

Getting your home ready for winter

FAMILY FEATURES SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

As the days get shorter and the weather turns chilly, it's time to prepare your home for the winter months ahead. Because your home will likely require extra maintenance to keep it in shape throughout the winter, beginning preparations early can help lower energy bills, increase the efficiency and lifespan of your home's components and make your property safer overall.

Consider these tips from the experts at the National Association of the Remodeling Industry to help ensure your home is ready before winter weather strikes.

Get your furnace checked

To keep your furnace from failing when you need it most, get it inspected by a professional before you need to rely on it to heat your home in the dead of winter. Regular tune-ups can prolong your furnace's life, help prevent carbon monoxide leaks and ensure your unit is working at maximum efficiency.

Seal leaks around windows and doors

If replacing window screens with storm windows and installing a storm door on your house isn't realistic, you can keep your home warmer and increase energy efficiency by applying caulk to seal any gaps you find around window and door moldings and help

keep heat from escaping. If any pipes or ducts travel through an exterior wall of your home, you can also use caulking and weather-stripping to help block potential entry points for cold air.

Check your gutters

Once the leaves have fallen and before the first snow, check to make sure your gutters are properly secured — replacing gutter spikes and downspout rivets where needed — and clear of debris. If your gutters are full of debris, it can lead to water backing up against the house and overflowing, which can cause potential damage to roofing and siding. Also adjust downspouts so they direct water at least 5 feet from the house, which can help prevent melting snow from saturating the ground around the house and causing foundational damage.

Prep the plumbing

Undrained water in pipes can freeze, both indoors and out, which can cause pipes to burst as the ice expands. Start by disconnecting hoses and shutting off exterior faucets, draining any water that remains in them and storing hoses indoors to prevent cracks. Drain any other pipes, valves or in-ground sprinklers that may be exposed to the elements and, for an extra layer of protection, wrap water spigots with covers to prevent damage.

Examine decks and patios

Your patios, sidewalks, driveways and decks need occasional maintenance as well, and giving them a once-over before colder weather hits can help ensure they're prepared to stand up to the elements. Repairing any broken joints or cracks in stonework and applying sealer can prevent melted snow from getting in and freezing, which can create bigger problems. The same principles hold true for decks and wooden handrails. Though typically made from treated or rot-resistant wood, they are subject to splintering, decay or insect damage and may need to be stained and sealed periodically. Of course, if replacement is necessary, it's best to complete the project before inclement weather hits. Find more expert tips to get your home ready for winter at Remodeling- DoneRight.com.

FROM THE PROS

Before blustery winter days arrive, there are plenty of home improvement projects contractors can tackle for homeowners. Many cooler weather projects focus on cost efficiency and sustainability, making the improvements all around smart investments.

Add insulation

Depending on the age of the home, improving the quality or increasing

the volume of insulation can make a difference in the home's energy efficiency. An expert can determine whether old insulation needs to be removed or new insulation should simply be added. A contractor can examine the home to determine where there may be gaps, as well as provide recommendations on the type and amount of insulation needed.

Install a programmable thermostat

A programmable thermostat helps to regulate temperatures based on daily routines, so homeowners aren't heating homes while no one is there to appreciate it. Experts can ensure electrical installation is done safely and provide guidance selecting a model that is appropriate for managing a home's heating and cooling needs.

Replace weather stripping, seal trim

Over time and with frequent use, weather stripping breaks down and loses its shape, even becoming brittle. Cracked trim around doors and windows leads to air leaks, and sometimes homeowners think the only solution is replacing windows and doors, but they still end up with drafts. Contractors can periodically replace trim using foam sealant to help eliminate inevitable drafts and save homeowners money in the long run — a more cost-effective approach than paying for new windows and doors.



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