket insulation and duct tape or by encasing the pipes with preformed plastic foam. In addition, examine your pipes for cracks and leaks.

Fireplace

Before you light the logs and get ready to settle in front of a cozy fire, make sure that your fireplace is in good working order. Clean the chimney flue and if needed inspected and repaired. Check the seal on your flue, which is designed to keep out drafts. Replace the seal if it is loose or damaged.

If you decide to do the fall maintenance yourself disconnect the power for any electrical or gas systems. In addition, before inspecting, cleaning or making any repairs refer to your owner's manual for all equipment for proper instructions, which should be the final authority on any maintenance.

Although this list is merely a guide, it can help you keep your home in good shape and have a winter free of major repairs.