

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup

Your home can't take care of itself. Your monthly budget should include money for routine maintenance and repair for the house and yard. Plan to set money aside for the large, irregular expenses that occur normally as a house ages. Large expenses include interior and exterior painting, repairs or replacement of heating and air conditioning units and appliances, floor coverings, and roof surfaces.

Housing experts recommend setting aside 1 to 3 percent of the market value of your house each year to pay for maintenance and repair costs. While all of these funds may not be needed if your home is new, the accumulated amounts will help you pay for large future expenses, such as re-roofing or replacing a heating unit.

Home maintenance helps provide a healthy, safe environment as it protects your growing financial investment. It is much easier to prevent the development of unsafe, unhealthy conditions and structural damage than to pay medical or repair bills or both.

Who is responsible for home maintenance? The homeowner is responsible for what is owned. (Check your owner agreement if you live in a condominium or townhouse.)

Why should you do regular home maintenance?

1. To maintain the value of the property.
2. A well-maintained home usually sells more readily and usually brings a higher price.
3. A well-maintained house is more comfortable.
4. Regular care minimizes unexpected repair work and expense.

5. Regular small repairs keep costs from becoming larger.

6. A lender's agreement usually requires the owner to maintain the property to protect the lender's financial interest.

What is involved in home maintenance? Cleaning roof and gutters, cleaning or painting outside wall surfaces, cleaning floors and walls, vacuuming carpet, keeping sink and shower drains running freely, etc.

What is involved in home repair? Replacing broken glass in windows or doors, replacing warped or worn shingles, repairing a cracked or heaved sidewalk or driveway, replacing worn out faucets, repairing a broken stair rail, etc.

How often should you do maintenance and repairs? Maintenance and repairs should be done as soon as the need appears. This sooner-the-better practice helps prevent further damage and keeps repair costs down. At least once every 6 months, inspect your house and yard thoroughly to identify items needing work.

Who should do the maintenance and repairs? The homeowner who does his or her own maintenance and repairs saves money. Use the following sources to learn how to do your own maintenance and repairs:

1. Manufacturer's use and care booklets and

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- care guides from repair and cleaning products used.
- 2. Extension leaflets on maintenance and repairs,
- 3. Do-it-yourself (DIY) publications often available free in builder supply or hardware stores.
- 4. Home maintenance/repair books and videos in the public libraries or stores.
- 5. An experienced neighbor or friend.

If you are not able to do the work, hire a qualified, experienced repair person. Ask friends for personal recommendations. Check the telephone book, neighborhood newspapers, or special advertisements to find a reputable repair person. Ask for written estimates, and do not pay in advance for maintenance or repair services.

Include a maintenance/repair category in your monthly budget. If you do not need the money in a particular month, put it in a savings account for the periodic, expensive repairs that will happen as a house ages.

Inspect your house regularly. Develop a system where you inspect one area per month to ensure regular inspection of each area. Start at the foundation of the house and work upward and inward. The following list of areas to check may help.

FOUNDATIONS, BASEMENTS, and YARDS

- Water that strikes the house or drips down from the roof should drain away from the foundation walls. The gutter and downspout system should keep water from pooling around the foundation where it can create a moisture problem. Be sure gutters and downspouts are kept open and in good repair.
- Trim shrubs and bushes away from the foundation walls. Clearance space should be at least one foot.
- Check masonry foundation walls for cracks or weakened, crumbling mortar.
- Examine main support beams, support columns, and floor joists for evidence of bowing or warping.
- Check wood structural members, such as joists, beams, and columns, with a screwdriver or pocket knife to be sure wood is solid and free from decay.
- Check the inside and outside of all foundation walls and piers for termite tubes and damage. You may choose to have an insect-control company to do this each year.
- Check that the crawl space vapor barrier is in good condition and placed correctly. A vapor barrier is usually a polyethylene material (6-mil) that covers 70 to 100 percent of the crawl space, depending on the severity of the moisture problem.
- Examine the inside of basement walls for dampness or water stains indicating seepage or a leak.
- In most of North Carolina, water lines and outside faucets need some freeze protection or winter drainage. In addition, garden hoses should be drained and stored for the winter.
- Clean leaves and debris from around an outside heating/air conditioning condenser and trim back shrubs that may block air movement around the house.
- Yard care power equipment should be drained of fuel in the late fall or early winter and serviced according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Doorways, below grade window wells, and storm drains should be cleaned of debris or leaves.
- Driveways and walks should be checked for cracks, breaks, or erosion that may damage them. If asphalt surfaces need repairing, be certain you have the equipment and skill to do a lasting repair job. Otherwise, choose a reputable contractor. Unrepaired cracks in concrete can lead to further damage.
- Clean and repair garden equipment after the last use of the season. Remove dirt and rust, then store in dry area. Winter is a good time to file rough spots on hoes and shovels and to apply linseed oil to handles of garden tools. Thoroughly rinse pesticide and herbicide sprayers to prevent clogging, and rinse fertilizer spreaders to prevent corrosion.
- A septic tank needs periodic attention. Learn how to check for sludge and scum accumulation in the tank, and have solids pumped out of the tank as needed.
- Fences, gates, and retaining walls should be checked for ease of operation, condition of structure, and materials. Make repairs as needed.

EXTERIOR WALLS, WINDOWS, and DOORS

- Check bricks or blocks for cracked mortar or loose joints.
- Check siding for loose or missing pieces, lifting or warping, or any sign of mildew.
- Check painted surfaces for paint failure (peeling, chipping, blistering, chalking), water damage, or mildew.
- Examine all trim for tightness of fit, damage, or decay.
- Check the condition of caulking where two different materials meet, such as where wood siding joins the foundation wall, at inside corners, and where window and door trim meets the siding.
- Check the windows for cracked or broken glass, loose putty around the glass panes, holes in screens, and evidence of moisture between pane and storm windows.
- Check that windows and doors close properly. Examine all hardware on windows and doors, and lubricate moving parts.
- Check weatherstripping on windows and doors for damage and tightness of fit.
- Make sure that all window and door locks work properly. Each exterior door should have a one-inch deadbolt lock for safety.

ROOF

- Trim back tree branches that scrape against or overhang the roof. Keep branches away from chimney to avoid fire hazard and allow proper draft for safe and efficient chimney operation.
- Check for curled, damaged, loose, or missing shingles.
- Check the lower edge of roof sheathing for water damage.
- Examine all roof flashing and the flashing around chimneys, vent stacks, roof edges, dormers, and skylights.

- Make sure that the chimney cover (cap) is in good condition, and that it is tall enough to prevent creosote build-up.
- Check vents and louvers for free air movement. Clean screens and remove bird nests, spiders, insects, and dust.
- If there are wind turbines on the roof, check ball bearings. Clear gable vents of bird's nests and other obstructions.
- Check for damaged gutters, downspouts, hangers, and strainers. If needed, clean out gutters and downspouts. Make sure they are free from leaks and rust.
- Check the condition of paint on gutters.
- Examine television antenna guy wires and support straps.

INTERIOR SURFACES

- Check all ceilings and walls for cracks, loose or failing plaster, signs of leaks or stains, dirt, and finish damage.
- Check for cracks where ceilings join walls and where moldings attach to ceilings and walls.
- Check for odor or visible evidence of mildew or mold.
- Check for finish damage around cabinet pulls.
- Examine all joints in ceramic tiles and laminated plastics for adequate caulking. Have any of the tiles cracked or become discolored?
- Check caulking around sinks, bathtubs, and showers. Some types of caulking become brittle with age, and therefore useless as a water seal. Replace with a long-lasting resilient caulking material, such as silicone or latex.
- Check all floors for wear and damage. Are the floors level, bowed, or do they squeak when you walk on them? Particularly check where one type of flooring material meets another, such as where carpet or wood joins tile.
- Check stairs for loose treads, handrails, or carpeting, and repair as needed.

ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS and FIXTURES

- Check the condition of lamp cords, extension cords, and plugs. Also examine the appliance cords and plugs of vacuums, irons, mixers, washers, and dryers.
- Check for exposed wires and signs of wear in the “service box.” If you have a fuse that blows often or a circuit breaker that trips frequently, call an electrician to determine the cause and make the repair. Mark each circuit so you will know what outlets or appliances are included on each.
- If you experience a slight tingling shock when handling or inspecting any appliance or lamp, disconnect the appliance and repair it.
- Check places where wiring is exposed, such as in the attic. Look for exposed wires and wires with cracked insulation. Replace those in poor condition.
- If you have ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in outlets near sinks, the laundry, the shop, and the garage, check the GFCIs monthly and after an electrical storm.
- Check that all appliance cords are in good condition.

HEATING and COOLING SYSTEMS

- Have heating and cooling systems checked by a qualified serviceperson once a year or according to the manufacturer’s warranty and service recommendations. Failure to do manufacturer-recommended servicing may void warranties.
- Clean or replace filters. Check your owner’s manual for recommended procedures. Some filters should be replaced as often as once a month.
- Clean dirt and dust from around furnaces, air grills, and ducts.
- Regularly clean out fireplace ash pit.
- Have the chimney checked each fall before you use it. A build up of creosote and soot can be very dangerous. If you use your fireplace or woodstove regularly, a

yearly cleaning is recommended. Seek help from professional fire fighters or chimney inspectors if you have any doubt about the chimney safety.

- Check the attic to be sure that insulation or other material is not blocking free air flow through soffit vents, gable vents, or other attic vents. If light from the outside shines through each vent into a darkened attic, then the vents are clear.

PLUMBING SYSTEMS

- Check faucet and hose connections under sinks and toilets. Look for leaks at shut-off valves at sinks, toilets, laundry equipment, and main water shut-off valve.
- Is the water pressure adequate? Do all the drains run freely?
- In a basement or crawl space house, pull back floor insulation to check for leaks and wood damage around water supply pipes, drains, and water closet.
- Check sinks, tubs, and showers for proper drainage. Remove hair from drains. When necessary, use a snake or plumber’s friend to unstop drains—or call a plumber.
- Check the pressure relief valve on the water heater. Open it to see that it is working. Check for signs of leaking or rusting. Some manufacturers recommend that a small amount of water be drained periodically from the tank.

SAFETY SYSTEMS

- Test smoke alarm and heat alarm systems at least monthly. Replace old batteries.
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy for use in kitchen and near any wood-burning stove or fireplace. Check the extinguisher gauge for proper pressure.
- Keep flashlight(s) handy and in operating condition.
- Keep outside security lighting in good repair. Lighting exterior grounds helps discourage prowlers.

SUMMARY

Regular inspection and maintenance of your home will help you keep the house in good condition and maintain its value. Doing maintenance and repair as the need arises also keeps small problems from becoming bigger, more costly problems. Having and following a plan for home maintenance and repair will make the job easier. And finally, a well-maintained house will be more comfortable.

The checklists below can help you identify areas where work may be needed. For information on how to make repairs or handle maintenance, contact your county extension center.

If you would like additional information on selecting a home, you may wish to request other publications in the *A Home For Your Family* series. Single copies of North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service publications are available free of charge at your county extension center.

INSPECTION CHECKLIST (INSIDE)				
Item	No Problem	Needs Work	Cost	Date Done
Structure				
Floors				
Stairs				
Plumbing				
Heating/Cooling System				
Hot Water Heater				
Electrical				
Kitchen				
Bathroom(s)				
Windows				
Doors				
Walls/Ceilings				
Attic				
Basement				

Notes

INSPECTION CHECKLIST (OUTSIDE)

Item	No Problem	Needs Work	Cost	Date Done
Foundation				
Stone or Brickwork				
Siding				
Paint				
Porch(es)				
Windows/Screens				
Storm Windows/Doors				
Roof				
Chimney				
Gutters/Downspouts				
Garage				
Drainage				
Steps/Railing				

Notes

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