

If you live in the Northwest, here are maintenance jobs you should complete in spring and summer to prevent costly repairs and keep your home in top condition.

Certain home maintenance tasks should be completed each season to prevent structural damage, save energy, and keep all your home's systems running properly. What maintenance tasks are most important for the Northwest in spring and summer? Here are the major issues you should be aware of and critical tasks you should complete. For a comprehensive list of tasks by season, refer to the to-do lists to the right of this article.

Because spring and summer tend to be relatively dry in the Northwest, it's a good time to get outside and tackle home maintenance tasks. Apply your fresh spring perspective to all systems of your house, examining things carefully for signs of winter damage and performing routine yet critical preventive tasks.

Key maintenance tasks to perform

- **Follow up on moss treatments for your roof.** *Assuming you applied anti-moss treatments in the fall, spring is a good time to touch up the job, says Jim Katen of Benchmark Inspection Services in Gaston, Ore. Remove any remaining moss with a garden hose and a whisk broom. Whatever you do, don't use a pressure washer, Katen says; it's much too powerful and can damage the shingles and force water underneath them, where moisture can rot sheathing and roof joists.*
- **Tackle vegetation while it's still small.** *Spring is the best time to trim back shrubs and bushes that are close to the house. For trees, only do light pruning at this time of year, trimming back selectively at the branch tips (you'll want to remove large branches and do major pruning only in the fall). Be sure to keep vines off the house. "If you like wisteria, give it a trellis," Katen says. Some vines may be attractive, but they can do costly damage to the exterior surface of your house by holding in moisture that causes rot, introducing insects, or even rooting into the mortar between bricks.*
- **Inspect the roof and chimney.** *Now is a good time to look for shingles that are missing, brittle, curled, or damaged. For safety, wait for dependably dry weather before walking on a roofing surface, or stand on the ground and examine the roof through binoculars. If minor repairs are necessary, expect to pay a roofing contractor \$100–\$350.*

Check your chimney to see if it has sustained any damage to bricks, boards, and flashing. If you use your fireplace regularly, you need to have it cleaned or "swept" every two years by a chimney sweep certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America. Chimney sweeping prevents flue fires and creosote buildup that might cause dangerous carbon monoxide to enter the home. Chimney repairs run \$200 and up; a chimney sweep costs \$75–\$200.

- **Check gutters.** *Even if you cleaned your gutters in the fall, they'll likely need another once-over in spring. Be sure to check for areas where the gutters may have pulled away from the house, and for bent or twisted spots that allow water to puddle. You can usually make minor repairs to gutters yourself for \$50 or less by adjusting brackets, gently hammering out bent spots, and replacing any damaged sections.*
- **Schedule your biannual HVAC check.** *In preparation for the cooling season, have your HVAC professional come for your air conditioner's spring tune-up; expect to pay \$50–\$100. Ask him about the maintenance checklist he uses; it should include checking thermostats and controls, checking the refrigerant level, tightening connections, lubricating any moving parts, checking the condensate drain, and cleaning the coils and blower.*

Duct cleaning, while it probably won't hurt anything, is not necessary; be wary of contractors who want to coat the inside of the ducts with antimicrobial agents, as research has not proven the effectiveness of this method and any chemicals used in your ducts will likely become airborne.

Make sure your air filters are changed, and inspect and vacuum out all your floor registers.

- **Flush your water heater.** *Sediment builds up in your water heater over time, particularly if you have hard water. This can compromise the heater's efficiency and shorten its lifespan. Once a year, flush your water heater by attaching a garden or heater hose to the valve at the bottom of the tank (if you have a gas heater, be sure to turn the burner to the "pilot" setting first). Run the hose to the floor drain or outside the house and open the valve. Keep the water running through the heater until it runs clear.*
- **Check your GFCIs.** *A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protects you from fatal electrical shocks by shutting off the power whenever a disturbance in current is detected. They're the electrical outlets with two buttons in the middle ("test" and "reset") that should be present anywhere water and electricity can mix: kitchens, bathrooms, basements, garages, and the exterior of the house. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends monthly testing, which you're more likely to remember if you make it part of your spring routine.*

Test each GFCI by plugging a small appliance (say, a radio) into the receptacle. Press the test button, which should click and shut off the radio. The reset button should pop out; when you press reset, the radio should come back on.

If the radio doesn't go off when you press the test button, either the GFCI itself has failed and should be replaced, or the outlet is wired incorrectly and should be repaired. If the reset button doesn't pop out, or if pressing it doesn't restore power to the radio, the GFCI has failed and should be replaced. These distinctions can help you tell an electrician what the problem is—don't attempt the repair yourself if you don't have ample experience with electrical wiring.

Spending a weekend or two on maintenance can prevent expensive repairs and alert you to developing problems before they become serious. Be sure to check out the comprehensive seasonal to-do list following this article, and visit the links below for more detailed information on completing tasks or repairs yourself.

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