

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

As a carpenter I am often called to people's homes to repair, replace or troubleshoot house problems. Most if not all issues that I deal with are a result of not taking the time to perform periodic maintenance.

The fall season, is a good time to give your house a good inspection and get it ready for winter. Before the weather grows colder it's important to prepare and prevent costly damage later on.

Below is a Fall preventative home maintenance checklist that every homeowner can adapt and use:

Checklist: Fall Home Maintenance.

Gutters and Downspouts:

1. Clean gutters and downspouts frequently throughout fall to prevent build up of leaves and other debris.
2. Neglected gutters can lead to wood rot problems, pest infestations, wet basements, foundation damage and many other expensive complications.
3. Ensure that water is not getting behind gutters and also check the gutter support brackets.
4. Check to ensure water drains properly and does not pool, which can cause damage to foundations, driveways, and walkways.

Windows and Doors:

1. Change summer screens to cool weather storm windows and doors.
2. Inspect and repair any loose or damaged window or door frames.
3. Install weather stripping or caulking around windows and doors to prevent drafts and lower heating bills.
4. Clean and lubricate garage door hinges, rollers, and tracks and be sure screws are tight.
5. Install storm panels and store screens.

Heating Systems:

1. Replace the filter in your furnace. Consider having a heating professional check your heating system to ensure optimal performance and discover minor problems before they turn into costly major repairs.
2. Clean your ducts / fins to better your heating system's efficiency as well as to reduce household dust and to provide relief to those with respiratory problems.
3. Check for air leakage especially around joints.
4. Lubricate hot water heaters pump and motor.
5. Bleed air from radiators or convectors.
6. Change batteries and set your programmable thermostat

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

Plumbing:

1. To prevent pipes freezing and bursting; ensure that the pipes, as well as the wall cavities where they reside, are well insulated.
2. Be sure that you know how to locate and turn off the water shut-off valve in case pipes do freeze. Label this shut off for family members.
3. Have a plumber install a “ball valve” for this shutoff. Ball valves are superior to knob and washer valves.
4. Shut off water to exterior faucets.

Chimney and Fireplace:

1. Have a professional inspect and clean your chimney.
2. Fireplaces that are regularly used during the season should have an annual cleaning to prevent dangerous chimney fires.
3. Test your fireplace flue for a tight seal when closed. Consider installing a carbon monoxide alarm near the fireplace and furnace.
4. Change smoke detector batteries.

Attic Ventilation:

1. Be sure attic insulation does not cover ventilation vents in the eaves to prevent winter ice dams on the roof.
2. Be sure ridge vents and vents at eaves are free of plants and debris.
3. Check bird and rodent screens for attic vents to prevent any unwanted guests.
4. Add insulation and seal air leaks. [Click here](#) to see my many posts on insulation and air leaks.

Landscape and Yard Work:

1. Although grass appears to stop growing in the fall; the roots are actually growing deeper to prepare for winter. Now is the best time to fertilize and reseed your lawn.
2. Prune your trees and shrubs after the leaves turn to encourage healthy growth in the spring.
3. Trim any tree limbs that are dangerously close to power lines or the roof of your house. Heavy snow and ice can cause damage in the winter.
4. Remove and store garden hoses.
5. Drain exterior fountains, remove pump and store indoors and cover fountain.
6. Lawn Sprinkler System: Shut off water, and have system blown out for winter.

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

Here is a maintenance checklist to help you:

- turn off outside water bibs and remove hoses (fall), open hose valves (spring)
- rake debris away from side of house and other structures – prevents rot
- clean out gutters and downspout elbows
- check gutters, downspouts, and roof penetrations for leaks
- treat wood gutters (spring or fall)
- check and repair caulk (if needed) around exterior surfaces (fall)
- note any cracks in foundation, brick or stucco
- hose off house exterior (spring)
- scrub mildewed areas of house exterior and treat for mildew and fungus on decks (spring)
- clean gaps between deck boards above joists
- Clean around air conditioner compressor and condenser coils. (often overlooked)
- trim any trees or shrubs that touch house
- Inspect and replace weather-stripping, insulation. (if needed)
- inspect and repair (if needed) screens
- inspect and clean (if needed) storm window weep holes
- clean out under decks and porches
- inspect and repair (if needed) glazing compound
- clean out basement window wells
- examine septic system drain field for flooding, odor; have tank pumped yearly

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

Fall and Spring cleaning are necessary to maintain a house and keep it in good condition. No matter where you live, seasonal changes in temperature and moisture levels require special maintenance tasks.

These are some monthly jobs that should be done to keep appliances and mechanical equipment working properly. Doing so will likely extend the life and performance of each item.

1. inspect and clean faucet aerators and shower heads
2. clean frost-free refrigerator drain pan and coils
3. inspect dishwasher for leaks
4. clean kitchen exhaust fan filters
5. grind ice cubes in disposer
6. check and replace (if needed) heating system air filter
7. drain 1-2 gallons of water [sediment] from water heater
8. maintain drains with baking soda or hot water, not with chemical drain openers
9. pour water down unused drains
10. inspect visible foundation areas, pipes, vents and ducts

At least once a year, these items need to be checked. It's important to properly check the fireplace and combustion appliances by fall, because the house is "sealed up" in the winter and not much fresh air enters in.

1. clean and seal tile grout
2. inspect plumbing shutoff valves
3. inspect toilets for stability and tighten bolts or replace seal and bolts
4. "exercise" circuit breakers
5. vacuum smoke alarms
6. vacuum heating registers, vents, ducts, radiators
7. inspect fireplace flues for "glassy" creosote buildup and have flues cleaned regularly
8. inspect fireplace firebrick and mortar for cracks and deterioration, patch small cracks, but large ones require professional repair

Most heating system maintenance should be done twice a year, once before the heating season and once before the cooling season.

1. general furnace inspection: look for rust, scaling on heat exchanger, proper flame color, note odd sounds or smells and check condition of venting
2. test for proper drafting at furnace and/or water heater diverter, examine flue for leaks, rust, damage
3. examine pressure-temperature relief valve for leaking
4. Arrange for appropriate regular servicing and cleaning of combustion appliances.

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

5. Change filters
6. drain hot water system expansion tank
7. check hot water system water level (pressure)
8. bleed hot water system radiator

Preventative maintenance takes time and costs money, but it is still more cost effective than the crisis de jour approach of waiting until something breaks and then scrambling to have it repaired. Regular preventative maintenance can help to avoid repairs, extend the life expectancy of many components and in some cases, reduce energy consumption.

Checklist: Spring Home Maintenance

Roof:

Check roof shingles for loose shingles or damage from branches, and around vents, skylights and chimneys for leaks. Repair as necessary. Flashing at dormers, plumbing stacks, valleys, should be carefully inspected. Flat roofs should be inspected for blisters, bubbles, and flashing details. Trees should be trimmed back from roof edges. Eaves: Soffits and fascia should be inspected for loose and rotted areas as well as areas damaged by squirrels.

Attic:

If there are no soffit / ridge vents, keep gable vents open year-round to ensure proper ventilation.

Gutters:

Clean gutters and drain pipes so leaves won't clog them and be sure they drain away from the house.

Grading:

The landscape grading adjacent to the house should be checked to ensure a "positive" slope of one inch per foot for the first six feet away from the house. Drain basins should be cleaned of debris and tested

Fireplace:

Clean fireplace of ashes. Check for loose or missing chimney mortar. Have chimney professionally cleaned. Make sure damper closes tightly. Check chimney for worn flue liner or joints and for birds' nests or other obstructions. Install a chimney cap.

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

HVAC Filters:

Remember to replace filters once a month, or as needed. Check and clean dryer vent, air conditioner, and stove hood and bathroom fans. Especially after a renovation or dusty remodeling work.

Safety Equipment:

Ensure that all smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order. Replace batteries in appropriate devices as needed, or at least twice each year.

Refrigerator:

Make sure your refrigerator door seals are airtight. Test them by closing the door over a dollar bill. If you can pull the bill out easily, the latch may need to be adjusted or the seal may need to be replaced. In addition, if you have a coil-back refrigerator, vacuum the coils at least twice each year. Your refrigerator will run more efficiently with clean coils.

Bath & Faucets:

Check for leaky faucets in kitchen and bathroom(s). Replace washers as necessary.

Check caulking around sinks, bathtubs, and showers. Replace carbon cartridge for water filter

Windows and Doors:

Repair locks so windows seal tightly. Replace weather seals as needed.

Siding and Paint:

Look for cracks and holes in house siding or paint. Replace caulk if necessary.

Porches and Decks:

Wooden components should be checked for rot and insect infestation. Wood should be painted or stained as required.

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

Garage:

Automatic garage door openers should be tested and adjusted to reverse in the event of an emergency.

Attics:

Attics should be inspected annually for water stains on the underside of the roof sheathing. One should also look for rot, mildew, and fungus indicating high humidity levels in the attic. Check to make sure the insulation is not wet. Check for vermin, bird and bee nests. Check for missing insulation – bare spots. Make sure vents are open and not obstructed. Insulate hatch door.

Basement:

Check for moisture issues. Be sure to clean dehumidifier regularly, if you have one.

Locate and mark the shut-offs for the heating, electrical and plumbing systems.

Electrical Panel:

The main electrical panel should be checked annually for rust or water marks indicating moisture getting in. All breakers should be turned off and on to ensure none have seized. A panel which is warm to the touch or smells of burned insulation should be brought to the attention of an electrician. Burned wires indicating loose or poor connections should be repaired by qualified personnel. All circuits should be labeled. Ground fault circuit interrupters should be tested monthly.

Heating System:

Have cooling / heating system serviced yearly. Change filters. Clean stovepipe between the stove and the chimney. Check vent pipe for corrosion and holes, and replace if necessary.

Wood Stoves:

Clean a wood-burning heater: Scrape interior (especially nooks and crannies) with wire brush. Check for cracks, and repair with stove cement if necessary. Clean exterior completely.

If heater has a blower, vacuum the blower or replace any filters, and oil the motor.

Hot Water Heater:

Drain hot water heater and remove sediment from the bottom of the tank.

Fall and Spring Home Checklist

Trees, Shrubs and Vines:

Limbs overhanging the house should be cut back. Dead limbs should be removed. Vines should be trimmed back from all wood surfaces.

Lawn Sprinkler System:

Charge pipes with water, check for leaks, damaged sprinkler heads.

Lawn Mower:

(Spring) change oil, fresh gas, sharpen blade, new spark plug. (Fall) empty gas for storage.

Snow Blower:

(Spring) Make any repairs, empty gas for storage. (Fall) Lubricate, change oil, new spark plug, fresh gas, fill tires, extra sheer pins, and test.

If you would like your home inspected give me a call 617-799-1971