HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

YEARLY HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Seasonal tasks from HRRC's Yearly Home Maintenance Schedule

The whole year in one place. Tick a box when the job is done, and log the date on the record pages in the study guide. Keep this sheet inside a kitchen or basement cabinet door.

SPRING — APRIL – JUNE

- ☐ **Clean the gutters; make sure they flow.** Flush with a hose and watch every seam. Downspouts should discharge 4–6 ft from the foundation.
- ☐ **Inspect the roof for damaged shingles.** From the ground with binoculars. Cracked, curled, lifted, missing, or bare of granules.
- ☐ **Check flashing; re-seal as needed.** Chimney, vents, skylights, wall junctions — where nearly every roof leak starts.
- ☐ **Re-nail loose siding and trim boards.** Galvanized or stainless ring-shank nails. Set the heads, fill, prime.
- ☐ **Check house and garage for rotting wood.** Press suspect wood with a screwdriver. Fix the water source before you fix the board.
- ☐ **Check porch flooring; repair as needed.** Board ends, stair stringers, rail posts. Any wobble in a rail is a safety issue.
- ☐ **Replace bad caulk at windows, doors and siding joints.** Cut the old bead out first. Leave the bottom edge of trim and the weep holes open.
- ☐ **Scrape loose window glazing; replace.** Prime the bare wood before re-glazing. Pre-1978 house? Lead precautions apply.
- ☐ **Clean windows and frames; wash and repair screens.** Clear the weep holes. Label storm panels by window as you take them down.

SUMMER — JULY – AUGUST

- ☐ **Scrape, prime and paint anything in need — especially bare wood.** Prep is the whole job. Prime bare wood the same day you expose it; caulk after priming.
- ☐ **Pre-1978 home: observe lead-paint precautions.** No dry scraping or power sanding. Mist, contain on plastic, P100 respirator, keep children away.
- ☐ **If paint isn't due, wash the exterior at least once.** Dirt and mildew hold moisture against the surface. Hose and soft brush beat a pressure washer.
- ☐ **Look for carpenter ants, termites and other destructive insects.** Mud tubes on the foundation, coarse frass, hollow-sounding wood. Confirmed termites = licensed pro.
- ☐ **Check flat roofs; recoat or seal, especially the flashing.** Clear the drains. Water still standing 48 hours after rain is a defect, not a quirk.
- ☐ **Check mortar — chimney and firebox included — and tuck-point.** Match the mortar. A hard modern mix in soft old brick pops the brick faces off.
- ☐ **Check concrete drive, walks, patios and landings for condition and level.** Mark trip hazards over ¼ in. Any slab pitching back toward the house needs correcting.
- ☐ **Clean the carpets; wax tile and hardwood floors.** Windows open so they dry fast. Modern polyurethane floors are cleaned and recoated, never waxed.

- ☐ **Check the caulk or seal between house and drive.** Backer rod plus self-levelling sealant. An open joint here is a common cause of a wet basement.
- ☐ **Trim trees, bushes and shrubs.** Keep growth 12 in. clear of siding and roof. Wait on spring bloomers until they finish flowering.
- ☐ **Clean the flower beds out around the house.** Pull mulch back 2–3 in. from the siding and check that beds still drain away from the wall.
- ☐ **Drain sediment from the water heater and steam system.** Shut off gas or power first; flush until it runs clear. The water is scalding.
- ☐ **Copper sulfate in the floor and downspout drains.** Dose per the label, then don't run water in that drain overnight.
- ☐ **Copper sulfate in the floor and downspout drains.** Second round of the year. Not on a septic system, and check your local rules.

BEFORE YOU CLIMB

The ladder is the most dangerous thing on this list. One foot out for every four feet of height, three feet of ladder above the roof edge, never leaning on the gutter, both feet on firm level ground — and never when it's windy, wet or icy.

FALL — SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER

- ☐ **Patch and seal the driveway, steps and landings.** Above 50°F with dry days either side. Clean the cracks and kill the weeds first.
- ☐ **Check tuck-pointing on brick, then seal the masonry.** Repoint before you seal, and use a breathable repellent — not a glossy film that traps water.
- ☐ **Check weatherstripping on all doors and windows.** Replace what's compressed or torn; fit a door sweep where you can see daylight.
- ☐ **Check and repair everything that needs caulking.** Backer rod first in any gap over ¼ in. Don't forget hose bibs, dryer and cable penetrations.
- ☐ **Make sure garage floor and driveway drains flow.** Test with a hose. Clear the window wells and their drains while you're at it.
- ☐ **Clear gutters of leaves; check for leaks.** Wait until most leaves are down. A full gutter going into winter is how ice dams start.
- ☐ **Inspect the roof for loose or missing shingles; check flashing seals.** Fix it in October. A roofer in January costs more and can do less.

WINTER — NOVEMBER – MARCH

- ☐ **Shut off the interior valves supplying outdoor water pipes.** Disconnect the hoses, then drain the spigot and leave it open all winter.
- ☐ **Change furnace filters monthly if they're disposable.** Write the date on the frame; arrow points toward the blower. MERV 8–11 suits most systems.
- ☐ **Repair interior wall damage; touch up or repaint.** Find the cause first. Any water stain needs a stain-blocking primer or it bleeds through.
- ☐ **Check and re-grout bath and kitchen tile; apply a silicone sealer.** Caulk — not grout — where tile meets the tub, counter or another plane.
- ☐ **Copper sulfate in the floor and downspout drains.** Fourth round. This is the one task on the schedule that repeats every season.
- ☐ **Watch for ice dams, frozen pipes and condensation.** Keep indoor humidity 30–40%, clear snow off exhaust vents, and know where the main shutoff is.
- ☐ **Develop the plan for next summer's improvements.** Get bids now — contractors are quieter. Drainage and roof before anything cosmetic.

- ☐ **Clean and reseal decks, fences and pressure-treated wood.** Check the ledger and railings first. Water test: if it beads, don't seal yet.
- ☐ **Prune bushes, trees and shrubs.** Except spring-flowering shrubs. Cut to a bud or the branch collar; no stubs, never top a tree.
- ☐ **Have the furnace checked or tuned up, and change the filter.** Book before the first cold snap — everyone calls the week it turns cold.
- ☐ **Have the boiler checked every few years.** Every year once it is more than 20 years old.
- ☐ **Have the chimney cleaned.** Yearly if you burn wood; every 5 years if the flue only serves gas appliances.
- ☐ **Check the fireplace damper for obstructions.** Birds' nests, leaves, fallen mortar. Open it, close it, and look up with a flashlight.
- ☐ **Drain sediment from the water heater and steam system.** Second time this year. Test the temperature & pressure relief valve while you're there.
- ☐ **Copper sulfate in the floor and downspout drains.** Third round of the year.
- ☐ **At winter's end, re-open the valves to the outdoor pipes.** Open slowly and have someone watch the pipe inside — a split shows up on the first use.

CALL A PRO

For steep or aging roofs, furnace and boiler service, chimney sweeping and repair, confirmed termites, lead paint at scale, asbestos, electrical beyond a fixture swap, and anything structural. Three written bids, proof of license and insurance, and never the full payment up front.

WHAT REPEATS, AND HOW OFTEN

MONTHLY

Furnace filter through the heating season. Test a smoke or CO alarm. Look at the basement for damp.

EVERY SEASON

Copper sulfate in the drains. The twenty-minute walkaround. Clear the dryer vent.

SPRING & FALL

Gutters. Roof and flashing. Drain the water heater. Test every alarm and change batteries.

YEARLY

Furnace service. Chimney cleaning if you burn wood. Wash the exterior. Reseal shower grout.

KEY TERMS, PLAINLY DEFINED

Twenty-five words that do a lot of work in any conversation about a house — with a contractor, an inspector or an insurer.

BACKER ROD

Foam rope pressed into a joint before caulking, so the bead bonds to two faces instead of three and will not split. Use it in any gap wider than ¼ inch.

BRANCH COLLAR

The swollen ring where a branch meets the trunk. Prune back to it — never flush, never leaving a stub.

CREOSOTE

Tarry deposit left in a flue by burning wood. It is the fuel in a chimney fire; about 1/8 inch of glazed buildup means clean it now.

DAMPER

The plate in a fireplace flue that opens for a fire and closes to stop heat escaping. Check it for nests and debris before the first fire of the year.

DRIP EDGE

Metal flashing at the roof edge that throws water clear of the fascia and into the gutter.

EFFLORESCENCE

White powdery bloom on masonry — salt left behind by water moving through the wall. Brush it off, but treat it as a signal that something is still getting wet.

FASCIA

The horizontal board at the roof edge that the gutter hangs on. Peeling paint or rot there means the back of the gutter is leaking.

FLASHING

Sheet metal sealing the joint where a roof meets a chimney, wall, vent or skylight. Nearly every roof leak starts at flashing, not in the open field of shingles.

FRASS

Coarse, sawdust-like debris carpenter ants push out of their galleries. Unlike sawdust, it contains insect parts.

GLAZING (WINDOW)

The putty bead that holds glass in an older wood sash. Scrape what is loose, prime the bare wood, re-glaze to the sight line.

GRADE

The slope of the soil around the house. It should fall about 6 inches over the first 10 feet, away from the foundation.

ICE DAM

A ridge of ice at the eaves, formed when a warm attic melts roof snow that refreezes at the cold edge. Water then backs up under the shingles.

LEDGER

The board bolting a deck to the house. Ledgers that were nailed instead of bolted, or never flashed, are the usual cause of deck collapses.

LOW-WATER CUTOFF

The safety control on a steam boiler. Its blowdown valve is what you drain into a bucket, with the system cool, until the water runs clear.

MERV

The furnace filter rating scale. MERV 8–11 balances filtration against the airflow a residential system needs; denser is not better.

MUD TUBE

Pencil-width earthen tunnel termites build up a foundation wall. Finding one means calling a licensed pest contractor, not buying a product.

MUDJACKING / FOAM LIFTING

Raising a settled but sound concrete slab by pumping material underneath it, for a fraction of the cost of replacement.

PENETRATING VS. FILM-FORMING

Penetrating sealers soak in and let the surface dry outward. Film-formers sit on top, peel on horizontal surfaces, and trap moisture in masonry.

REPOINTING (TUCK-POINTING)

Raking failed mortar out to about ¾ inch and packing in fresh mortar matched to the original — softer for old solid-masonry walls.

RING-SHANK NAIL

A nail with a ridged shank that resists pulling out. Use galvanized or stainless outdoors; plain steel rusts and streaks the wall.

SILOXANE / SILANE REPELLENT

A breathable masonry water repellent — the right product for brick after repointing, unlike a glossy “waterproofer.”

SOFFIT VENT

The intake vent under the eaves. Block it with insulation and attic ventilation stops working, which is how ice dams begin.

SPALLING

The face of brick or concrete flaking away, usually from trapped moisture, freeze-thaw, or de-icing salt.

T&P RELIEF VALVE

The temperature and pressure safety valve on a water heater. Test it yearly; if it drips afterward, it needs replacing.

WEEP HOLE

A small drain opening at the bottom of a window frame or masonry wall. Never caulk one shut — water that gets in has to get back out.

General guidance only — local codes and conditions vary.

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

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