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HOME & LIVING

25 Great Ways to Save on Home Fix-Its

Any preventive work and regular inspections you can do now could save on expensive home repairs later

By Liza N. Burby, AARP

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Follow these tips to keep your home in tiptop shape for as long as you live there.

SAM ISLAND

Whether you've lived in your home for decades or are settling into someplace new, proactive maintenance tasks and repairs can help you stay one step ahead of expensive emergencies and replacements. An annual [Housepower Report](#) from Hippo Insurance Services, a licensed

insurance agency, found that unexpected repairs cost most boomers and Gen X homeowners around \$1,000 a year.

A good preventive step is to keep an eye on both internal and external home features, even paying for annual inspections of big-ticket items such as roofing, electrical, heating and cooling. In fact, when it comes to common maintenance and repair issues — those that involve water and moisture, structural and exterior, and system and appliance failures — prompt attention can help prevent costly replacements.



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Here are 25 ways you can stave off big repairs, plus tips on how to make minor repairs yourself. We've even given you estimated costs so that you and your budget aren't surprised in the future.

APPLIANCES

Many [appliance breakdowns](#) are due to poor maintenance, so taking a few simple steps to keep them running efficiently is a great and cost-effective idea, says Dennis Godnyuk, a licensed appliance technician and owner of Comfort Appliance Repair in Nashville, Tennessee.

1. Vacuum refrigerator coils

Dust and pet hair can get under your refrigerator, clogging the condenser coils that cool the appliance. That can be a fire hazard as it can cause your fridge to overheat, says Godnyuk. Once every six months, pop off the grill at the base and use a skinny vacuum attachment to clear it out. If you decide to move the fridge out to clean around it, Godnyuk recommends making it a two-person job to avoid straining your back; you could also hire someone else to move it out. If you have a high-end fridge with the coils up top, maintenance is probably not necessary.

Godnyuk also suggests having an appliance repairperson pull the fridge out and do a thorough professional cleaning with a brush and compressed air about every five years just to ensure all that dust and pet hair is cleared away. While refrigerators should last around 15 years, if you're doing constant maintenance, he says you could gain at least three to four extra years before any major issues arise. And with the cost of a new base model fridge starting at around \$700, it's worth the cleaning time.

2. Change and clean washing machine filters

Replace or clean your [washing machine](#) filter, which tends to collect items such as loose coins, lint and hair. While it's rare for a dirty filter to cause severe damage, Godnyuk says it can affect the

washer's operation if it's left untouched for years. "Cycles may get longer; clothes may come out smelly and not totally cleaned; and the worst outcome is the pump will get strained," he explains.

Eventually a worn-out washing machine pump can cause a breakdown, which may lead to costly emergency repairs or the need for a whole new appliance much earlier than you expected. A new pump, with labor, is likely to cost at least \$250, and a basic new washer starts at around \$600, says Godnyuk. A new filter, however, costs under \$20. Cleaning can help give the unit three to four additional years. Refer to the user manual to learn if your washer has a filter, where it's located, how to clean it and how often to replace it. Godnyuk says it should be easy for any 50-plus person to reach, as it's usually located on the bottom left of a front-loading washer or the back side for a top loader. Just remember to unplug the unit before working on it.

3. Clear out dryer vents

Most homeowners know to empty the lint trap on a dryer after every load. Godnyuk says that dust will still get through to the bottom, so vacuum the lint trap every six months using a narrow attachment on your vacuum cleaner. He suggests using dryer vent cleaning kits available at box stores, starting at around \$20.

You may need some help with this one. Once a year, move the unit out from the wall. Be sure to unplug it. Then, using a flexible dryer vent cleaning brush (get a kit with one that can extend 15 to 20 feet), stick the brush into the vent line (the duct that goes behind the dryer and connects to the house to exhaust the air out) and pull out the lint. Also, make sure to clear the vent cover on the outside of your house yearly, because if it's clogged shut it won't work properly and is a fire hazard. To clear out the entire duct line to the outside, Godnyuk says you may want to hire a professional for about \$150.

Cost-wise, if you do need a repair, this regular maintenance will save you 50 to 70 percent. "Most of the time when we show up at customers' houses, the dryers are clogged with lint to clear, so instead of the repair bill being \$120 to \$140, it's about \$280 to \$300," says Godnyuk. Considering a new dryer starts at around \$600, extra lint removal can prolong the unit's life as well.



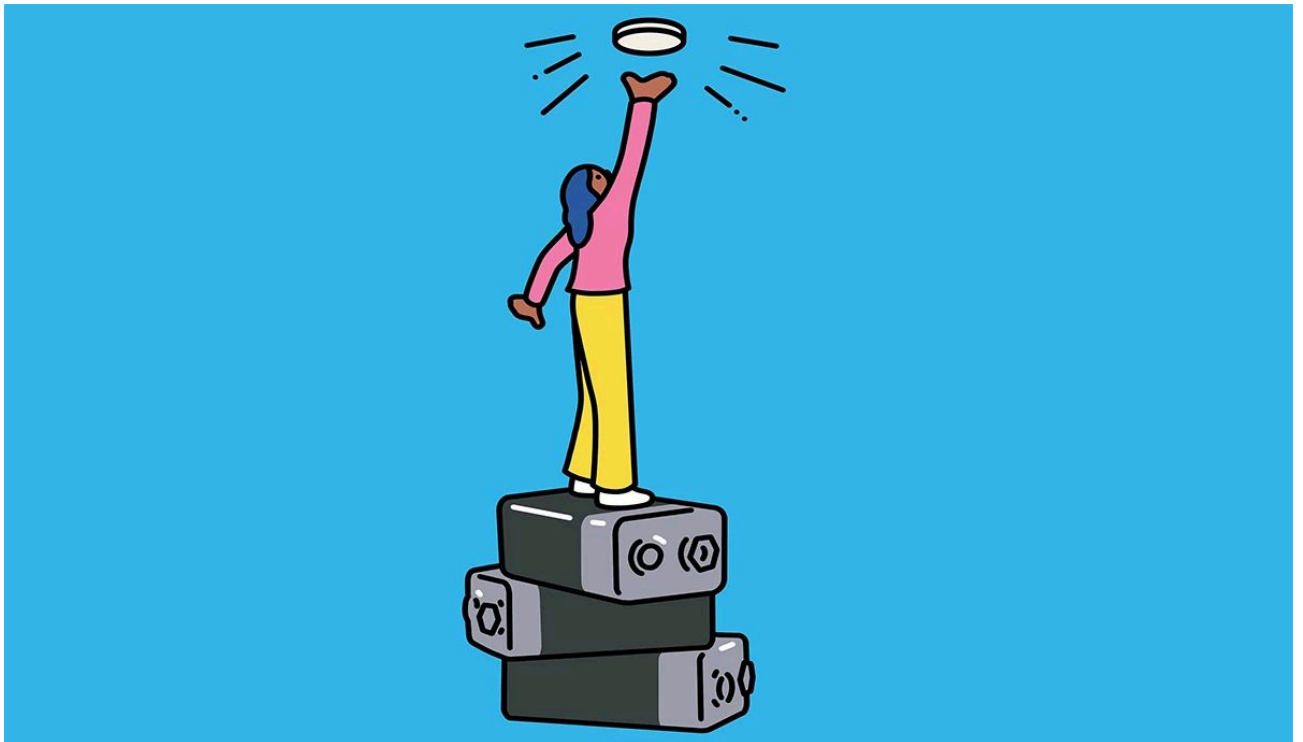
ELECTRICAL ISSUES

A home's electrical system can function well for 20 to 25 years, says Kolten Eden, master electrician at Denver's Doctor Fix-It Plumbing, Heating, Cooling & Electric. But, he continues, if you last had your electric breaker panel updated in 2000 or prior, today's home electronics can take a toll, because houses with older systems are not equipped for the amperage required for a

microwave on a kitchen circuit, for example. Problems like overheating breakers that are not the right size for the wire that's hooked to it can warrant a replacement. "Overall, the load of modern-day appliances [and] electronics on an old home's system can cause breakdown," Eden says. Rewiring a home is expensive and could cost anywhere from \$7,000 to more than \$20,000 for larger homes. An annual electrical tune-up — meaning you hire a licensed electrician to do a thorough evaluation of your wiring and breaker panel — is worth the average \$150 to \$300 to catch any problems early, says Eden. Ask your utility company if they offer this service. Meanwhile, there are other simple, related steps you can take.

4. Clearly label the breakers

Make sure every fuse in your panel is labeled properly, because in the event of an emergency, where something is sparking and not tripping a breaker as it should, you need to know which one to immediately turn off. Eden says your electrician should be able to do this as a service. Or make it a two-person job, where one person turns off an individual breaker and the other notes what it affects. Then either label each one with a label maker, or draw up a printed list that you tape to the inside of the door. This way, when you have a panel with 40 breakers, and something trips and turns off a major appliance or lights, you'll be able to turn it back on quickly.



Change out the batteries in your smoke detectors twice a year. (Ditto for carbon monoxide detectors.)

SAM ISLAND

5. Replace smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries

Homeowners may not realize that manufacturers of smoke detectors recommend replacing the units every 10 years, and carbon monoxide detectors after five or seven years, because they can't guarantee they'll continue to function past then. But you can add to the life of the units by changing the batteries every six months, using daylight saving time as a reminder. Don't wait until

they start chirping. A new battery-operated smoke detector costs between \$10 and \$30, and most basic carbon monoxide detectors are around \$30. “By replacing the batteries [as you] should, that prevents the need to replace units sooner than necessary – and taking a chance they won’t be functioning when you need them,” Eden says. This biannual task shouldn’t be done alone if you feel unsteady on a step stool or ladder.

6. Inspect plug-in surge protectors

While using plug-in style surge protectors on any of your electronics is important to prevent surges that could damage them, Eden says that anything with less than a five- to 10-year warranty – clearly stated on the package – is probably not the protection you need. While prices vary, they’re usually under \$100. That surge protection will save you money in the long run by protecting expensive electronics and other costly items if something does go wrong at the electric panel. Eden warns, “Always make sure that the indicator light is showing so that you know that it’s actually working as a surge protector and not just like an extension cord.”

STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Moisture and water issues in basements and crawl spaces can lead to issues with the foundation, says Dan Thrasher, CEO at Thrasher Foundation Repair in Omaha, Nebraska. Examining the foundation walls for cracks, water stains and signs of moisture will help you catch structural issues early. There are several other places around the house, both inside and out, that you can inspect and follow up with minor repairs.

7. Inspect for drywall cracks

“Drywall cracks are generally not a problem; the one exception is if they keep reappearing in the same spot and/or start extending more than 24 inches,” says Danny Niemela, a professional home remodeler and contractor, and vice president and CFO at ArDan Construction in Scottsdale, Arizona. That could indicate an underlying shift in your home’s structure, or moisture penetration. “Tap the walls in any areas around plumbing fixtures or windows. If there’s a hollow sound or it feels soft, cut a 6-by-6-inch test square to expose the backside. Look for mold or mildew or crumbling as a sign that moisture is entering,” Niemela says.

Finding and fixing drywall cracks before they get worse can save you \$5,000 to \$15,000 in mold- or structural-related repairs. Patch kits are less than \$20. But if the issue seems more widespread, contact a framer or roofer to look for underlying problems.

8. Check the concrete joints in the driveway

Thrasher says what often gets overlooked outdoors are the joints in concrete around the driveway: the seams left over from when it was first poured. They’re meant to ensure that if it cracks, it does so in a uniform way. But if water goes down through those joints, it can erode the dirt out from underneath the concrete, creating voids that make it start to move. Staying on top of this is especially important to avoid trip hazards or having to hire a contractor to patch the

concrete or grind down the cracks. Replacing concrete usually costs between \$8 to \$15 per square foot. For an average full driveway, that could be \$10,000 to \$15,000, and for just one section, \$1,500 to \$3,000. Prevent cracks by sealing the joints with quality caulking, either silicone- or urethane-based and made for outdoors. It's about \$6 to \$10 per 10-ounce tube, and each will take care of about 10 feet.

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9. Don't neglect patios and decks

Check your deck every spring if it's more than 15 years old, especially the posts and ledger board (the horizontal piece of wood that anchors the deck to your house), where water tends to collect, Niemela says. You can find soft spots or rot by probing them with a screwdriver. "Also, check for rusty fasteners or joist hangers under the deck. One loose bolt on a 3-inch post has the potential to fail and cause a serious fall risk," warns Niemela. "You can stop the whole deck from falling down later by replacing a few rusty connectors now. Parts cost \$20 to \$40."



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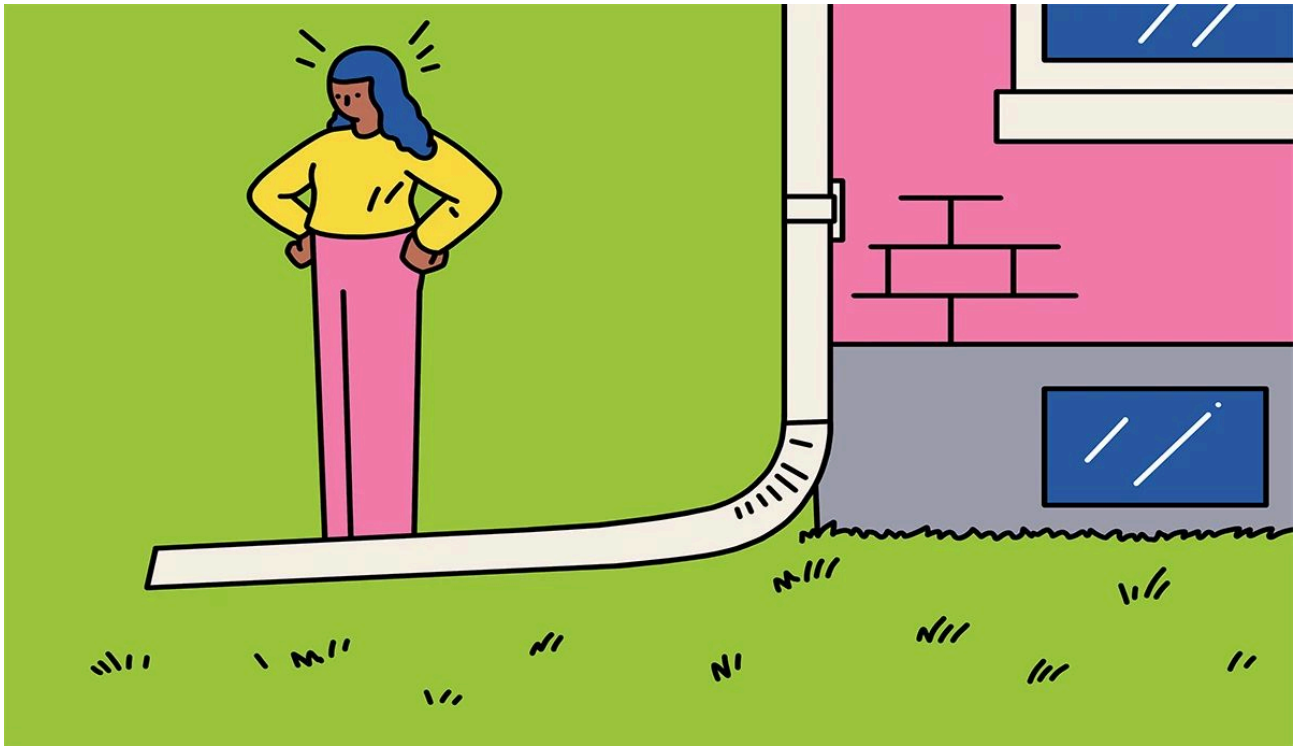
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[Wooden decks](#) also need periodic sealing to prevent moisture from entering and rotting the wood. Niemela recommends applying a clear sealing stain every two years. A \$35 five-gallon bucket covers about 250 square feet.

And fill any cracks in concrete patios with a crack fill sealant (around \$12 a tube to fill 30 feet of cracks, according to Niemela) as a preventive measure against concrete lifting unevenly due to moisture changes underneath, or a more serious foundation problem that can lead to trip risks. "A \$100 investment in sealants and small repairs each year can typically keep patios and decks from needing full replacements or concrete foundation repairs that cost \$10,000 or more," he says.

10. Slope downspouts and grading away from your home

Water management outside your home can prevent moisture from getting into the soil close to your foundation, which causes structural issues and water problems in basements and crawl spaces, Thrasher explains. So make sure your downspouts are either buried far enough away from the house, or, if they're on top of the ground, that they're going out at least seven to 10 feet away



To help prevent structural issues, position your downspouts at least 7 to 10 feet away from your home's foundation.

SAM ISLAND

from the foundation. “You want the water to run away from the house, not back toward it,” he says.

Grading and downspouts are easy to maintain and cost very little, but once a flood occurs in the basement or crawl space, it gets much more expensive and can't be addressed without hiring a professional. “A basement or crawl space repair averages around \$15,000,” Thrasher says. “And even damp basements and crawl spaces can increase risk of mold, leading to potential health issues.”

You'll also want to check that the grading of the soil slopes away from your house so the water from the rain and sprinklers doesn't sit next to the foundation. Adding soil and sloping it away can become part of your yard work. Depending on how much area you need to cover, buy bags of soil or get a truckload delivery and move it around in a wheelbarrow, filling in all the areas that slope toward the foundation.

WINDOWS AND DOORS

While homeowners can expect their windows and exterior doors to last at least 25 years, that doesn't mean you should neglect them, says Thomas Borcharding, owner of Homestar Design Remodel in St. Louis. Though you may never give your windows a second thought until you strain your back trying to open or close one or you feel the cold coming under your front door, inexpensive maintenance can extend their lives. Borcharding says that with installation, a replacement window averages \$800 to \$1,200, and doors are between \$1,000 and \$3,000. “They're one of the most expensive components of your home, so you have every right to ensure they're operating efficiently,” he says.

11. Inspect windows and doors

Borcherding recommends inspecting the tracks around your movable windows once or twice a year to make sure they're gliding smoothly. "If you notice that they're getting sticky or harder to operate, lubricating them with a silicone-based lubricant can reduce friction and make them last longer." Don't use petroleum-based lubricants, which will degrade rubber seals and lead to air leaks. Instead, use a silicone-based lubricant spray like WD-40 Silicone for about \$9 per 11 ounces. Door hinges need attention, too, and an 8-ounce, \$6 tube of white lithium grease can keep doors swinging open and shutting with ease.

Pay attention to glass that has condensation or a foggy appearance on the inside, or feeling a draft due to a broken seal. Borcherding says this is a common issue that can result from the frame shifting as the home foundation settles over time or from the rubber seal degrading, which eventually leads to the need to replace the window. If you want to put off the replacement window until your budget permits, Borcherding recommends using window insulation kits like Frost King, which is like putting a plastic film on your windowpanes that offers up a vacuum seal, for about \$15 a pack.

Borcherding also advises cleaning the areas where rubber seals meet the window, or where any movable part of your exterior doors meets the stationary sill. "Debris leads to air infiltration, which reduces energy efficiency," he says. Fortunately, it's an easy fix with either a wet paper towel or a small vacuum attachment. Make it part of your regular cleaning schedule, such as every time you clean your window glass. Since doors tend to see much more usage than windows, Borcherding recommends a more frequent cleaning schedule, like every one to three months.

12. TLC for garage doors

Garage doors are the heaviest moving part in a home, and the constant up-and-down naturally leads to wear and tear, says Randy Oliver, owner of Hollywood-Crawford Garage Doors & Openers in San Antonio. A basic but overlooked home maintenance task is lubricating the door's moving parts to prevent repairs. If you're comfortable being on a ladder, then spray them with garage door lubricant twice a year, or have someone else do it.

"But don't use WD-40. Stick to the kind specifically formulated for garage doors, like 3-in-1 Professional Garage Door Lubricant for \$10," Oliver says. "Spray the rollers [if they're steel], the hinges, the springs and the bearings on the bar above the door. Don't grease the tracks. Just wipe them clean so the rollers can roll freely."

Also check the bolts once a year, and tighten up anything that's loose. Oliver warns that if the bolts or screws are painted red, it means the component that is attached by this screw or bolt is under extreme tension. He recommends calling a professional to tighten them "to help prevent serious injury or even death."

Performing regular maintenance could save you a \$150 service call and help extend the life of these parts.

HEATING, VENTILATION AND AIR CONDITIONING (HVAC)

You want to keep your home temperature well regulated and energy-efficient. You also want to avoid having to replace [your heating](#) or cooling unit, which can be [costly](#). Getting a service contract for each can help, since you'll likely get a professional to provide ongoing maintenance to prevent wear and tear on your units. But there are steps you can take as well.

13. Change your furnace filters

Jason Kerr, president of Intelligent Service, a plumbing, heating, cooling and drain services company in Mount Prospect, Illinois, says many of the no-heat calls his company gets are from people who don't have a regular schedule of replacing their furnace filter. "The furnace will shut off when it doesn't get the proper air flow because it's clogged with cat, dog [and] human hair, dust and debris," he explains. "Understanding what the recommended filter and change interval is, and making sure that you stick to it religiously, is important."

That's because if your furnace filter gets too dirty it can't breathe, which is like being a heavy smoker and having difficulty breathing, says Jonathan Gilbertsen, an air quality expert and vice president of Chris Heating and Cooling in West Chicago, Illinois. "It can't run as long, it overheats, and then the unit short-cycles, meaning it overheats, cools off, starts, then overheats again. That causes early failure, higher energy bills and uneven heating in the home." A full furnace replacement typically costs between \$4,000 and \$10,000.

Gilbertsen says a simple rule is if the filter looks dirty when you check it, replace it. Most are located on a slot on the side or bottom of the furnace, inside the return air duct, or behind a grille in a hallway, ceiling or wall. Filters cost between \$2 to \$50 or more, depending on the type and how fine the filtration is. "Changing the filter regularly is one of the simplest, most effective ways to protect your heating system and your indoor air quality," he says.

14. Open all the vents

Many [empty nesters](#) close all the vents to the rooms they don't use, believing they're saving money on heating. "But what you're really doing is hurting that furnace, because it's trying to heat your whole house and you're restricting airflow, and that can shorten the lifespan," says Gilbertsen. "Every furnace is designed to heat that whole house. So if it's 2,000 square feet, and you close off 1,000 square feet, that furnace is now way too big for that portion of your home, and it's now producing too much heat."

You might save money in the short term, but long-term, the furnace will have more issues more frequently. An easy fix is making sure that at least 90 percent of the vents are open. "This may make your gas bill \$10 higher, but will end up saving you thousands in the long run by reducing repairs and replacement frequency," Gilbertsen adds.

15. Maintain your water heater

One home repair you should bet on — and be proactive about — is your water heater, since most last about 8 to 10 years, according to Aaron Adams, a master plumber and CEO of Aaron Services: Plumbing, Heating, Cooling in Atlanta. The first sign of failure will likely be a leak. “Sometimes that leak is significant and can flood whatever room or floor of the home they’re in. So if yours is approaching this age, you should start budgeting for a replacement,” he advises. A new conventional water heater with a tank costs around \$2,000 to \$2,500 with labor.

You can also improve water heater efficiency by flushing it once a year to reduce the sediment that tends to build at the bottom, reducing the capacity, says Gilbertsen. If you feel comfortable with this type of project (it is not something Gilbertsen suggests for a novice), attach a 6-foot garden hose to the spigot and let it drain into the floor drain or utility sink for 10 minutes. Then close the spigot and let it refill. The whole process should take about an hour — and should add three to five years to your water heater’s life expectancy.

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16. Care for the thermostat

Check on your thermostat seasonally to make sure the digital buttons are in working order. If you have a battery-operated version, change the batteries every six months to a year. “The thermostat is mission control for your HVAC system,” Kerr explains. “If it isn’t programmed or functioning properly, your system may not be heating or cooling your home effectively.” If it shuts down completely, you need to service it. Replacements cost between \$250 for a basic programmable thermostat and \$1,100 for a Wi-Fi-enabled smart thermostat, which alerts you to outages and allows you to monitor temperature and humidity remotely from your phone.

17. Clear the air-conditioning condenser

Filters in your cooling system need to be changed at least once a season, says Gilbertsen. It’s also important to make sure the outdoor condenser gets attention. “People like to plant gardens or trees around them to make it aesthetically pleasing, but that can inhibit performance, making it harder for the condenser to breathe.”

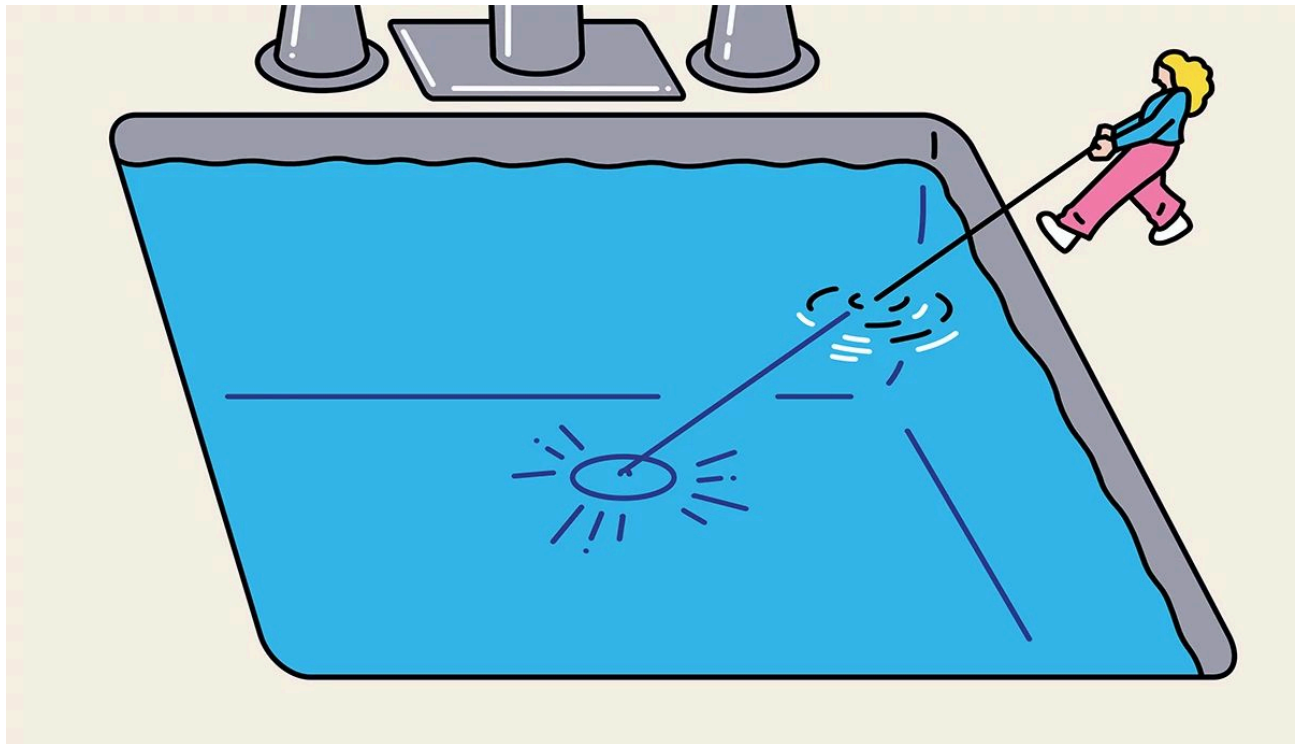
Trim all plants back at least 6 inches to give it room. Also, make sure nothing is hitting the unit. Gilbertsen says debris from cottonwoods in the Chicago area typically builds up on condenser coils, “and then it becomes like breathing through a wool blanket, so it’s working twice as hard to pull air through.” Just hose it all down at a 45-degree angle to avoid pushing debris into the unit, and keep an eye on it throughout the season, he recommends. It’s worth the extra time, since a new condenser with labor will cost a few thousand dollars.

18. Check the attic insulation

If it feels like your second floor is warmer or cooler than the first, checking the insulation is a good idea, Gilbertsen says. Newer homes now have about 18 inches of insulation in the attic, but some older homes only have about 6 inches, resulting in a draft coming from the ceiling. Insulation gets matted down over time because people walk on it, which ruins the integrity. You can check by noting if it is over the floor joists in your attic. Anywhere the floor joists are showing would indicate it's settled below 18 inches and needs to be refilled. Otherwise, rooms near the attic will have a warm/cold draft depending on the season, "causing the homeowner complaint of 'my upstairs is always 10 degrees hotter,'" says Gilbertsen. He recommends calling an insulation company for a quote on adding more, because this isn't a job you'll want to do yourself. The cost for 1,000 to 1,500 square feet is about \$2,800 to \$3,500.

PLUMBING

Plumbing tends to be an out-of-sight, out-of-mind part of our homes, and that's what can lead to something going wrong very quickly. Proper care and maintenance of the plumbing and drainage systems can prevent expensive disasters like drain replacements, which are often upward of \$5,000, says Kerr. Even a standard plumbing repair can run you \$500 or more. Fortunately there are inexpensive steps you can take to at least postpone some big-ticket expenses.



Once or twice a week, stop up your sink, fill it as high as you can with water and let it drain. It'll help purge all kinds of sludge from your pipes.

SAM ISLAND

19. Flush your sink pipes

The plumbing in homes built before water-conservation standards were put in place was designed to handle the deluge of water that came from filling a sink to wash dishes and then draining it, says Kerr. "Now we just flip the faucet on for a couple seconds, rinse something off and

stick it in the dishwasher. The drain lines for a kitchen very rarely see large volumes of water anymore.”

His solution is to put the stopper in the kitchen sink, fill it to the top with water, and then release it. “That allows for a large deluge of water to make its way down the drain, and it will work well to flush out those lines, pushing any food particles or grease down the drain, preventing backups.” Getting into the habit of doing this once or twice a week can save you \$300 to \$600 for a service call.

20. Clear the drains

Is there a sewer smell when you turn on any faucet? Is your bathtub or sink draining slowly? Homeowners can easily tackle these troubleshooting tasks. For the former, Kerr advises turning on all your faucets, especially the lesser-used ones, for about a minute. If that doesn't clear up the smell, you may need to call a plumber, since that could mean the sewer is backing up.

For the drains, which can get clogged with soap residue and hair, Kerr recommends a Drain Weasel. Just shove the bendable plastic “snake” past the clog and pull back up all the junk you want out of there. It's available at most box stores for under \$10. You can also use a bio-friendly enzyme treatment to clear those pesky clogs. Kerr says it's about \$50 for a 64-ounce container that should last the average home about a year and should be used as directed.

21. Caulk sinks and tubs

If you notice a stain on your ceiling in the room below the bathroom but don't see any obvious signs of a leak, check the caulking around your tub and the tiles, says Adams. It could be cracked. Even a small hole can lead to big problems. He recommends clearing away the old caulking, then cleaning the area and letting it dry completely. A 10-ounce tube of 100 percent silicone caulk costs around \$10. Apply it at a 45-degree angle, then let it cure (dry) for at least 24 hours. If caulking doesn't solve the leak, you'll probably have to call your plumber to determine if the issue is more extensive. Keep in mind that a plumber can often also caulk if you ask — at an additional cost of about \$150 to \$200.

22. Become aware of your shutoff valves

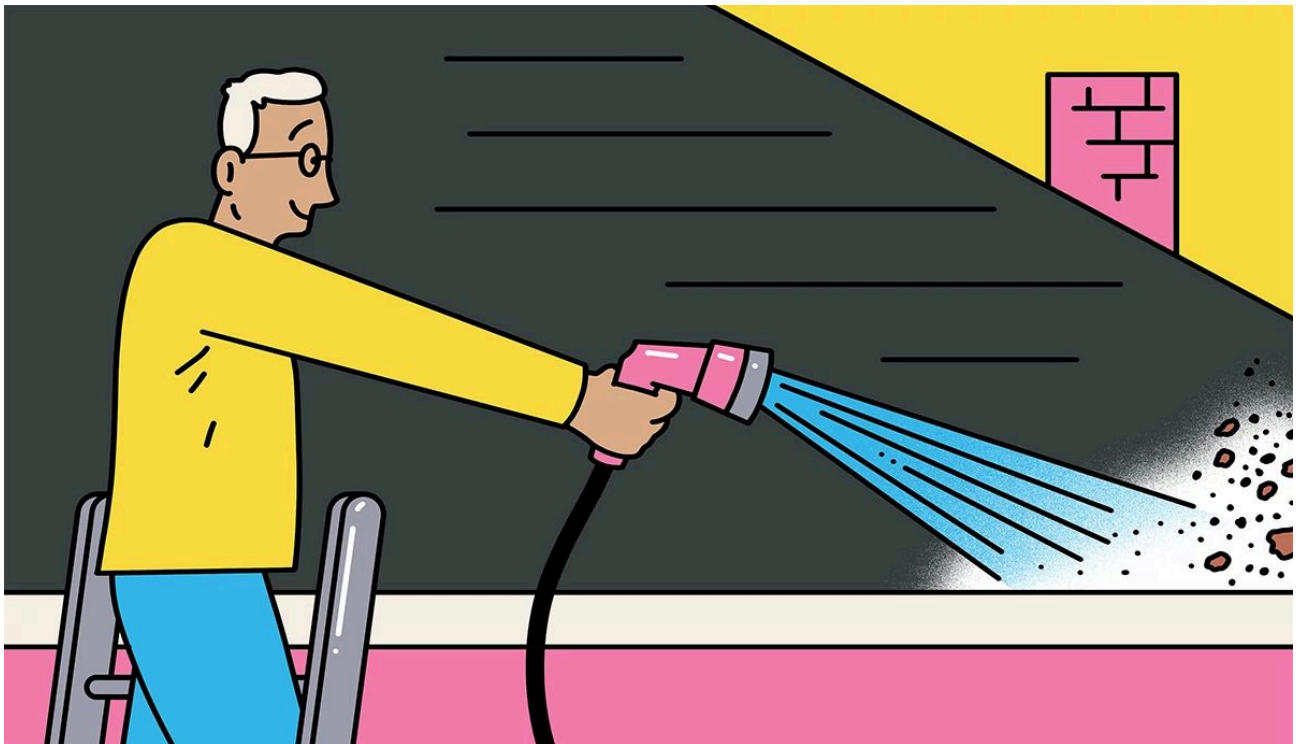
Learn how to shut off the water to your home in the event of a plumbing emergency to prevent extensive and costly damage, Adams recommends. If the leak appears to be coming from under the sink or the toilet, it's easy to turn off the stop valve right there. If that doesn't work, and the leak is from the pipe coming to the area, you'll need to locate your main shutoff valve. Adams says that in many homes it's on the wall where the pipe comes into the basement from the street.

Check to see if the valve is a ball valve style rather than a gate valve. Adams explains that gate valves, which have round handles, are an older style that's prone to breaking. “This means that if you have a plumbing emergency, you may not be able to turn off the water; or if you do, you won't be able to turn it back on again because most break in the off position,” he says. These shutoff

valves involve highly pressurized water and require special tools to make the change, so you'll need to hire a plumber, says Adams, adding that "there's no room for error." That repair could cost \$250 or more.

ROOFING

Because the warning signs of most roof failures are nearly invisible to the untrained eye, Nathan Borntreger, a licensed roofing contractor and owner of SonShine Roofing in Sarasota, Florida, recommends having your roof inspected annually by a trustworthy, experienced roofer. Besides, there are solid safety reasons for having a professional be the one to get up on your roof. Borntreger says the typical \$200 cost "dramatically reduces the odds of a surprise five-figure failure down the line and helps to spot problems early and keep up with recommended maintenance." There are also things you can watch for on your own without climbing onto your roof, and they cost nothing to do.



Try to remove the gunk from your gutters and other rooftop waterways at least a couple of times a year.

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23. Clear the gutters and roof valleys

One task homeowners can do to extend the lifespan of their roof is to clear the waterways of debris. Unkept gutters and valleys can accumulate dead foliage, dust, dirt, soot and other particulates that can build up over time and prevent water from draining properly. Borntreger recommends doing this two to four times a year, depending on the level of environmental debris your home is exposed to. This may involve climbing a ladder, so if you don't feel safe doing it on your own, hire a professional for \$100 to \$300.

24. Look for internal leaks

Since the interior of a home is usually where urgent issues show up first, Borntreger recommends doing a quick visual scan every month or so. Look for discoloration, chipping paint and warped trim on the ceilings and walls. Pay special attention to corners, edges, around windows and ceiling fans, where subtle stains are easy to miss. “If you spot any of these indicators, don’t just cover them with a coat of paint,” he says. “These are signs of water intrusion, which means you need to go deeper. Catching a leak early is your best defense against a large repair bill.”

25. Check the attic

Early signs of roofing issues can show up in your attic, so take a peek there a couple of times a year. Before you start looking around, take a sniff. A faint mustiness is common in humid climates, but a strong, sour or “wet” odor shouldn’t be written off. This is likely a sign of prolonged water intrusion or humidity buildup, Borntreger says. Check during daylight hours so that tiny holes are easier to spot if sunlight is poking through. For a more thorough review, bring a good flashlight, looking for darkened or stained sheathing, moldy or clumped insulation and softened or warped wood. Check for oxidation (rust) on nails, screws and metal plates, as well as signs of insect activity or fungus.

“Any combination of these signs is a strong indicator that your attic is harboring too much moisture, which can dramatically shorten your roof’s lifespan and drive up energy costs,” Borntreger says. This level of inspection can be hazardous if your attic requires that you crawl around, so use common sense.

Liza N. Burby is an award-winning journalist who writes about business, real estate, social issues, lifestyles, education, health and science. Her work has appeared in publications like AARP magazine, Newsday, Better Homes & Gardens and Writer's Digest, as well as university and hospital publications.

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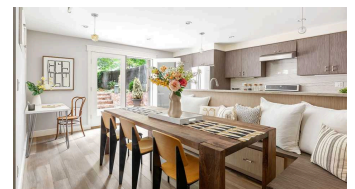
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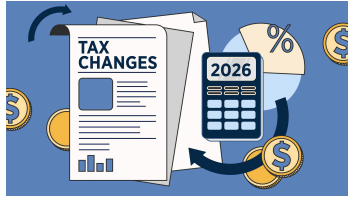
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Conversation

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karend788846

2 DAYS AGO

How about changing a sink faucet? Can I do that myself?

REPLY | 2 Replies | 0

roachme

2 DAYS AGO

Reply to karend788846

Probably. My 19 yo daughter changed one while I was deployed overseas. The problem is usually getting an old style out, not putting the new one in.

REPLY | 1

EPT92

23 HRS AGO

Reply to [karend788846](#)

If you are somewhat mechanically inclined and have the proper tools, give it a shot.

What is the worst that would happen? Just be sure to know where the water shut off valve is.

If you break something or can't complete the mission, then you may need to call for reinforcements.

Be aware that today's instructions are more like cartoons. Pictures with no words to help you along.

Before starting, you might want to go to you tube and watch some videos. You may even find one with the same faucet you are tryin...

[Read more](#)

[REPLY](#) |  0

GAKKIEZ 

3 DAYS AGO

Good list of preventative measures! Some of these are simple but many may require additional costs to hire someone to actually do them. As I've aged , it's getting harder to change smoke detector batteries or furnace filters. Even hard wired smoke detectors have a battery back-up. Furnace filters can have different access points. I have difficulty even finding someone to assist in flipping a mattress.

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