

## WEATHER WATCH

## Prepare house for cool-weather season

John Godfrey  
Copley News Service

When T.S. Eliot wrote, "April is the cruellest month," chances are he wasn't thinking about home maintenance. The human condition, yes. Weatherstripping and insulation, no.

So while spring may indeed bring sorrow to your soul, it is winter that brings numerous home maintenance concerns to your doorstep. Windows, gutters, roofs, basements, plumbing and ventilation systems all require close inspection before the winter months arrive. Take the time to winterize your home now; otherwise, you might be singing some sad songs of your own.

Money is typically a good motivator, so let your bank account be your muse when it comes to fixing up your home for the long winter months.

Winter brings colder weather; colder weather sends most people to the thermostat. Trouble is, the more you use your furnace, the more you're going to pay in heating bills. The easiest and cheapest way to maximize the heat you purchase is to make sure the heat doesn't sneak out windows, doors and poorly insulated areas.

## START SMALL AND CHEAP

Weatherstripping and/or caulking doors and windows should be your first weatherproofing task each fall. An incredible amount of heat escapes through cracks

around these openings, and both caulk and weatherstripping are simple, effective money-savers. Exterior shrink film is also worth looking into, as it creates a clear barrier between your window and the elements.

In cold-weather areas, storm windows are virtually a must. If you already have a set of storm windows and don't mind loading them back and forth to the garage every year, keep at it. If your storm windows are on the their way out, consider buying combination two- or three-pane storm windows with sliding screens. These windows double (or triple) your insulation year-round, and when the warm weather returns you can leave the windows in place, slide the screen across and save your back.

The heat that doesn't escape through cracks in doors and windows might be sneaking out through your walls. Proper insulation will save money through the winter, but aside from cursory inspections of the attic, most people don't know exactly how much insulation they have in their walls.

"The Family Handyman Helpful Hints" (Reader's Digest) has come up with two easy ways to check.

First, try removing switch plates and outlet coverings and look for insulation around the electrical box. If that doesn't work, locate a low-visibility spot in your home — a closet on an exterior wall, perhaps — cut a small hole into the wall and

see what you find.

Even if you succeed keeping most of the heat inside your home, a shoddy ventilation system could keep the heat from being efficiently distributed around your domicile. If you haven't given your heating/ventilation system much thought in recent years, consider hiring a professional service to analyze your system. If your system is inefficient and needs replacing, go with a natural gas system — gas is approximately three and a half times cheaper than electricity.

## UP ON THE ROOF

The life expectancy of a roof can range from less than 20 years to well over 100 years, depending on climate and quality of materials. Numerous problems can crop up long before it's time to lay your roof to rest, however.

HouseMaster of America produces a fall maintenance checklist that includes straightforward advice on making sure that the roof above your head stays there and does its job.

First, check around the chimney, looking primarily for faulty flashings. Flashings are the metal shields around chimney and other roof openings, and are the most common cause of roof leaks.

Second, don't think you should seal attic louvers and vents. Many do-it-yourselfers overcompensate when it comes to sealing openings; sealing these vents will

trap moist air in the attic and cause rotting of the roof.

Also, check gutters and leaders to avoid water damage to your home. Blocked gutters should be cleaned immediately so as to prevent water damage to the siding. Rusty or leaky gutters need to be replaced before winter comes.

To obtain a copy of HouseMaster's Fall Maintenance booklet, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to HouseMaster, Fall Maintenance Booklet, 421 W. Union Ave., Bound Brook, NJ 08805.

## TINKER WITH THE INTERIOR

As winter encroaches, you'll probably be spending more time indoors than usual. If you've spent time making your home winter-efficient, you might as well spend a few moments to make it people-friendly, too.

Alan Boehmer, interior designer and stylist for Coming Home, thinks people should "try the unexpected" when it comes to livening up the living area. Boehmer recommends such tactics as painting one wall in a certain room with a bright color; changing standard light bulbs to reflectors in order to create a dramatic effect; hanging a quilt on the wall behind the bed in place of a headboard; and buying potted plants such as orchids or hyacinths.

"Celebrate your home!" he exclaims. Particularly if you've taken the time and spent the money to make sure it will still be standing when the weather warms and the blossoms re-emerge.

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