

# FALL HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

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## Winterization Essentials: Protect Your Home Before Cold Strikes

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**Target Completion:** September - November

**Estimated Time:** 18-25 hours total

**Estimated Cost:** \$600-\$1,000

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## SEPTEMBER: HEATING SYSTEM & INTERIOR PREP

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### HVAC - Heating System (CRITICAL PRIORITY)

- **Schedule professional furnace/heating inspection**
  - **Book NOW before October rush**
  - **Cost:** \$100-\$150
  - **Includes:** Burner cleaning, heat exchanger check, CO safety test, blower inspection
  - **Why critical:** CO poisoning kills 400+ annually, mostly from faulty furnaces
  - **Schedule by:** Mid-September
- **Replace HVAC filter**
  - New filter before heating season
  - Stock up on 6-month supply

- **Cost:** \$40-\$90 (bulk purchase)
- **Test heating system**
  - Turn on heat, verify it works
  - Listen for unusual sounds
  - Check all vents blow warm air
  - **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Clean heat vents and registers**
  - Vacuum inside vents
  - Wash vent covers
  - **Time:** 1-2 hours
- **Reverse ceiling fan direction**
  - Switch to clockwise (pulls air up, pushes warm air down)
  - **Time:** 5 minutes per fan

## Fireplace & Chimney (If Applicable)

- **Schedule chimney inspection and cleaning**
  - **Must do annually** if used regularly
  - **Cost:** \$200-\$400
  - **Prevents:** Chimney fires (\$125M damage annually), CO poisoning
  - **Schedule by:** September (before heating season)
- **Test fireplace damper**
  - Should open and close smoothly
  - Seal tightly when closed
  - **Fix if:** Stuck or not sealing

- **Stock firewood if wood-burning**
  - Store off ground, covered, away from house
  - Season for 6+ months before burning
  - **Amount:** 1-3 cords for winter depending on use
- **Inspect gas fireplace**
  - Check pilot light
  - Test remote or switch
  - Clean glass doors
  - **Time:** 30 minutes

## Carbon Monoxide & Safety

- **Test all smoke and CO detectors**
  - Press test button on each
  - **Replace batteries in ALL units**
  - **Replace unit if:** Over 10 years old, doesn't test properly
  - **Time:** 30 minutes | **Cost:** \$20-\$60
- **Inspect fire extinguishers**
  - Check pressure gauge (should be in green zone)
  - Note expiration date
  - Replace if needed
  - **Location:** Kitchen, garage, near fireplaces
  - **Cost:** \$30-\$50 each

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## OCTOBER: WEATHERIZATION & EXTERIOR PROTECTION

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## Gutters & Drainage (HIGH PRIORITY)

- **Clean gutters thoroughly (TWICE if trees)**
  - **First cleaning:** Early October
  - **Second cleaning:** Late October/Early November (after leaves fall)
  - Remove all debris completely
  - Flush downspouts with hose
  - **Time:** 2-4 hours each time | **Cost:** \$150-\$300 (pro) or \$0 (DIY)
  - **Why critical:** Clogged gutters = ice dams = \$3,000-\$10,000 damage
- **Inspect and repair gutters**
  - Look for: Sagging, rust, loose fasteners, leaks
  - **Secure loose sections** before winter weight
  - **Seal leaks** with gutter sealant
  - **Time:** 1-2 hours
- **Install gutter guards** (optional but recommended)
  - Reduces cleaning frequency
  - Prevents ice dams
  - **Cost:** \$5-\$10 per linear foot
- **Extend downspouts if needed**
  - Should direct water 6+ feet from foundation
  - Add extensions if water pools near foundation
  - **Cost:** \$10-\$30 per downspout
- **Check yard drainage**
  - Walk yard after rain
  - Note pooling or slow drainage

- Grade away from foundation if needed
- **Time:** 30 minutes observation

## Roof Inspection

- **Professional roof inspection**
  - **Best timing:** Before winter, after leaves fall
  - **Cost:** \$200-\$400
  - **Critical if:** Roof over 10 years old, recent storms
  - **What they check:** Shingles, flashing, vents, overall condition
- **Visual inspection from ground**
  - Look for: Missing/damaged shingles, moss, debris
  - Check: Flashing around chimneys and vents
  - **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Remove leaves and debris from roof**
  - Especially in valleys where water flows
  - Prevents ice dams and rot
  - **Safety:** Hire pro if multi-story or steep roof
- **Check attic for leaks**
  - Look for: Water stains, daylight through boards, wet insulation
  - Best time: During or right after rain
  - **Time:** 20 minutes

## Windows & Doors Weatherization

- **Install storm windows** (if removable)
  - Clean before installing

- Check seals and fit
- **Time:** 2-3 hours
- **Apply weatherstripping**
  - Check all exterior doors
  - Replace worn or compressed strips
  - **Cost:** \$20-\$50 | **Saves:** 15% on heating costs
  - **Time:** 1-2 hours
- **Install door sweeps**
  - Bottom of all exterior doors
  - Should seal against threshold
  - **Cost:** \$10-\$20 per door
- **Caulk exterior windows**
  - Remove old, cracked caulk completely
  - Apply fresh bead around all frames
  - **Cost:** \$15-\$30 | **Time:** 2-3 hours
  - **Do when:** Temperature above 40°F for proper curing
- **Apply plastic film to drafty windows** (interior)
  - Temporary solution for single-pane windows
  - Creates insulating air gap
  - **Cost:** \$10-\$30 | **Time:** 1 hour

## Trees & Landscaping

- **Trim tree branches away from house**
  - Maintain 6-10 foot clearance
  - Remove dead or weak branches

- **Priority:** Branches over roof, near power lines
- **Cost:** \$200-\$800 (professional required for large/high branches)
- **Why critical:** Prevents damage in ice/snow storms
- **Rake and remove leaves**
  - Don't let thick layer smother grass
  - Compost or bag for removal
  - **Time:** 2-4 hours weekly during peak fall
- **Aerate and overseed lawn** (cool-season grass)
  - Best time: September for cool-season grasses
  - **Cost:** \$60-\$150 (rent aerator) or \$200-\$500 (pro)
- **Apply fall fertilizer**
  - Strengthens roots for winter
  - Different formula than spring (higher potassium)
  - **Time:** 1 hour | **Cost:** \$40-\$80
- **Plant spring bulbs**
  - Must be in ground 6 weeks before hard freeze
  - **Time:** 2-4 hours | **Cost:** Varies

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## NOVEMBER: FINAL WINTERIZATION

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### Irrigation System Winterization

- **Shut down sprinkler system** (MUST DO before freeze)
  - Turn off water supply
  - Drain all water from pipes

- Blow out lines with compressor (recommended)
  - **Cost:** \$50-\$150 (professional blow-out)
  - **Why critical:** Frozen pipes burst = \$500-\$2,000 repairs
- **Disconnect and store garden hoses**
  - Drain hoses completely
  - Store indoors or covered
  - **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Shut off exterior faucets**
  - Turn off interior shut-off valve
  - Open exterior faucet to drain
  - Leave open all winter
  - **Time:** 10 minutes per faucet
- **Insulate exterior faucets**
  - Use foam faucet covers
  - **Cost:** \$3-\$5 each | **Time:** 15 minutes

## Outdoor Equipment & Furniture

- **Winterize lawn mower**
  - Run until gas tank empty OR add stabilizer
  - Change oil
  - Clean undercarriage
  - Store in dry location
  - **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Store or cover outdoor furniture**
  - Clean thoroughly first

- Cover or move to garage/shed
  - Store cushions indoors
  - **Time:** 1-2 hours
- **Winterize pool or spa**
  - Balance water chemistry
  - Lower water level
  - Add winterizing chemicals
  - Cover securely
  - **Cost:** \$100-\$300 (professional) or \$50-\$100 (DIY)
- **Drain and store power washer**
  - Run pump dry
  - Add antifreeze to pump
  - Store indoors
  - **Time:** 15 minutes

## Plumbing Winterization

- **Insulate exposed pipes**
  - Focus: Crawlspaces, basements, exterior walls, attics
  - Use foam pipe insulation
  - **Cost:** \$20-\$50 | **Time:** 1-2 hours
  - **Prevents:** Frozen pipes (\$500+ repairs, \$5,000+ water damage)
- **Know location of main water shut-off**
  - Test that you can turn it off
  - Make sure everyone knows location
  - Clear access (not blocked by storage)

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Check sump pump operation**
  - Pour bucket of water into pit
  - Pump should activate
  - Consider battery backup for power outages
  - **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Service water heater**
  - Drain and flush to remove sediment
  - Check anode rod (replace if mostly corroded)
  - Test temperature/pressure relief valve
  - **Cost:** \$100-\$150 (professional)

## Snow & Ice Preparation

- **Service snow blower**
  - Change oil
  - Replace spark plug
  - Check belts and auger
  - **Time:** 45 minutes | **Cost:** \$30-\$60
- **Stock ice melt and sand**
  - Pet-safe ice melt recommended
  - Sand for traction on slopes
  - **Cost:** \$20-\$60
- **Inspect snow shovels**
  - Replace if cracked or broken
  - Have backup shovel

- Consider ergonomic shovel (prevent injury)
- **Cost:** \$20-\$50
- **Check generator** (if applicable)
  - Test run for 15 minutes
  - Change oil if needed
  - Stock fuel (with stabilizer)
  - **Time:** 30 minutes

## Garage & Entry

- **Lubricate garage door**
  - Apply silicone spray to rollers, hinges, tracks
  - Test auto-reverse safety
  - **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Weatherize garage door**
  - Check bottom seal
  - Replace if cracked or stiff
  - **Cost:** \$20-\$50 | **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Create winter entry station**
  - Boot tray
  - Coat hooks
  - Salt/ice melt storage
  - **Cost:** \$30-\$100

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## INTERIOR FALL PREP

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## Windows & Insulation

- **Check window operation before winter**
  - Test that all windows close and lock properly
  - Fix now—won't want to in winter
  - **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Inspect attic insulation**
  - Should be R-38 to R-60 depending on climate
  - Add more if compressed or insufficient
  - Check for: Gaps, moisture damage, pest intrusion
  - **Cost:** \$1,000-\$2,500 (professional) if adding insulation
- **Close foundation vents** (if applicable)
  - Crawlspace vents should close for winter
  - **Time:** 15 minutes

## Basement & Crawlspace

- **Inspect for moisture issues**
  - Look for: Water stains, musty smell, efflorescence
  - Address before winter (worse when ground freezes)
  - **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Check sump pump**
  - Test operation
  - Clean intake screen
  - Verify discharge pipe drains away from foundation
  - **Time:** 15 minutes

## Emergency Preparedness

- **Assemble winter emergency kit**
  - Flashlights, batteries (test them)
  - Battery-powered or hand-crank radio
  - First aid kit
  - Non-perishable food (3-day supply)
  - Water (1 gallon/person/day for 3 days)
  - Blankets
  - **Cost:** \$100-\$200
- **Create home emergency plan**
  - Everyone knows: Main water shut-off, electrical panel, gas shut-off
  - Emergency contact list posted
  - Out-of-town contact designated
  - **Time:** 30 minutes

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## FALL BUDGET BREAKDOWN

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### Professional Services:

- Furnace inspection: \$100-\$150
- Chimney cleaning: \$200-\$400
- Roof inspection: \$200-\$400
- Sprinkler winterization: \$50-\$150
- Gutter cleaning (x2): \$300-\$600

### DIY Materials:

- Weatherstripping: \$20-\$50

- Caulk: \$15-\$30
- Pipe insulation: \$20-\$50
- HVAC filters (6-month supply): \$40-\$90
- Ice melt/sand: \$20-\$60

**Total Fall Budget: \$600-\$1,000**

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## **TIMING IS EVERYTHING**

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### **Early September:**

- Schedule heating inspection
- Schedule chimney cleaning

### **Mid-September:**

- Test heating system
- Begin leaf management

### **October:**

- Clean gutters (first time)
- Weatherize windows/doors
- Tree trimming

### **Late October/Early November:**

- Clean gutters (second time)
- Final leaf cleanup

### **Before First Freeze:**

- Winterize irrigation (CRITICAL)
- Disconnect hoses
- Insulate pipes

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## COST-SAVING TIPS

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### **Bundle services:**

- HVAC + duct cleaning
- Gutter cleaning + roof inspection
- Save 10-20% on combined services

### **DIY when safe:**

- Weatherstripping
- Caulking
- Gutter cleaning (single story)
- Most interior tasks

### **Buy materials in bulk:**

- HVAC filters (6-month supply)
- Ice melt (before first snow)
- Weatherstripping (do whole house)

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 **COMPLETION:** Check all boxes before first freeze!

 **NEVER FORGET:** MyHomePlatform reminds you of critical fall tasks 2 weeks before freeze date in your area → [Start Free]

 **NEXT:** Download Winter Maintenance Checklist in December

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