



Winter Maintenance Tips

1. Program Your Thermostat

As temperatures fall, you'll seek a heat system in your home to keep you cozy and warm. Yet no one wants toasty temperatures indoors if it means your utility costs will rise to unreasonable levels. Consider these energy saving tips below, so you aren't sweating when your winter gas bills come, and as the weather warms, evaluate your winterizing measures to see which ones make sense to maintain through the spring and summer months.

- Set your thermostat as low as is comfortable in the winter. For each degree you raise your thermostat setting, your fuel bill climbs **3%**.
- Consider slipping into a sweater before you crank up the temperature. Don't forget to program the thermostat to a lower temperature during the hours you are away from home. If your thermostat allows you to program different temperature zones, turn the heat down or off in rooms that aren't being used.

2. Maintain Filters and Heating System Equipment

Regularly clean or replace the filters for your furnace and central heating system. Likewise, make sure to clean registers—ensuring that they are clean and not blocked by debris or trapped air.

If you're not sure how to bleed trapped air from a hot-water heat radiator or flush the water heater, call a professional. They also can perform a routine check of your central heating/cooling duct system for leaks.

A simple task like cleaning equipment and making sure it's not leaking or obstructed by furniture, carpet or drapes can improve your system's energy efficiency **by 10%** while extending the life of your equipment. For about \$80 to \$100, a technician will inspect your furnace or heat pump to be sure the system is clean and in good repair, and that it can achieve its manufacturer-rated efficiency. The inspection also measures carbon-monoxide leakage.



3. Add Insulation

Wrapping insulation around pipes and your water heater can help minimize heat loss as water runs from the water heater to your faucets. By adding insulation, you won't have to wait as long for hot water, you will conserve water, and you can **save up to 10%** of your total energy costs.

4. Seal Openings

It's foolish to spend money heating your home if the warm air can escape. Caulk and weather-strip around exterior seams, cracks and openings. Pay extra attention around windows and at points where various exterior materials like wood, brick and vinyl siding meet.

On the inside, caulking and weather-stripping around windows and door frames will cut down on drafts. A draft guard along the bottom of an exterior door also can help prevent heat from escaping. If you're not using your chimney, close the damper. Additionally, air sealing and properly insulating the attics and walls can save up to **10%** of total energy costs.

5. Replace Windows

Consider replacing old windows with high-efficiency Energy Star double-pane windows with protective coatings that reflect heat back into your home during winter. This can reduce your heating and cooling costs by up to **15%**.

6. Use Fans Wisely

It may sound simple, but using fans wisely can save energy, too. In just one hour, kitchen, bath and other ventilating fans can pull out a houseful of warm air. So turn ventilation fans off as soon as they have done the job. Aim to keep the humidity level between 30% and 60%. If your ceiling fan has a reverse switch, use it to run the fan's blades in a clockwise direction after you turn on your heat. Energy Star says the fan will produce an updraft and push down into the room heated air from the ceiling (remember, hot air rises).

7. Adjust Drapes

When it's cold outside, keep drapes and shades on your south-facing windows open during the day to allow sunlight to enter your home, and then you can close them at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.



8. Caulk Around Windows and Doors

If the gaps between siding and window or door frames are bigger than the width of a nickel, you need to reapply exterior caulk. (Check the joints in window and door frames, too.) Silicone caulk is best for exterior use because it won't shrink and it's impervious to the elements.

Try GE's Silicone II Window and Door product, which is "rain ready" in three ([\\$6 at Home Depot](#)). Check window-glazing putty, too (which seals glass into the window frame). Add weatherstripping as needed around doors, making sure you cannot see any daylight from inside your home.

9. Clean the Gutters

If your gutters are full of leaves, water can back up against the house and damage roofing, siding and wood trim -- plus cause leaks and ice dams. You'll typically pay \$70 to \$225 to clean gutters on a single-story house, depending on its size. Also look for missing or damaged gutters and fascia boards and repair them.

10. Prepare to Stow Your Mower

As the mower sits through the winter, fuel remaining in its engine will decompose, "varnishing" the carburetor and causing difficulty when you try to start the engine in the spring.

If you've added stabilizer to your fuel to keep it fresh longer, then fill the gas tank to the top with more stabilized fuel and run the engine briefly to allow it to circulate. If not, wait until the tank is nearly empty from use and run the engine (outdoors) to use up the remaining fuel. Check your mower's manual for other cold-weather storage steps. Mr. C's Hardware in Hurst charges \$89 for a tune up (included new blade, spark plug, filter, oil).



11. Inspecting Your Roof to Get Ahead of Problems

A roof inspection is one of those preventative maintenance jobs that's easy to overlook. Don't. Add a once-a-year reminder on your calendar to go out on a warm day and fix any problems you find. If you're squeamish about heights, don't worry. You can do a thorough inspection from the ground using a pair of binoculars.

Or, you can get up close and personal with your roof using a ladder. However, there's no need to get up on your roof just yet. The less you walk around up there, the better for your roofing — and the safer for you. Work your way around your house, noting any potential problems.

Here's what to look for:

- Cracked caulk or rust spots on flashing.
- Shingles that are buckling, curling, or blistering.
- Missing or broken shingles.
- Cracked and worn rubber boots around vent pipes.
- Missing or damaged chimney cap. (OK, that's technically not part of your roof, but since you're looking anyway.)
- Masses of moss and lichen, which could signal the roof is decaying underneath. Black algae stains are just cosmetic.

If you find piles of colored grit from asphalt roof tiles in the gutters, that's a bad sign — those sand-like granules cover the surface of roof shingles and shield them from the sun's damaging ultraviolet rays. Check the age of your roofing and see if it's nearing the end of its life cycle.

Easy Fixes for Roofing Problems

Any loose, damaged, or missing shingles should be replaced immediately. Check for popped nails that need to be hammered back in place. If you're comfortable working on a roof, then it's not too difficult to replace shingles and caulk flashing yourself. Cost: \$24 for a bundle of shingles, \$6 for roofing caulk. Allow a half-day to make a few shingle repairs.

Metal and vinyl flashing around chimneys, skylights, and attic vents that has separated needs to be resealed with caulk. However, flashing and vent boots that are beginning to rust or deteriorate should be replaced.



Cost of Professional Repairs

Contact pro roofing companies and seek at least three bids for repair work. You can use a handyman for minor fixes and possibly shave costs, but the person should be bonded, have proof of liability, and have workman's compensation insurance.

Some costs for common repairs include:

- A few broken or missing shingles: \$100-\$150.
- Large repairs (10-by-10-foot section of roofing): \$100-\$350 asphalt; \$200-\$1,000 wood.
- Replacing flashing or boots around chimneys, skylights, and vents: \$300-\$500.
- Repairing flashing in valleys: \$15-\$25 per running foot.

12. Be Ready For An Emergency

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

- Flashlights
- Bottled water
- Nonperishable food items
- Blankets
- Phone numbers for your utility companies
- Battery backup to protect your computer and other important electronic equipment
- First-aid kit

If you have an emergency generator, make sure you have gasoline stored and available to fuel it.

13. Protect Your Pipes

Pipes located in attics and near outer walls can be susceptible to freezing in extreme temperatures. When the forecast calls for unusually cold temperatures, let water drip from hot and cold faucets overnight. Also try keeping 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. For exposed pipes in your attic, add extra insulation around them.