

Winterizing your Home

Here are ten tips to help you prepare your home for winter:

1) **Furnace Inspection** Call an HVAC professional to inspect your furnace and clean ducts. Stock up on furnace filters and change them monthly. Consider switching out your thermostat for a programmable thermostat. If your home is heated by a hot-water radiator, bleed the valves by opening them slightly and when water appears, close them. Remove all flammable material from the area surrounding your furnace.

2) **Get the Fireplace Ready** Cap or screen the top of the chimney to keep out rodents and birds. If the chimney hasn't been cleaned for a while, call a chimney sweep to remove soot and creosote. Buy firewood or chop wood. Store it in a dry place away from the exterior of your home. Inspect the fireplace damper for proper opening and closing. Check the mortar between bricks and tuckpoint, if necessary.

3) **Check the Exterior, Doors and Windows** Inspect exterior for crevice cracks and exposed entry points around pipes; seal them. Use weatherstripping around doors to prevent cold air from entering the home and caulk windows. Replace cracked glass in windows and, if you end up replacing the entire window, prime and paint exposed wood. If your home has a basement, consider protecting its window wells by covering them with plastic shields. Switch out summer screens with glass replacements from storage. If you have storm windows, install them.

4) **Inspect Roof, Gutters & Downspouts** If your weather temperature will fall below 32 degrees in the winter, adding extra insulation to the attic will prevent warm air from creeping to your roof and causing ice dams. Check flashing to ensure water cannot enter the home. Replace worn roof shingles or tiles. Clean out the gutters and use a hose to spray water down the downspouts to clear away debris. Consider installing leaf guards on the gutters or extensions on the downspouts to direct water away from the home.

5) **Service Weather-Specific Equipment** Drain gas from lawnmowers. Service or tune-up snow blowers. Replace worn rakes and snow shovels. Clean, dry and store summer gardening equipment. Sharpen ice choppers and buy bags of ice-melt / sand.

6) **Check Foundations** Rake away all debris and edible vegetation from the foundation. Seal up entry points to keep small animals from crawling under the house. Tuckpoint or seal foundation cracks. Mice can slip through space as thin as a dime. Inspect sill plates for dry rot or pest infestation. Secure crawlspace entrances.

7) **Install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors** Some cities require a smoke detector in every room. Buy extra smoke detector batteries and change them when daylight savings ends. Install a carbon monoxide detector near your furnace and / or water heater. Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to make sure they work. Buy a fire extinguisher or replace an extinguisher older than 10 years.

8) Prevent Plumbing Freezes Locate your water main in the event you need to shut it off in an emergency. Drain all garden hoses. Insulate exposed plumbing pipes. Drain air conditioner pipes and, if your AC has a water shut-off valve, turn it off. If you go on vacation, leave the heat on, set to at least 60 degrees.

9) Prepare Landscaping & Outdoor Surfaces Trim trees if branches hang too close to the house or electrical wires. Ask a gardener when your trees should be pruned to prevent winter injury. Plant spring lower bulbs and lift bulbs that cannot winter over such as dahlias in areas where the ground freezes. Seal driveways, brick patios and wood decks. Move sensitive potted plants indoors or to a sheltered area.

10) Prepare an Emergency Kit Buy indoor candles and matches / lighter for use during a power shortage. Find the phone numbers for your utility companies and tape them near your phone or inside the phone book. Buy a battery back-up to protect your computer and sensitive electronic equipment. Store extra bottled water and non-perishable food supplies (including pet food, if you have a pet), blankets and a first-aid kit in a dry and easy-to-access location. Prepare an evacuation plan in the event of an emergency.

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