



Prepare your home for winter in the fall

The long, cold blustery days of winter are on their way as sure as fall follows summer. For homeowners that means now's the time to undertake those special maintenance jobs that will protect your home and keep you and your family warm and comfortable during the months ahead.

Houses, like people, get old, and if you have an aging home, you may need to offer it some extra loving care. And since much of that care is needed on the exterior shell of the home, the time to do it is during the cool, crisp days of autumn rather than trying to catch up with the needs during the colder days ahead.

It all starts with a careful, thorough inspection of the outside of your home. There are a half dozen areas that may need special attention. In some areas the maintenance you'll need to do can be relatively simple and done by yourself; in other cases you may need to call in a professional to deal with a problem.

Start with the eaves troughs

Eaves troughs that are blocked with leaves, bird's nests or other material can create problems for you during the winter. With lots of snow and freezing temperature, this debris can freeze and form ice dams in the troughs which will force water to back up under the shingles or down through the siding and eventually enter the house.

Clean material from the eaves trough carefully and make sure downspouts and joints are free of blockages by running a plumber's snake or a straightened out metal coat hanger through them. Don't lean a ladder against the troughs; it may pull them out of alignment.

Check the chimney

Blocked chimney's can also cause many problems. Use a flashlight or a mirror on a sunny day to look down your chimney to check for blockages. If it needs cleaning to get rid of debris, soot or tar, a professional cleaner can do the job easily with a vacuum machine.

Although it may be messy, you can do the job yourself with a stuffed and weighted small burlap bag lowered down the chimney and then pulled back up. Block the fireplace below to contain the mess.

When you are inspecting the chimney make sure you look for mortar damage between the bricks, and spaces in the flashings around the flue or the base of the chimney. You may need to make some repairs by caulking the trouble spots.

The roof can be a problem area

While you're checking the chimney, take a close look at your roof. Damaged shingles should be replaced, and other small repairs made where necessary. Sometimes it's only possible to discover the damage through watermarks on ceilings inside your house. You should be able to do most small repairs yourself, but take extra care; falls from roofs are a major source of household accidents and injuries.

While roofing usually stays in good shape for many years, as the house gets older you may want to ask a

reputable roofing professional to do a thorough check to see whether you need major repairs. If they're needed, and they will be at some time, it's better to do them sooner than later.

Look for spaces in joints

Wherever two parts of different material come together on the outside of your home there is potential for damaging spaces that could let in water or drafts. Particularly check the areas around windows and doors, plumbing, exhaust and ventilation vents, roof and corner joints, foundation joints and any other places where there are intersections.

Spaces in these areas need to be filled with caulking or putty. It's not a difficult job, and if you do it properly it can last for four or five years. The key point is to check all those potential problem areas carefully and repair them quickly.

The inside job of winter proofing

Insulation, for the most part, is an inside job but keep it in mind when you are preparing your house for winter. Proper insulation can dramatically reduce your heating costs, and help make your home comfortable. Proper ventilation, combined with insulation, can lessen excess visible and hidden condensation which can be the cause of extreme damage to the structure of your home.

During the often harsh Ontario winters, there's nothing like a warm and healthy house to come home to. By inspecting and repairing potential winter problem areas now, you and your family can have an easy, enjoyable and trouble-free life in your home during the coming cold months.