

Fall Maintenance Checklist

When the last of summer's heat is a faint memory, and you're pulling out your hoodies more than your shorts, it's time to tackle a few simple chores that'll make winter more pleasant and prevent some nasty surprises next spring.

Stow Your Lawn Mower - Empty the gas tank. Unused gas left in a mower can get stale, gumming up the carburetor and inviting rust.

Banish Water Everywhere - Remove and drain outdoor garden hoses and store them in a shed or garage. Leaving hoses attached can cause water to back up in the faucets and pipes just inside your exterior walls. Make this an early fall priority so a sudden cold snap doesn't sneak up and cause damage. Turn off any shutoff valves on water supply lines that lead to exterior faucets.

De-Gunk Your Gutters - Clogged rain gutters can cause ice dams, which can lead to expensive repairs. After the leaves have fallen, clean your gutters to remove leaves, twigs, and gunk. Tighten gutter hangers and downspout brackets and replace anything worn or damaged.

Eyeball Your Roof - If you have a steep roof or a multi-story house, use binoculars to inspect from the ground. Look for warning signs: Shingles that are buckled, cracked, or missing; rust spots on flashing. Any loose, damaged, or missing shingles should be replaced. Black algae stains are just cosmetic, but masses of moss

and lichen could signal decay.

Direct Your Drainage - Take a close look at the soil around your foundation to make sure it slopes away from your house at least 6 vertical inches over 10 feet. This will keep water away from your foundation, otherwise leading to cracks and leaks.



Prune Plants - Late fall is the best time to prune plants and trees - when the growth cycle is over. Your goal is to keep limbs and branches at least 3 feet from your house so moisture won't drip onto roofing and siding, and to prevent damage to your home's exterior.

Check Your Furnace - Schedule an appointment with a heating and cooling professional to get your heating system tuned up for the coming heating season. Change your furnace filters, too. This is a job you should do every two months anyway. If your HVAC

includes a built-in humidifier, make sure to replace its filter too.

Carbon Monoxide is No Joke - For maximum protection, it's important to have a CO detector on every floor, placed 5 feet from the ground. For the best reading place the alarm at least 15 feet away from fuel-burning appliances. Make sure nothing is obstructing the unit. Do not place the unit in dead air spaces or next to a window or door. Test monthly.

Check Your Smoke Detectors - Press and hold the test button on your smoke detector monthly. You should hear a loud high-pitched alarm. If the sound is weak, replace your batteries, and replace the unit if it is more than 10 years old.

Give Your Fireplace a Once-Over - Check the firebox for cracked or missing bricks and mortar, if you spot any damage, obtain a professional fireplace and chimney inspection. Make sure the damper opens and closes properly. Your fireplace flue should be cleaned of creosote build-up every other year.

Seal the Deal - Grab a couple of tubes of colour-matched exterior caulk and make a journey around your home's exterior, sealing up cracks between trim and siding, around window and door frames, and where pipes and wires enter your house. Preventing moisture from getting inside your walls is one of the least expensive - and most important - of your fall maintenance jobs. You'll also seal air leaks that waste energy.

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Cut the Clutter

You've reached your breaking point. You've tripped over the same thing in the living room too many times. Now you've picked it up to finally put it away and you realize – you have nowhere to put it. You have too much clutter. So what do you do? Where to start so you can reduce the clutter in your home and make your walkways safe once more?

Getting started is easier than you think. If you want to take control of clutter, get a few boxes, and begin organizing one room at a time.

Begin by removing everything on top of your cabinets, tables, and in bookcases, and placing everything in a box, says Keith McCleary, academic director of Interior Design at The Art Institute of York-Pennsylvania. If there are other random accessories in the room, remove those as well. Keep just the basic furnishings. Now sit with the room in its simplest form for a short time.

McCleary says "Simplicity and clean lines make a room feel liveable, and that's what it's really all about: comfortable living." Think about the kind of focal point you're trying to create. How should you

orchestrate this space and show off your special pieces in terms of size, scale, colour and texture?

After a day or two has passed, go back to the box and look for items that define your personality or will be noticed by guests visiting your



home. Ask yourself: when is enough, enough?" says McCleary, "Each piece of furniture in the room can function to complement. Accessories should contrast."

When you look at your well-designed room, you should see positive elements, as well as appreciate the possibility for negative space by removing unnecessary pieces that don't add to the design composition. Interior design students are taught to help their clients step back and

ask themselves: Is it finished now? You can err when you go shopping and purchase nice pieces for your home, because before long you may have accumulated too many of those nice things. Take a hard look at some of those things you don't really want or need; it might be time to share that stuff with your local Goodwill.

Sometimes, you might think you have to keep memorabilia or outdated gifts from Aunt Florence in your home all the time. "Not so," says McCleary. "It's perfectly acceptable to remove those items when you do your box exercise." If you get a call from Auntie when she plans her next visit, head to the attic and put those old Beanie Babies she gave you on a shelf in your den – temporarily. She'll be happy

for the gesture. When she leaves, feel free to put them back in the box of memories until her next visit.

After you complete this exercise in each room in your home, you'll notice that the clutter has disappeared. Now you can recognize how attractive the remaining items are in that same space. This initiative takes determination and focus, but when you've completed the exercise, your focus can be on the lovely space you've recreated.

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