

Fall Home Maintenance Checklist

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With autumn here it is time to get your house in shape for the cooler months ahead. Fall is a great time to take care of the little things that can make a big difference for you and your home. Getting ready for colder weather means checking, repairing, and prepping your home to withstand the upcoming rain, wind, and snow.

Here are some helpful tips that every homeowner should do before hibernating this winter.

1. Stow Your Mower

With the cooler months ahead, it's time to start thinking about how you are going to stow your lawn mower. Before saying goodbye to your lawn mower for the winter season, there are a few things you should consider. First, it will be a good idea to sharpen the blade of your lawn mower to ensure that it is in

tip-top shape for the spring. You'll also want to empty your gas tank before putting your lawn mower to rest. Taking simple steps like these before putting your lawn mower into storage will help increase the longevity of your equipment.

2. Perform an Energy Audit

Performing an energy audit is really important because it will tell you where heat is escaping, so you can correct the problem and save money on utilities. If you are doing an energy audit yourself, first make a list of all air leaks in your home by seeing where there are drafts. You can learn how to detect air leaks by following these simple steps (<http://energy.gov/energysaver/articles/detecting-air-leaks>). Seal the air leaks that you have identified by applying caulk or weatherstripping. Potential energy savings by detecting and fixing drafts can range from 5% to 30% and will make your home much more comfortable.

3. Replace Your Storm Windows

Before it gets too cold, replace your screen windows and doors with energy-efficient storm windows. Consider a proper storage space for your screen windows so they do not get damaged over the winter months. You'll want to give them a good cleaning, along with your storm windows, so that they are ready for the upcoming colder months!

4. Check your Furnace

Home heating systems that aren't properly maintained may be less than 50 percent efficient. A dirty filter will increase your heating costs and reduce the life of your equipment. For these reasons, it is important to check your filter once a month and replace or clean if necessary. Have a professional take a look and perform any adjustments to your furnace during this time if needed.

5. Install Gutter Guards

Homeowners often overlook the importance of gutters, but they protect your home by diverting rain water safely away from your home. Gutter cleaning is a temporary solution to a permanent problem, but it is important to keep your gutters clear and clean in order to prevent home issues like foundation and structural issues.

If neglected long enough, these types of concerns can be serious and costly. One way to combat clogged gutters and eliminate gutter cleaning is to have gutter guards professionally installed to your home. Installing a micromesh gutter protection system, will help save you the time and hassle of cleaning your gutters when the leaves begin to fall.

6. Maintain your Home's Exterior

Trim back trees and branches that are hanging too close to your home. Fall and winter are known for unexpected weather conditions, so it is important to prevent any type of debris from falling on your home and producing serious damage.

Seal driveways (<http://www.angieslist.com/articles/diy-how-seal-driveway-asphalt.htm>), brick patios, and wood decks. For long term care of your home exterior, it is important to apply a layer of sealant to prevent weed growth, repel stains, and increase the longevity of these areas.

7. Chimney and Fireplace

You'll want to call in a professional to inspect and clean your chimney. Annual cleaning of your chimney is important to prevent dangerous chimney fires. Test your fireplace flue to ensure that it is tightly sealed when closed.

8. Test Smoke/Carbon Dioxide Detectors

This is a simple task for homeowners, but it is often forgotten about. Detectors should have a "test" button. If the alarm sounds -- you're good to go! If not, try replacing the batteries and test again. If the alarm still doesn't fire, you may need a new detector. Testing these systems is a quick, but very important quarterly test to perform.

Taking these steps will not only lower your utility costs, but they will protect your largest investment, your home, from the unexpected weather conditions ahead.

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