

A Checklist for Winterizing and Weatherproofing Your Home

There's no doubt about it – winter is coming. Freezing temperatures, cold air, ice and snow make the warmth inside your house cozy and inviting. At least, that is, when your house is up to the task.

Winterizing your house isn't only about staying warm, however. Winter is notorious for busted pipes, invading pests or furnaces that suddenly fail to function, for instance, but winterizing your home helps prevent such unexpected surprises.

Additionally, a house that isn't winterized will consume more energy, and energy costs continue to rise dramatically every year. Failing to winterize your house will progressively cost you more money on top of repair headaches.

Save more, worry less and stay comfortable by systematically checking your home's condition and performing simple tasks around the property to ensure it is winter-ready. You can easily perform an effective, efficient weatherproofing job yourself over a weekend or two.

Best of all, the work requires little investment beyond your time and perhaps a few basic supplies. Even the

cost of additional insulation, if needed, pays off every time you open your utility bills.

Servicing Furnaces and Ductwork

- Check the house thermostat to ensure it works properly. Replace old thermostats with newer, programmable models that allow you to set a lower temperature while you are away or asleep and raise the temperature only when you need it. According to the [Department of Energy](#), lowering the temperature about 10 degrees for eight hours a day may save you up to 10 percent a year.
- Change your furnace filter. Always follow the recommended filter change schedule according to the furnace and filter type. This may vary from monthly to perhaps every six months.
- Check the furnace pilot light to see if it is lit. Turn on the furnace and blower to ensure the furnace ignites and completes a full cycle, from warming up to blowing heat and shutting off the blower again. Hire a professional to evaluate the furnace and determine if it operates safely and efficiently.
- Shine a light into your ducts to look for evidence of mold, pests or accumulations of dirt and debris. The [EPA](#) states that there isn't yet enough evidence to suggest regular cleanings are

necessary. Instead, clean ducts when moldy or excessively dirty. Consult a professional for more information and cleaning assistance.

- Inspect the heating ductwork. Look for holes and loose connections, tightening, taping or replacing pieces as necessary. Problem areas often occur where ducts meet the floor, ceiling or go through the wall.
- Insulate ductwork that runs under your house or through unheated areas. Special blanket insulation makes insulating around the ducts easy, simple work. According to [Energy Star](#), the typical house loses about 20 percent of the air flowing through the ducts due to holes, leaks and loose connections. Factoring in heat loss through uninsulated ducts, the amount is likely even higher.

Inspecting Fireplaces, Wood Stoves and Chimneys

- **Inspect the chimney** if you have a fireplace or wood stove. Look for obstructions such as bird nests or leaves blocking the flue. Place screen and a chimney cap over the top of the chimney to prevent future problems.

- Clean the chimney to remove any creosote buildup. Scrape the ashes and creosote out of the fireplace or wood stove when finished.
- Check the fireplace or wood stove to ensure it operates properly. Hire a professional to assess the equipment if preferred.
- Test the interior portion of the wood stove flue, between the stove and the wall where it exits. Make sure the connections are secure and the pipe is sound.

Cleaning Your Gutters and Roof

- Clean the roof completely to remove the year's accumulation of dirt, debris and leaves. Especially in areas with deep snow accumulations, the excess weight may stress the roof. Plus, accumulating organic matter encourages rot to invade your roof. Typically a shovel or broom – even a hose from the ground in some instances – makes short work of the job.
- Inspect the roof during the cleaning to identify areas where shingles are missing, damaged or otherwise in need of repair. Look for other problems such as soft areas, chimney or vent damage and separating gutters. Hire a professional to perform the inspection and repair work.

- Clean the gutters surrounding the roof. Move to the downspouts and ensure they are clear and in good repair.

Weatherproofing Your House Exterior

- Rake away leaves and rotting vegetation from your house foundation.
- Squirt expanding foam insulation or caulk into gaps and holes in your exterior house wall, such as around pipes or wires.
- Check window wells surrounding basement windows. Remove debris and ensure the window is safe from potential damage. Install special plastic window shields as necessary.
- Ensure your wood supply, if applicable, is separated from the house by at least 20 or 30 feet and covered with a plastic tarp or other moisture barrier. Open trash or recycling containers, woodpiles and similar collections invite rodents and pests to invade your home and enjoy the heat.
- Inspect outbuildings and areas such as sheds and cellars or crawlspaces. Note any damage or

potential problems. Secure windows and doors in these areas.

- Drain garden hoses and insulate exposed water pipes as applicable.
- Blow out or drain sprinkler systems.
- Cover central air units with heavy protective material to block snow and ice. Have a professional open the unit cover and turn off the disconnect switch first to prevent accidental use in winter. Clean the outside of the unit, removing dirt and leaves, and allow it to dry before covering.
- Remove window air conditioner units or cover permanently installed units.
- Trim tree branches hanging over your house, electrical wires or outbuildings. Remove dead and damaged trees and branches.

Preparing Your Windows and Doors

- Inspect windows to ensure the glass is in good condition and secure in the window frame. Check doors for structural stability. Replace or repair

windows and doors as necessary. Upgrading old windows with newer, energy-efficient models will boost your utility savings.

- Look for air gaps around window and door frames. This proves easiest when it's light on one side of the wall and dark on the other. Fill voids with a little low-expansion spray foam insulation designed for windows and doors. Once the foam cures, it is simply trimmed flush with the wall surface. Doors, especially, tend to leak air from around the frame and trim.
- Replace or install weather stripping under entry doors and around windows.
- Take down summer window screens and screen doors. Replace with storm windows and storm doors.
- Hang plastic over windows or use shrink-wrap. Large windows, in particular, lose a tremendous amount of heat, especially older windows. Plastic sheeting placed over the inside of the window, if performed with care, doesn't look that bad and will significantly lower your heating bill.

Winterizing With Insulation

If your house is fairly new, the insulation level is likely sufficient for your climate. Older homes, however, often installed insulation somewhat haphazardly – if at all – and you may pay for it with your wallet.

The easiest, most reliable method to ensure your insulation is up to keeping you warm is to have an energy audit performed. Some utility companies offer courtesy energy audits, or you can hire a professional.

It's also possible, in some cases, to verify the level of insulation by measuring the material and determining the total R-value by multiplying the depth by the insulation's R-value per inch. Add more insulation, of the type desired.

Checking the insulation level in the attic is likely the easiest place for the DIYer to start, and one of the most important places since heat rises.

While adding insulation, if necessary, may prove the most costly step of your home winterization, you won't have to do it again anytime soon. Better yet, you will get the money back, month by month, and in some areas rebates may be available. For more information, consult a professional.

Don't forget about your water heater. Turn down your water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit and cover it with blanket insulation or a cover, as specified by the

manufacturer. If your water heater is in an uninsulated area, this is even more important.

Interior Weatherization and Safety

- Open any register vents or air returns inside your house. Vents may be wall mounted, in the floor or in the ceiling. Repair or replace damaged or loose vents.
- Feel the wall around electrical outlets, pipes or wires leading to the outside. Seal and insulate as appropriate. Expanding foam insulation for windows and doors provides the benefits of both.
- Reverse your ceiling fans to help circulate warm air that gathers near the ceiling. When the fan blades rotate clockwise, they push the warm air down to “reheat” the lower areas.
- Mount smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, if you don't already have them, or change the batteries if you do. Test each one to ensure it operates properly. The winter season, when heating appliances may emit carbon monoxide and burning fires and other potential hazards are common, is a good time to schedule this annual task as part of your winterization process.

A Winter Weather Survival Kit

What would a discussion about winterizing your home be without mention of an emergency kit? If all else fails and you lose power, the sturdiest house won't keep out the cold. Keeping supplies on hand to help you through a storm and power outage will help keep you safe. Gather a kit containing:

- Flashlights.
- Candles.
- Matches.
- A battery-powered radio, especially a NOAA radio or two-way device.
- Two or three blankets.
- Bottled water.
- Seven days worth of non-perishable food and a can opener if needed.

Change old outside water spigots

The modern outdoor faucets are self draining and will not freeze during the winter. The old style must be shut off and drained or you run the risk of them freezing and bursting.

courtesy [Karie Fay/Realestate.com](https://www.realestate.com)