

The saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” may be a cliché, but it’s useful advice. Preventive maintenance is the best way to keep your home in good repair. Often, such maintenance routinely carried out will ward off major repairs. You’re in the best position to keep a watchful eye on potential problems.

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Maintenance Guide

Basic Home Information

Note down this important information about your home. If there's something you don't know, find out. All adults in the home should know this basic information:

- ✓ Heating fuel main shut-off location
- ✓ Main electrical shut-off location (fuse box)
- ✓ Main water shut-off location
- ✓ Location of fire extinguisher
- ✓ Main drain line cleanout location

Some people recommend “exercising”: all fuel, electric and water shut-off valves and switches (turning them “off” and then “on”) to ensure that they are not stuck open. Some fuel valves are difficult to turn—it might be advisable to keep a wrench nearby for emergencies.

Interior Concerns

If you have a water softener, service it regularly according to the manufacturer's directions.

If you have a built-in humidifier, clean it regularly, and inspect it for rust.

If you get your water from a well, maintain the pump according to the manufacturer's recommendation (this usually entails minor lubrication). Be alert for any irregularities in the pump operation, especially short cycling on and off. Test the well water if you haven't done so before, and test it annually if you have both a pump and a septic system.

Attic spaces should be checked periodically for moisture, leaks, insects, rodents, adequate ventilation and the condition of pipes, wires and ducts.

Monthly Safety Tests

- Automatic garage door openers
- GFI receptacles and GFI circuit breakers
- Smoke alarms/keep 9 volt batteries on hand
- General inspection of heating unit and water heater

Monthly Interior Chores

- Clean out debris and/or hair from sink and tub stoppers
- Inspect and clean faucet aerators and shower heads
- Clean frost-free refrigerator drain pan
- Inspect dishwasher for leaks
- Clean kitchen range exhaust fan filters
- Grind ice cubes in disposer
- Check and replace (if needed) heating system air filter
- Drain 1-2 gallons of water from water heater
- Maintain drains with baking soda or hot water, not with chemical drain openers
- Pour water down unused drains
- Inspect foundation, pipes, vents and ducts visible from inside
- Test batteries in smoke detectors
- Clean dishwasher strainer, and spray arms

Annual Interior Chores

- Clean and seal tile grout
- Inspect plumbing shut-off valves
- Inspect toilets for stability (do not over tighten flange bolts)
- "Exercise" circuit breakers
- Vacuum smoke alarms and test
- Vacuum refrigerator coils
- Vacuum heating register, vents, radiators
- Inspect fireplace flue for glossy build-up of creosote and have it cleaned regularly
- Inspect fireplace firebrick and mortar for cracks and deterioration (patching small cracks can be a D-I-Y project)
- Inspect and replace if necessary, caulk around tubs, shower and sinks
- Clean water inlet filters for clothes washer, check hose for leaks and replace if necessary
- Vacuum lint duct and surrounding area of dryer
- Flush garbage disposer with hot water and baking soda

Spring and Fall Outside Chores

- Rake debris away from side of house and other structures
- Clean out gutters
- Check gutter, downspouts, roof soffit and flashing penetrations for leaks
- Check and repair (if needed) caulk around exterior surfaces (fall)
- Note any cracks in foundation, brick or stucco
- Scrub mildewed area of house exterior (spring)
- Clean gaps between deck boards above joists
- Clean around air conditioner compressor/level
- Trim any trees or shrubs which touch house
- Inspect and replace (if needed), weather-stripping
- Inspect and lubricate (if needed) windows for emergency egress
- Inspect and clean window screens
- Clean out under decks and porches
- Inspect and repair (if needed) glazing compound
- Clean out basement window wells
- Examine exterior of house for settlement of winter damage
- Clean and lubricate garage door hinges, rollers and tracks; tighten screws

Heating, Cooling and Hot Water

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

- Clean or replace air filter; vacuum registers
- General furnace inspection; look for rust, scaling on heat exchanger, proper color flame; note odd sounds or smells
- Check condition of venting
- Test for proper draft at furnace and/or water heater diverter, examine flue for leaks, rust, damage
- Examine pressure-temperature relief valve for leaking, and test, if desired
- Drain 2 gallons of water off expansion tank
- Arrange for appropriate regular servicing and cleaning

Exterior Concerns

Do a general inspection (from ground level) for missing and/or loose shingles.

Close and drain hose bibs, remove hose in the fall.

Open hose bibs (spring).

If a home has a crawl space, this should be inspected for the same concerns as in a basement. Common crawlspace problems are broken heating ducts, excess moisture, mold, mildew and insects. Also, clean out debris to keep good clearance between the soil and any structural wood.

Inspection of A/C condensing unit should be free of debris and level. Internal noise of mechanical problems should be handled by a professional.

To preserve your new driveway, it is advisable to seal coat it after it has been paved. Sealing too soon, however, may cause damage to your new driveway. The best time to seal is 1—2 years after it has been paved, and every 5—6 years thereafter. Because blacktop is naturally porous, water can seep into and through the paving. Blacktop is also softened and broken up by gasoline, lube oil, grease, road salts, and anti-freeze which drips from cars. Sealer protects blacktop with a coating that is impervious to these harmful elements. Unprotected driveways remain porous, dry out, become rough and lose their life rapidly. Due to reduction of traction, it is not advisable to seal our driveway if it is on a steep hill.

Tools and Materials

Most home maintenance projects will require only a few simple tools. Here is a basic list of those tools and materials which you may find generally useful to have around your home as part of a basic home tool kit.

General Tools and Materials

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yard rake | <input type="checkbox"/> Caulk gun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caulk | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-foot step ladder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work gloves | <input type="checkbox"/> Rubber gloves |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buckets | <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy-duty sponges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tri-sodium phosphate (TSP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bleach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Power washer | <input type="checkbox"/> Tile cleaner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grout sealer | <input type="checkbox"/> Paint brushes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean rags | <input type="checkbox"/> Shop-Grade vacuum cleaner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adjustable wrench | <input type="checkbox"/> Slip-Joint pliers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Utility knife | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular screwdriver |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phillips head screwdriver | <input type="checkbox"/> Drain Auger (plumber snake) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight | <input type="checkbox"/> Hammer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tape | |

Specialty Tools and Materials:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paint and/or Stain for Interior and Exterior House Surface and Structures | <input type="checkbox"/> Extension ladder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Furnace air filters | <input type="checkbox"/> Spot shot stain remover |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oops (All-Purpose Cleaner) | |