

HELPING TO PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT

A home will likely be the largest purchase most of us will make in our lifetime. It makes financial sense to keep up with regular maintenance to ensure that any issues are found and corrected, hopefully before they cause serious damages.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

(Author unknown)



FALL HOME MAINTENANCE GUIDE

With the leaves changing color, the kids back in school and frosty mornings upon us, we can bet that Old Man Winter will be here in no time. The harsh Alberta winters can really do a number on our home, especially if we aren't properly prepared. Taking on home maintenance can be a daunting task for many home owners. To make things easier, HouseMaster has compiled an easy to use checklist to help you get it done right!

There are many advantages to taking a proactive role in maintaining your home. By keeping on top of maintenance you reduce repair and operating costs, as well as the potential for safety issues or health hazards your family faces within the home. The best part is you are protecting the value of your home.

Completing preventive maintenance helps avoid expensive emergency repairs. Keep in mind, contractor fees rise in proportion to the urgency and the hour of the service call. Properly maintaining your systems will also assist in extend the useful service life of existing systems, buying you some additional time before replacement. Taking care of the regular maintenance can eliminate costly consequential damage. When major home components, like a roof, fail, the damage to home interiors and furnishings can be substantial.

Most items on the list below can be completed by a reasonably handy person, however, if you feel that it's too difficult or dangerous, it would be wise to contact a professional to help you get it all done. Of course, there will be some additional costs but keeping up home maintenance is usually preferable to having to complete costly repairs due to poor maintenance. Remember, these tips are only general guidelines. Since each situation is different, contact a professional if you have questions about a specific issue.

	Winterize Exterior Faucets: Remove all hoses from exterior faucets and be sure to close the valve on the interior of the home, if one is present. Keep the exterior valve open to drain all the water in the pipe to prevent water freezing in the pipes and bursting. Frost Free faucets have different requirements as well as private irrigation systems. In these cases, refer to the owner's manual.
	Check Exterior Lighting: Make sure that the areas around the home have ample lighting for the darker months the year. Change bulbs as needed.
	Check Driveway & Walkways for Winter Safety: Fall is the perfect time to seal up any cracks and shave down the edges of larger cracks to lessen trip hazards that could be easily covered by snow fall. It also makes for easy shoveling.
	Check Stairs and Handrails: Handrails get a lot more use in the winter, test each to make sure they are sturdy and well secured. Check and repair any issues with stairs to help prevent nasty falls.
	Seal Gaps on the Exterior: By sealing up exterior penetrations, you can be sure that the critters and the cold will stay outdoors. Don't forget to check the dryer and HVAC exhausts and intakes for any debris.
	Check Roofing: This one sounds tricky but don't be fooled. Using a pair of binoculars and a decent digital (or phone) camera you can "zoom" in on areas of the roof that may not be easily or safely accessible. We recommend using a professional for any repairs.
	Clean Eaves & Direct Downspouts: Keeping your eavestroughs and downspouts clean will provide ample flow to re-direct the water from the roof away from the home's foundation. Be sure to keep the downspouts down in the winter and spring.
	Check Ground Slope at Foundation: To ensure water run-off and reduce ponding, a positive grade around the home must be upkept to move water from melting snow away from the foundation. By maintaining ground cover, such as mulch or decorative rocks, you can reduce the potential for water in the basement.
	Rake Up the Leaves: Although some lawn specialists will tell you to let the leaves be, we recommend disposal instead. Not only for appearance but if the leaves are left there, they will block the much needed sunlight in the spring and may cause brown spots.
	Trim the Trees: By trimming the trees in the fall you can prevent weak branches from piling with snow and falling. Also, the trees will have less leaves and are easier to trim. Its important to note that some trees can only be trimmed in the spring or fall.
	Winterize the Lawnmower: Wipe down the outside of the mower and <u>very carefully</u> try to remove as much gunk as possible from underneath the unit, keeping away from the cutting blade. Then check your spark plug. Generally, it's not advised to store a mower with raw, unstabilized gas as it can cause damage to the components. But this opinion differs from manufacturer to manufacturer. You're best off to check the owner's manual.
	Fire-Up the Snow Blower: Be sure you have fresh gas in the tank (less than 30 days old). Then check your spark plug. If you didn't change the oil last season you probably should this year. Also, check the rotor blades for wear and tear. Take a quick read through the owner's manual for the start up procedures and safety provisions, just to refresh your memory, then fire it up. If everything sounds good and is operating correctly, you are all set, if not consider having a professional do an annual maintenance.
	Check Attic Insulation and Ventilation: <i>(Its best not to walk around in your attic. The items listed can be checked with a flashlight, from a ladder placed at the attic hatch.)</i> First off, take a look at the area of the attic hatch, where the lid meets the frame. To prevent warm, moist air from entering the attic there should be a gasket around the frame. Weathrestipping is an easy fix for this problem. Next, check the insulation to ensure that it is evenly distributed and not blocking the soffit ventilation (where equipped). Also, be sure to check the ventilation covers for any blockages such as insect or bird debris. If you see any wet areas or fresh water stains, it can be indicitive of ventilation or other issues. Best to seek advice from a professional in these cases.
	Check Home for Fire & CO Safety: Fire officials recommend smoke detectors be installed inside of each bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on each level of the home (including the basement) and not near the kitchen. Replace batteries and test all of the fire and carbon minoxide detectors in the home and add new ones as needed to ensure complete coverage. Fall is also a great time to review (or create) a fire escape plan for your family. Knowing what to do in an emergency can help save the lives of those you love.

	<p>Check for Drafts on Exterior Doors: It can be hard to tell if your exterior door requires new weather stripping. If the weather stripping in place looks torn or damaged, better off to just replace it. Or, you can try sliding a dollar bill between the door and door-jamb on the locked side. If the dollar bill can fit through, chances are good that a cold draft can also get in.</p>
	<p>Have a Chimney Sweep Clean and Inspect Wood-Burning Appliances: Most families use their wood-burning appliances much more frequently in the colder months. Before gathering around the hearth with hot chocolate, make sure you have the unit checked and cleaned by a professional. Creosote build-up in the chimney greatly increases the chance of a chimney fire.</p>
	<p>Have Furnace Serviced: Ensuring your furnace is ready for winter should be a top priority for every home owner. Its best to have your furnace maintained by a professional at least once a year, not only to ensure its functional, but many manufacturer's warranties will become void if the unit isn't properly maintained. Don't forget that furnace filters should be changed every 3-6 months. Its also wise to have your furnace and ducts cleaned every 3-5 years or if there is debris in the ducting from home improvements, pets or pests.</p>
	<p>Winterize the Air Conditioner: Ensure that the power to the unit is shut down at the unit or at the breaker panel. Remove any landscaping growth that is close to the unit, or underneath it. Then using a hose with a moderate spray, spray the unit down to remove any debris or dirt. Then allow the unit to completely dry. Once dry, place a vinyl or plastic cover over the unit and be sure to secure it so it won't blow away. You should also check the piping to ensure its protected from freezing, the best way to do this is to use foam pipe covers.</p>