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Fall checklist: Here are 7 steps to get your home ready for winter

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Even as summer-type weather is clinging to the world, holding on for dear life, fall is squeezing its way into your neighborhood.

You know change is on the way, so now is the time to get your home and yard ready for the inevitable chill to come.

Allen Lyle of the radio show "Homefront" explains, "Winterizing your home is just a fancy way of saying you're making it more energy-efficient."

Great! Who doesn't want a home that is ready for winter and more energy efficient, too?

Seven simple steps will help you get your house ready for the coming cold. Whether you decide to tackle that list of winterizing "honey do's" all at once, or choose to take them one a day, get set to prep your castle for the cold.

1. Gear up to detect problems before they cause damage.

The change of the season is a perfect time to change the batteries in your smoke detectors. More fires occur during the winter than the summer, and it is always good to be prepared for the worst.

This is also a good time to install a carbon monoxide monitor if you don't already have one.

These handy gadgets can detect deadly carbon monoxide gas that can be emitted by your furnace if it isn't working properly. According to the Center for Disease Control, carbon monoxide poisoning accounts for 15,000 emergency room visits and 500 unintentional deaths in the United States each year. Install one detector on each level of your home.

2. Check to be sure that your furnace is working properly.

Not only can this help prevent carbon monoxide leaks, it can let you know if there are other problems to be addressed as well.

Danny Lipford, host of TV's "Today's Homeowner," suggests, "Have your heating system serviced by a professional to make sure it is operating at maximum efficiency. It is also a good idea to change your air filter at least once a month." A dirty filter prevents good airflow.

Make sure your furnace has adequate ventilation and check the batteries of your thermostat. Lipford recommends setting your programmable thermostat to fit your daily routine, so your house is warm when you are there, but you don't waste energy when you are gone.

3. Prep all of your seasonal equipment for the winter months.

Clean and dry all of your garden tools. Nanette Richford, an avid gardener, proposes applying a thin sheet of motor oil to the blades of tools to prevent rusting. Mow the lawn one last time and then drain the gasoline from your mower or add fuel stabilizer to help it get through the cold.

Fall is also the ideal time to give your snow blower a checkup. Be sure that it starts and seems to be working properly. Do you have ice melt, a snow shovel and a car scraper? If not, you may want to pick

some up now. Do it before they disappear from store shelves with the first snowfall.

4. Inspect your home for possible problems.

Clean out your rain gutters so that they can run freely. Brandon Dyce, of AskMen.com, warns, "Debris-filled gutters cause water to flood back onto the roof." He suggests removing leaves and then rinsing the downspout to be sure water is carried away from the house.

Don't forget to check out the stuff around the base of your home. Pull out any dead or sickly plants, which may be hiding pests or diseases that can overwinter and cause problems for you next year.

Look for any cracks in the foundation that need to be addressed.

"Even if it's a small crack, it's worth sealing up," Lipford advises.

"It also discourages insects from entering your home." You can often seal these with weather-resistant caulk.

5. Scrutinize your windows and doors.

Blocking those obvious leaks can keep you from chilly breezes that try to invade your abode. Examine the window caulk and re-caulk any spots that are cracking or peeling.

Installing weather stripping is not that hard and will keep your home protected from nasty drafts.

"If you have temporary storm windows and doors," Lyle counsels, "now's the time to put them back in. If you don't have them or can't afford them, you can purchase a temporary plastic film that installs on the inside of the windows."

Also, be sure your swamp cooler is covered and tightly sealed.

6. Don't let freezing temperatures ice you over.

Turn off your sprinkling system completely and have it professionally "blown out."

Remove your garden hoses from outdoor spigots and drain them thoroughly. Water left in hoses can freeze and cause cracking.

Insulate any exposed piping, including the faucets themselves.

According to Roger Albright, author of "547 Ways to Be Fuel Smart," protect your indoor pipes by remembering to set your thermostat to heat your home to at least 55 degrees even when you aren't home. This will keep your pipes from freezing.

7. Be ready, just in case.

Emergencies often happen when you least expect them.

In an urgent situation, like a power outage or heavy snow, it is no fun to try searching a darkened house for the things you really need.

Have flashlights, extra batteries, matches and candles readily accessible. Keep a regular, corded phone on hand that can still be used if power lines are down and cell phone batteries are dead.

Include a list of any emergency numbers, as well as utility company phone numbers, taped in the front of your phone book.

Store bottled water and some non-perishable food, including pet food if you have a pet. Have the necessities available to get you through until things are back to normal.

As Old Man Winter winds his way toward your corner of the world, make sure your residence is ready for his onslaught.

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