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Fall Is Coming

A homeowner's guide to maintenance

BY JESSICA MESZAROS (Reprinted with permission from the author)

After the heat and humidity of summer, it can be tempting to immediately roll out the welcome mat for autumn. However, the season can be a problematic visitor for homeowners. Falling leaves and dropping temperatures could lead to issues like clogged gutters, frozen pipes or insulation problems in winter if left unattended. Many problems can be sidestepped with a few simple fixes that can be done before summer ends. Below is a simple checklist of items that can help every homeowner prepare for the season and not be caught by surprise if autumn decides to make a sudden visit.

Survey the inside and outside of the home.

Make sure to note the condition of the home's foundation and watch for cracks or warping. The damage is caused by the shrinking or expanding of soil beneath a home as temperatures and moisture conditions fluctuate. Extensive damage could even cause a home's indoor flooring to sagging and large gaps could also be an entry point for animals and pests seeking warmth. Calling in a professional to address exterior repairs to the foundation, siding or walls can help reassure the fix is safe and effective enough to last all winter long.

Double-check the windows.

Almost every home has windows, and it's vital to make sure they're well-insulated and in top condition. When in doubt, have a window inspection done. A professional will be able to inspect the condition of the window while also noting the state of hardware and caulking, which can lead to leaks and drafts without regular replacement. A window's hardware, screws and moving parts should be cleaned and lubricated once a year. If damage occurs to the sealing or caulking, windows can result in significant threat loss in some homes, meaning that double- and triple-paned windows can impact electric bills. Thermal seals cannot be repaired without replacing the panes entirely. So, if there's fog, condensation or haze between the glass panes, it's time to call in the professionals. For seriously outdated or damaged windows, complete window replacement might be the fastest and most financially sound option.

Care for trees and shrubs.

In addition to overall pruning, another priority is keeping plants nourished during the winter droughts. Adding composted organic mulch under trees in the fall can help the

soil retain water and regulate its temperature in the presence of extreme cold or icy temperatures. Fertilizing a lawn or yard can also help grass and greenery remain nourished and bounce back faster in spring. For those looking to plant trees or shrubs in time for a spring bloom, September through November is known as an ideal time for tree planting because it allows the roots to become established before the ground freezes.

Rake leaves. It's a task that requires minimal equipment, which means the entire family can get involved. Get the family dressed in boots and gloves and turn the chore into a fun activity. Jumping into the piles at the end is optional.

Drain and clean the pipes.

The fall foliage is picturesque on the trees, but infinitely less pleasant when it's clogging gutters or other pipework a home needs to function. Also, take a moment to turn off any outdoor faucets or sprinklers so that freezing water doesn't cause mid-season pipe bursts. All exterior hoses should be drained and stored.

Check the chimney.

It's hard to resist a roaring fire on a winter night, but a dirty fireplace or chimney can pose a safety hazard to an entire family. A build-up of creosote, a carbonaceous chemical, in the interior over time can potentially cause a house fire. An annual chimney inspection and cleaning can help make sure the fireplace and flue are safe and will contain flames, embers and heat effectively. The earlier in summer or fall a chimney is checked, the better.

Have ice melt and a snow blower ready.

Snow seems a long way off, but once temperatures start to cool, the spike in demand could reduce availability while raising the price.



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