Fall/Winter Maintenance Checklist & Tips

-Below are a few tips that I've gathered over the years that can make a difference and save you money in the long run!

No matter where you live, winter can signal a dip in temperatures and the possibility of unpredictable weather, including inches of snow and dangerous ice. Winterizing — from climates that expect snow and below-freezing temps for months to regions that experience a cooling off and unpredictable precipitation — can help make sure your home is ready for the season.

Tips to prepare the inside of your home for winter

The comforts of a cozy, warm home in winter can help you forget about the short days and the multiple layers of clothing. These tips can help you weather the winter season.

- Have your furnace inspected. Since your heating will probably be running constantly throughout the winter, you should have it inspected annually to help it run efficiently and prevent CO from entering your home. Also remember to change out your HVAC filters every month.

- Inspect the insulation in your attic and crawlspaces. Warm air rises and leaves the house through the roof, so you should focus on insulation in your ceilings. Insulating the crawlspaces will help keep your floors warm.

- Seal potential leaks. Before cold weather comes, take time to insulate your home or apartment to keep the winter chill outside. Seal areas around recessed lights, the attic hatch and plumbing vents that may be allowing warm air from the living space below to enter the attic.

- Allow for ventilation. Proper attic ventilation, adequate attic insulation and a tight air barrier between the attic and the interior of the house will work together to prevent ice dams.

- Use window sheet kits. If you don't have double-paned or storm windows pick up a plastic-film sheet kit from your local hardware store. These will only last one season, but they do help with energy efficiency and are able to halt the cold flow of winter drafts. Try these updates to help make windows energy efficient:

    - Install storm windows,
    - Hang curtains,
    - Add caulk to windows,
    - Use weather stripping,
    - Create exterior shade, and
    - Replace your windows.

- Apply weather stripping. Add weather stripping to doors and caulk window gaps. Make sure all windows are locked to keep out as much cold air as possible.

- Use a fireplace. If you plan to use it, schedule an inspection and service by a professional to make sure your chimney is clear of debris and that your damper opens, closes, and seals tightly.

- Insulate pipes. Pipes located in attics, crawl spaces, basements and near outer walls can be susceptible to freezing in extreme temperatures. Insulate to help prevent your pipes from freezing.

When the forecast calls for unusually cold temperatures:

- Let water drip from hot and cold faucets overnight.
- Keep cabinet doors open to allow warm air to circulate in places like below sinks. If you open the cabinet doors, be sure to remove anything inside the cabinets that may pose a safety to hazard to children, such as household cleaners.

- Finally, consult your local utility company about an energy assessment to determine where your home is losing energy and what energy-smart investments would make sense.

Tip: Smart home apps and amenities, such as a smart thermostat, can help you integrate winter management of your home into your everyday routine, helping you to trim energy costs and keep your home cozy too. Winterizing can help you enjoy indoor days, knowing you've done what you can to protect your living space through the season and aid in the overall maintenance and longevity of your home.

Outside winter home maintenance tips:

Even with the cold weather conditions, your yard still needs to be maintained as well as ensuring your home is winterized.

- Tool checkup. Make sure your snow shovels are free from cracks. Schedule the annual tune-up for your snow blower if you have one.
- Winterize outdoor faucets. Remove all hoses or devices attached to outdoor spigots. Be sure to drain any water left behind in the pipes. Have in-ground sprinkler systems blown out and turn off water to the outdoor spigots.
- Outdoor furniture. Wash upholstery and frames. In northern climates, store both furniture and cushions in a covered spot free from moisture.
- Install storm windows and doors. Storm windows and doors add a layer of protection to your home and help increase their energy efficiency.
- Clear any landscape debris and waste. Remove any debris or branches from around the HVAC unit, gas meters, away from basement windows and your dryer exhaust vent. Cut back dead or dying limbs and any branches that can touch the roof or siding. When it's windy, branches can rub or scratch the surfaces of your home and cause damage. They also could fall during a storm or break under heavy snow and ice.
- Firewood. Store your firewood in a dry place at least 30 feet from your home to avoid a fire hazard.
- Visually inspect your roof. Look for any missing or damaged shingles; consult a roof professional if needed. Ensure that all gutters are clean and securely attached to help prevent ice dams.
- Swimming pools and hot tubs. In northern climates, close up and secure both swimming pool and hot tub.
- Outdoor lights. Ensure that lights at doors (front, back and garage) are functioning. Replace any burned-out bulbs with more efficient LED options.

- Prevent pests. Walk around your house to check the foundation for small cracks or openings where mice or other pests can tunnel in. Winter is when they seek the warmth of your house, so seal up any possible entrances.
- Sidewalk and driveway. Shovel the snow from the sidewalk and driveway and then follow-up with a de-icing product to prevent slips and falls.
- Repair driveway & walkways - Damaged walkways, drives, and steps are a hazard year-round, but their dangers are compounded when the weather turns icy. Fixing issues in the fall is also critical to preventing little cracks from becoming expensive headaches. Look for cracks more than 1/8-inch wide, uneven sections, and loose railings on steps. Check for disintegration of asphalt or washed-out materials on loose-fill paths. Most small jobs are well within the ability of a DIY'er but save major repairs for experienced hands.

Winter storm preparation tips:

Blackouts and snow-ins can occur during winter months, so take a moment to prepare yourself and your family for such winter emergencies. Having the following items ready will help you make it through safely:

- Battery-powered flashlights or lanterns and extra batteries.
- Drinking and/or bottled water.
- Nonperishable food items. Keep the pantry stocked: It's smart to keep your house stocked with groceries all winter long. Should the power go out, you'll want to have plenty of extra water and nonperishable food that you can prepare without cooking.
- Extra blankets, sleeping bags and warm winter coats.
- Phone numbers for your utility companies.
- Cell phone and portable charger.
- Prescription drugs and other medicine.
- A battery-powered radio, with extra batteries, for listening to local emergency instructions.
- Battery backup to protect your computer and other important electronic equipment.
- A first-aid kit.
- And you can also consider buying a generator. A permanent or portable generator can provide temporary when and where you need it.

Inspect winter decorations after a winter storm:

'Tis the season to be festive but remember to stay safe with your holiday decorations. Inspect the wires of your light display before switching them on — they may be frayed and present an electrical fire hazard. Same goes for the Christmas tree inside — always check the light strands for any sign of wear and tear from being in storage. If you have a real Christmas tree, keep it watered, since dry trees catch fire easier. Check with your local municipality for instructions on how to dispose of the tree once the new year arrives.

Exterior

Examination of the roof. If you can manage it and it's not too risky, take a visual inspection of your roof with a ladder and check for any loose shingles or tiles. Be extra cautious around vents and seams where the materials can expand and contract with the weather. If there are any cracked or broken tiles, shingles, or composition slats, you may be able to fix them yourself otherwise: a professional roofer to patch up before the weather turns really bad.

Inspect the chimney. If your home is a chimney you want to inspect that there are no loose bricks, holes in venting or piping and that the vent is clean and clear. It's also a good time to consider hiring a chimney sweep to prevent any chimney fires when you use the fireplace over the winter.

Check the gutters. Gutters should be free of debris and leaves. Clogged gutters can lead to foundation issues, leaks in a basement, or water leakage in flashings and fascia causing the water to freeze and damage the home and the construction of the property.

Winterize any outdoor kitchen items. Now is the time to winterize any outdoor appliances. Some of these may be able to be used during the colder months but items like propane tanks, water hoses, and anything that could be damaged because of freezing weather should be turned off, drained, cleaned, and insulated.

Winterize pools and water features: Because we do get freezing temperatures, you want to winterize your pool and any water features, which means draining them, adding necessary chemicals, clearing out pipelines, and conducting

irrigation blowouts. You want to install thick covers over swimming pools and if you're unsure about how to take care of your particular water feature, ask local pool and water feature landscaping professionals about the best way to preserve and protect your home and property.

Turn off water and cover faucets. Turn off any water that goes to outside hose spigots if you can and cover with a hose cover any outdoor faucets to prevent freezing. Make sure you have drained all hoses of their water, so the water does not freeze and crack the hose.

Clear walkways and driveways. Make sure you don't have any slick leaves left on the sidewalk, porch, or deck and keep these areas clear of snow and debris throughout the winter.

Interior

Check for seals around windows and doors. A good way to check the seals around doors and windows is to hold a match or an incense stick near the closed door or window and if the smoke waivers or blows away, you got a gap that can allow warm air out and cold air in. Consider either replacing windows that have lost their seal or use weather stripping or caulking to seal up the area from the outside.

Insulate electrical outlets. Any outlets that are located on exterior walls may need to be insulated with foam sealers to reduce airflow around the switch and outlet.

Other helpful Reminder

Ward off gas problems. - Keeping a gas heater in good shape is both a safety and a cost issue. An improperly maintained heater can spew toxic gases into the air of your home, or it could simply be costing you more to operate. Have a professional check these devices annually. There are also some maintenance items you should address. First, shut off the heater. Then check the air-shutter openings and exhaust vents for dirt and dust. If they are dirty, vacuum the air passages to the burner and clean the burner of lint and dirt. Follow the manufacturer's advice for any other needed maintenance.

Check smoke detectors: When you change the clocks to standard time, change the batteries in your smoke detector. “Fall is a great time to install new batteries as you are preparing your home for cooler months.

Remember, if your alarm chirps—a sign the battery is low—replace it, no matter the time of year.

Set Your Thermostat - If you have an older thermostat, upgrade to a 7-day programmable thermostat or a smart thermostat. Most older thermostats do not have a programmable schedule, making it more difficult to dial back the temperature and save on heating costs.

A programmable thermostat allows you to preprogram your thermostat based on your schedule. You can program your thermostat to drop the heat when you leave for work and kick it up before you get home. Or program it to drop a few degrees at bedtime for better sleep. These small cutbacks can save you plenty over time. A smart thermostat is a programmable one with advanced features, including the ability to control it from your phone, and get alerts if the temperature is too low or high.

Fertilize your lawn in the Fall - Prep your lawn for winter: To ensure your lawn's health and beauty come spring, there are several important yard work projects to complete in the fall. Raking leaves and aerating will prevent your lawn and garden beds from suffocating. Fertilizing and winterizing grass, trees, and shrubs will allow your greenery to enter its winter slumber comfortably and properly nourished. Professional lawn care services will make quick work of these projects, freeing up your time for family, friends, and football.

Fire extinguishers: Every home should have at least one fire extinguisher rated for all fire types (look for an A-B-C rating on the label). At a minimum, keep one near the kitchen; having one per floor isn't a bad idea. Annually, check the indicator on the pressure gauge to make sure the extinguisher is charged. Make certain that the lock pin is intact and firmly in place, and check that the discharge nozzle is not clogged. Clean the extinguisher and check it for dents, scratches, and corrosion. Replace if the damage seems severe. Note: Fire extinguishers that are more than six years old should be replaced. Mark the date of purchase on the new unit with a permanent marker.

Fire escape plans: Every bedroom, including basement bedrooms, should have two exit paths. Make sure windows aren't blocked by furniture or other items. Ideally, each upper-floor bedroom should have a rope ladder near the window for emergency exits. Review what to do in case of fire and arrange a safe meeting place for everyone away from the house.

General cleanup: Rid your home of accumulations of old newspapers and leftover hazardous household chemicals. (Check with your state or local Environmental Protection Agency about the proper way to discard dangerous chemicals.) Store flammable materials and poisons in approved, clearly labeled containers. Keep a clear space around heaters, furnaces, and other heat-producing appliances.

Touch up exterior paint. Fall offers plenty of days that are warm enough to work with exterior paint, and a touch-up can help prolong the life of your siding and trim. A fresh coat of paint or sealer on any surface that potentially will be covered with snow, such as porch stairs or wood floors, also is a wise idea. Sooner is better to contact a local painter or attempt the project yourself, as many paints aren't recommended for application on days when the temperature will dip colder than 45 to 50 degrees.

Clean your carpets. Fall is an ideal time to clean your carpets. The humid days of summer have passed, but the below-freezing days of winter have yet to arrive. It's the best time to open windows for ventilation, which should speed the drying process. If you're not comfortable operating a carpet cleaning machine, let a professional wrangle the bulky cleaning equipment. With a house full of wet carpet, you'll be best suited to get outdoors and enjoy the lingering warm days.