



SPIFF-UPS FOR ALL SEASONS

To keep your home's value, you've got to invest a little time.

Money®

By: Josh Garskof, excerpted: January 2008



Doing mundane jobs like changing filters and flushing radiators won't win you any decorating prizes. It will, however, keep your biggest investment in peak condition and preclude the need for budget-busting repairs. But it's hard to remember what to do when. The solution: Keep our home-maintenance checklist handy.

WINTER

PREP YOUR PIPE. If you don't, it'll ice up and burst. Remove your garden hose from the outdoor faucet before the first freeze. Unless you have a frost-proof spigot (a worthwhile \$25 to \$50 upgrade), turn off the water supply at the shutoff valve inside the house and open the outdoor spigot to drain water from the line. Leave it this way until the spring thaw. **FREQUENCY** Once a year

DRY UP. Does your house use hot-water radiators? When you fire them up for the season use a flathead screwdriver to open their bleeder valves one by one, allowing air that has built up in the system to escape before closing them again. This will make your heating system more effective. **FREQUENCY** Once a year

GET YOUR FLUE SHOT. Have your boiler or furnace (and your hot-water tank), serviced before you turn on the heat for the season (\$100 to \$200 per burner). Neglect this task and debris can clog your exhaust flue, and your equipment won't operate efficiently. If you burn oil, your oil company will provide the service. For gas burners, contact a local heating contractor. **FREQUENCY** Once a year

LET OFF STEAM. If you have steam heat with an overflow valve, open it until the water runs clean (probably five to 10 seconds) to flush out rust and sediment. Then top off the water level. **FREQUENCY** Every few weeks

SPRING

DO A GUTTER CHECK. Make sure that no joints or fasteners are loose. If you spot a problem you can't easily fix (for example, if one is sagging), have it repaired by a gutter or roofing company (\$150 and up). **FREQUENCY** Once a year

THEN CLEAN THEM. Put on rubber gloves and use a hose to get rid of leaves and squirrel poop that jam up gutters. Otherwise, water could back up into walls, causing many thousands of dollars in damage. If your house is more than one story tall, hire a roofer or a gutter company to do the job (\$150 or so). **FREQUENCY:** Once a year at least.

GO OVER THE ROUGH SPOTS. Inspect your house's exterior for peeling paint. Scrape loose patches and apply an oil-based primer and then two coats of paint. You'll be delaying the need for the next paint job. **FREQUENCY:** Once a year.

RINSE AND DRY. Replace all heater and central air-conditioner filters. Wash window air-conditioner filters in the sink, wipe them and reinstall. **FREQUENCY** Every one to three months

SUMMER

BEAT AROUND THE BUSHES. Prune all shrubs and other plants so that they're at least a foot away from the house. "That's the minimum airflow needed to dry out wet siding after rains and prevent paint damage and rot," says architect Karen Sweeney, the director of preservation for two Frank Lloyd Wright museum buildings in Oak Park, Ill. **FREQUENCY:** Once a year



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BECOME A GRADE GRUBBER. Check the soil grading around your house to make sure that it slopes away from the foundation. If water pools there, it can seep inside. The fix: Fill the area with fresh topsoil (\$13 to \$18 a cubic yard). **FREQUENCY** Every other year

PUT ON AN OVERCOAT. Protect exposed outdoor woodwork, such as unpainted fencing and decks (unless they're made of a tropical hardwood like teak, or the manufacturer recommends against treating) by painting on a coat of a high-quality wood preservative, such as Sikken's Cetol (\$30 a gallon, at paint stores). **FREQUENCY** Every three to five years

SMELL OUT PROBLEMS. Check for musty odors in the basement and under-sink cabinets. They're signs of moisture or mold. Have a plumber check out mustiness under a sink; for the basement, a waterproofing company (find one at nawsrc.org) can address leaks. **FREQUENCY** Every few months

FALL

FLUSH AWAY. Drain a few gallons of water from your hot-water heater and your boiler. "This will flush out rust and sediment, which can make the unit inefficient and cause premature wear to the burner," says Walter Mullins, who teaches new-homeowner how-to classes for the Housing Partnership in New York City. **FREQUENCY** Once a year.

RECRUIT DICK VAN DYKE. Hire a chimney sweep to check and clean it (\$100 to \$300). You can find a certified chimney sweep at csia.org. **FREQUENCY** Every other year

PUT A DAMPER ON DRIPS. In the attic, check the underside of the roof for wet spots and call a roofer (\$150 and up) if you find any. Keeping the structure dry is your best protection against everything from mold to rot to carpenter ants. **FREQUENCY** Every other year.

TEST YOUR GARAGE DOOR OPENER. Step 1: While standing in the garage, block the electric eye near the floor and press the button to close the door; it shouldn't budge. Step 2: Lay a two-by-four on the ground across the door opening and close the door. When it hits the wood, it should reverse. If the system fails either test, repair or replace the opener (\$200 to \$400 a door). **FREQUENCY** Once a year.