

# Winterize Your Home

Autumn is the ideal time to get your home ready for winter. The better prepared your home is, the better it'll handle the coming inclement weather. Here are a few tips to get started.

**Keep your home warm all winter long.** A well-maintained heating system will not only keep you warm, it may also help you save money on your utility bills.

- Test your furnace. Turn the thermostat up and listen as the furnace turns on. If it's running fine, turn the thermostat back down.
- Replace the air filter. Experts recommend changing or cleaning filters once a month during the wintertime to improve the airflow and efficiency of the furnace.
- Have your furnace serviced by a technician, preferably one who will also assess it for wear and tear and will let you know if it needs repaired or replaced. They'll also clean your vents, if necessary.
- If your heating system runs on propane or oil, call your system maintenance professional to check and fill it if needed.
- Reverse your ceiling fans to run clockwise so air circulates downward; this will reduce heating costs by **10%.\***

**Prepare your cooling system.** You may not need it during winter, but taking steps to maintain your cooling system now will keep it in good working order when springtime brings the heat.

- Clean debris from the condensing unit, and use a hose to clear dirt from the fan blades and coils.
- Drain hoses and pipes and, if your unit has one, make sure the water shut-off valve is in the "off" position.
- Turn off exterior water spigots, look for water leaks and repair any that you find.
- Cover the condensing unit to prevent rust and damage. A breathable waterproof cover can help ensure the unit stays in good condition for years to come.
- Remove and store window AC units for the winter.



**Check your insulation.** Keep the heat inside your home by checking for and repairing leaks.

- Check your windows, especially the hinges and slides, for leaks. Caulk the sides of your windows and joints if you find leaks.
- Install storm doors and windows, if you have them.
- Cover your hot water tank with an insulating blanket to help it run more efficiently.

**Prevent pipes from freezing and causing expensive damage to your home.** According to the Insurance Information Institute, water damage from frozen pipes is among the costliest claims, with the average claim totaling more than \$7,000.

- Drain exterior faucets and disconnect garden hoses. Store the hoses in a garage, basement or shed.
- Cover exposed piping in uninsulated parts of your home using pre-slit foam, which can be purchased from a hardware or home improvement store. It can be cut to fit the pipe and duct-taped in place.
- If you have a summer home, or a part of your home that won't be used, shut off its water and drain the plumbing system.



\*Source: Popular Mechanics





**Don't forget to clean the gutters.** The gutters are an important part of your home's exterior that move water away from its perimeter. Although water seems harmless, when it builds around your home's foundation, it can foster the growth of mold and mildew and may cause structural issues. If you live in an area that experiences cold temperatures during the winter, the moist ground around your home can freeze and expand, impacting the structural integrity of your home.

#### What are the effects of blocked gutters?

- If the gutters are overloaded, they can fall from the house.
- Overflowing water may spill out and increase the chances of flooding around your foundation and in your basement, if you have one. If the water freezes, it may cause cracks in the foundation.
- If the water freezes in the gutter and creates an ice dam, it can push against the roof and walls of your home and increase the chances of rot.
- Water can stain the exterior siding of a home.

Check and clean your gutters at least once a year—more often if your home is surrounded by trees—and replace them if they're old, damaged or missing pieces. It is typically a do-it-yourself project that may take an afternoon; however, depending on the size of your home, you may want to hire a professional to do it for you.

#### Prepare your home's exterior for the winter months.

Keep the exterior of your home in great shape throughout the season.

- Inspect the roof yourself or hire a pro. When you're up there, look for missing shingles or other damage and have it repaired. Also, inspect the flashing around your chimney and repair leaks.
- Inspect your foundation and seal places where small animals could crawl under the home. Also, clear away debris.
- Turn off the water supply to your sprinkler system and remove water by blowing compressed air through the lines. If you have water fixtures, drain them and unplug pumps.
- Take care of your deck. Cover patio furniture and seal the deck, if necessary.
- Drain the gas from your mower or put fuel stabilizer in the tank.

#### Keep your fireplace in safe, working

**order.** If you have a wood-burning fireplace, proper maintenance will help it work more efficiently and prevent it from becoming a fire hazard.

- Have it serviced and inspected by a professional. The frequency and type of service depends on how often you use it and the type of wood you burn.
- Ensure the chimney is clear of any nests or other animals and the draft is clear of debris.
- Make sure the flue damper works and can be opened and closed.
- Ensure the fire brick is in good shape and repair open mortar joints immediately.

