HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

GUTTER SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Start with your annual spring inspection

When April showers fall upon your roof, it's the job of your gutters to control and carry away all that water. You can pinpoint problems in your system if you take a few minutes to check the condition of your gutters and downspouts. Your annual spring inspection is a good place to start.

WATCH YOUR GUTTERS IN THE RAIN

Put on your rain gear or grab an umbrella, and go outside during a heavy rain. Nothing else will give you such a graphic picture of how much water your gutters must handle – or how well they are doing their job. If you see water pouring out over the top of a downspout or flowing down your siding, you know you have some repairs to make to return your gutter system to working order.

REPAIR OR REPLACE?

Older galvanized gutters that have developed holes or are rusting out should probably be replaced. Aluminum gutters and downspouts, however, will last much longer with periodic maintenance, provided that they haven't been crushed by a ladder or car bumper, or deformed by excessive ice build-up.

CHECKING YOUR GUTTER SYSTEM

1. **Fascia and rafter ends.** Gutters that are otherwise sound can sag out of alignment, usually because they are no longer securely fastened in place. (A "washed-out" area in the lawn below can indicate this problem, as the cascading water destroys the ground cover.) When weather permits, climb a ladder to the gutter line and check the fascia board behind the gutter. This board can rot out, and you'll have to replace it. While you are removing the old fascia, check the condition of the rafter ends to which the gutter is nailed. If the ends have rotted, it's a simple job to nail a "sister" alongside the rafter end, giving you sound wood to anchor the gutter.
2. **Seams and caulking.** Then, clean out any debris from the gutter, so you can check the caulking at the gutter seams and where the gutter meets the house. Remove any deteriorated caulk and re-caulk as needed.
3. **Downspouts.** Finally, while you're on your ladder, check the downspouts to make sure they are clear of obstructions and flowing smoothly.

TESTING YOUR DOWNSPOUT DRAINS

You can test your downspout drains by putting a garden hose into the top of each downspout (or into the tile crock at the bottom, if you break the mortar seal and pull the downspout out of the tile). Let the water run for 10–15 minutes. If the water doesn't back up, the drain line is clear from that point onward. If, on the other hand, the water backs up, the drain should be snaked to remove the obstruction (usually caused by tree roots).

By testing each downspout, you can pinpoint the likely location of the clog; for example, if the rear downspout backs up, but the front one flows freely, the obstruction is probably in that portion of the drain between the two downspouts.

By checking your gutters periodically, you can prevent the major headaches that water damage can cause.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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