A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR HOMEOWNERS

Winter Preparation

HELPING YOUR HOME BE READY FOR THE SEASON AHEAD

PLAN
PREPARE
BE READY



Why Prepare for Winter?

Winter can be tough on a home. Freezing temperatures, snow, ice and shorter days can affect your roof, plumbing, HVAC system, exterior surfaces, and outdoor property. A little preparation now can help you avoid costly repairs, improve safety, and prevent surprises — like waking up to a cold house on a freezing morning.

Winter conditions vary across the country, so the timing and priorities will be different in every region. Use this guide as a framework and adapt the steps to your local climate and the specific needs of your home.



Small Steps Make a Big Difference

You don't have to do everything at once. Take time to look around your home, note any concerns, and complete a few key tasks each week. These small steps can help you avoid bigger problems and give you greater peace of mind all winter long.



Different Winters. Different Priorities.

Winter conditions vary by region. The recommendations in this guide are general in nature. Adjust the timing and focus based on your local climate and the specific needs of your home.

IN THIS GUIDE

HEATING & HVAC
Keep your home warm, efficient, and reliable.

PLUMBING & PIPES
Help prevent frozen pipes and water damage.

ROOF & GUTTERS
Manage snow, ice, and moisture.

EXTERIOR SURFACES
Check siding, windows, doors, and seals.

OUTDOOR PROPERTY
Prepare walkways, driveways, landscaping, and outdoor items.

WINTER SAFETY
Be ready for ice, power outages, and winter conditions around your property.

CHECKLISTS & NEXT STEPS
A simple guide to keep you on track.

Make a Plan for Your Home

LOOK AHEAD. FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS.
KEEP YOUR HOME READY.

Winter affects different parts of a home in different ways. A little planning now can help you avoid costly repairs, prevent safety issues, and keep your home running smoothly when temperatures drop. Use this guide to identify the areas that matter most for your home, take action where needed, and enjoy greater peace of mind throughout the season.

Every Home Is Different

Consider your home's age, design, location, and past issues when deciding what to focus on. You may not need to do everything, but every home can benefit from a seasonal check and a plan.

Timing Matters

The right time to prepare can vary by region. In colder climates, you may need to act earlier. In milder areas, you may have more time. Focus on the steps that apply to your home and your local climate.

A Simple Approach

THREE STEPS TO GET STARTED

1 → 2 → 3

LOOK
Walk around your home inside and out. Notice anything that needs attention.

PRIORITIZE
Focus on the items that could cause the biggest problems if left unaddressed before winter.

TAKE ACTION
Handle what you can, and schedule professional help when needed.

A Little Preparation Now...

can help you avoid big problems later — and keep your home safer, more reliable, and better protected all winter long.



What Good Looks Like

A home that is prepared for winter is better protected, more efficient, and more comfortable. Systems are working properly, potential issues have been addressed, and you can focus on enjoying the season instead of worrying about what might go wrong.

Protect Your Home's Key Systems

A LITTLE ATTENTION NOW CAN PREVENT BIGGER PROBLEMS LATER.

Winter weather can be hard on a home. Cold temperatures, snow, ice, and sudden temperature drops can affect your heating system, plumbing, roof, and exterior surfaces. Use this overview to focus on the key areas, with more details in the pages ahead.

Winter Reminder

Many winter problems don't develop overnight. Take time now to check these key areas so your home is ready for cold temperatures, ice, snow, or unexpected cold snaps.



HEATING & HVAC

Keep it warm, efficient, and reliable.

- Change or clean air filters
- Test the heating system before cold weather
- Clear debris from around the outdoor unit
- Check that vents and returns are not blocked
- Consider a professional tune-up

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- System runs reliably
- Good airflow in all rooms
- No unusual noises
- Outdoor unit is clear and accessible



PLUMBING & PIPES

Help prevent frozen pipes and water damage.

- Insulate exposed pipes in unheated areas
- Know where your main water shutoff is located
- Disconnect and drain outdoor hoses
- During extreme cold, follow local guidance for protecting vulnerable pipes
- Check for any signs of leaks

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- Pipes are insulated
- Outdoor spigots are drained
- You know how to shut off water
- No leaks or moisture



ROOF & GUTTERS

Manage snow, ice, and moisture.

- Keep gutters clean and clear
- Check for loose or damaged shingles
- Ensure downspouts direct water away from the foundation
- Watch for ice dams in colder climates
- Remove heavy snow buildup when safe to do so

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- Gutters are clear
- Roof is in good condition
- Downspouts are functioning
- No signs of ice dams or leaks



EXTERIOR SURFACES

Check siding, windows, doors, and seals.

- Inspect and reseal caulking and weatherstripping
- Check for drafts around windows and doors
- Look for cracks or gaps in siding, trim, or masonry
- Ensure exterior vents are clear
- Keep walkways and entry areas in good repair

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- Seals and weatherstripping are in good shape
- No noticeable drafts
- Siding and trim are intact
- Exterior vents are clear



Preparedness Pays Off

A little time spent checking these key systems can help you avoid costly repairs, keep your home safer, and give you greater peace of mind all winter long.

Outdoor Areas Matter Too

PREPARE YOUR PROPERTY FOR COLD, ICE, AND WINTER CONDITIONS.

Your home's outdoor areas take a beating in winter. Cold temperatures, ice, wind, and moisture can affect walkways, driveways, landscaping, and outdoor structures. A little attention now can help you prevent damage, keep your property safer, and make spring cleanup easier.

Look Around Your Property

Take a walk around your home. Look for areas that may need attention before winter arrives. What you notice now can help you avoid problems later.



WALKWAYS & DRIVEWAYS

Keep surfaces safe and in good condition.

- Check for cracks or uneven surfaces
- Consider sealing cracks before water freezes
- Keep surfaces clear of leaves and debris
- Understand the difference between salt and sand (see our Salt, Sand & Ice Melt Focus piece)
- Make sure handrails and steps are secure
- Have a plan for ice and snow removal (even if rare in your area)

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ Surfaces are in good condition
- ✓ Cracks are sealed
- ✓ Drainage is working
- ✓ Safe, well-lit walkways
- ✓ A plan for snow and ice (if needed)



LANDSCAPING & PLANTS

Help your landscape survive the season.

- Clean up fallen leaves and debris
- Prune dead or damaged branches (as appropriate)
- Consider covering sensitive plants in colder climates
- Water plants and trees before the ground freezes
- Consider seasonal lawn and landscape needs (timing varies by region and plant type)
- Prepare containers and move tender plants indoors

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ Plants are healthy and trimmed
- ✓ Beds are cleared of debris
- ✓ Sensitive plants are protected
- ✓ Trees and shrubs are in good condition
- ✓ Outdoor containers are stored or protected



FENCING, GATES & OUTDOOR STRUCTURES

Check for weather-related wear and tear.

- Inspect for loose boards, hardware, or damage
- Make sure gates open and close properly
- Check for rot or weakened posts
- Secure or store outdoor furniture
- Inspect decks, railings, and play structures
- Consider weather protection for grills and equipment

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ Fences and gates are secure
- ✓ Hardware is in good condition
- ✓ No visible rot or damage
- ✓ Outdoor furniture is stored or protected
- ✓ Decks and railings are safe to use

Don't Forget Drainage

Good drainage helps prevent ice, standing water, and damage around your home. Keep gutters, downspouts, and ground-level drains clear so water can move away from your foundation.



Important Reminder

Winter conditions can change quickly. Focus on what you can do now to make your outdoor areas safer, more durable, and easier to maintain — no matter where you live.

Before Winter Arrives

A QUICK CHECK TODAY CAN HELP YOU AVOID BIGGER PROBLEMS TOMORROW.

Use this checklist to walk through the key areas covered in this guide. It's not about doing everything at once — it's about knowing what to look for, taking simple steps, and being ready before winter conditions arrive.

HEATING & HVAC

- [ ] Test the heating system before cold weather
- [ ] Replace or clean air filters
- [ ] Check that vents and returns are clear
- [ ] Consider a professional tune-up

PLUMBING & PIPES

- [ ] Know where your main water shutoff is located
- [ ] Insulate exposed pipes (as needed)
- [ ] Check outdoor spigots and hoses
- [ ] Look for any signs of leaks

ROOF & GUTTERS

- [ ] Keep gutters clean and clear
- [ ] Check for loose or damaged shingles
- [ ] Ensure downspouts direct water away from home
- [ ] Watch for potential ice dam issues in colder climates

EXTERIOR SURFACES

- [ ] Inspect siding, windows, doors, and seals
- [ ] Check for drafts or gaps
- [ ] Ensure exterior vents are clear
- [ ] Keep walkways and entry areas in good repair

OUTDOOR PROPERTY

- [ ] Look over walkways, driveways, and steps
- [ ] Check landscaping, trees, and containers
- [ ] Inspect fences, gates, and outdoor structures
- [ ] Make sure drainage is working properly

BE READY

- [ ] Know your emergency and utility contacts
- [ ] Have flashlights, fresh batteries, and basic supplies
- [ ] Consider how your home would manage a temporary loss of heat or power
- [ ] Know what should — and should not — be used for emergency heating



Different Winters. Different Priorities.

Your winter may include snow and prolonged freezing temperatures — or it may be a few days of extreme cold. Either way, a little preparation helps protect your home and gives you greater peace of mind.

REGIONAL REMINDER

The timing and severity of winter conditions vary across the country. Homes with overhead power lines may be more vulnerable to outages from ice, wind, or falling limbs, while many areas have underground lines. Use the information in this guide as a starting point, and always consider local guidance for your area.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

This guide is just the beginning. Visit the Homeowner Mastery Library for more seasonal guides, Focus pieces, and detailed resources to help you understand your home, plan ahead, and make better decisions.

Explore the Homeowner Library ›



A Little Preparation Goes a Long Way

You don't have to predict every winter problem. You just want to know your home well enough to recognize what deserves attention before conditions change.

Happy winter — and be safe.