



## Fall Maintenance Tips

By Rick Bunzel, Mountain View Property Inspection

The cooler temperatures of September present a perfect opportunity to catch up on home exterior maintenance. Throughout the summer, I have been making mental notes of peeling paint, leaking gutters and trees that are growing a little too close to the house. Like most homeowners, I procrastinated because it's too hot during the day and those West Nile laden mosquitoes are out in the early evening. Unfortunately, as the weather cools those excuses go away. Here are five tips to help you with your fall maintenance:

### 1. Maintain your gutters.

Water leaking into a home is a major cause of damage and is easy to prevent. If you are able to inspect your gutters, do so. If you are not physically able to, hire someone to do it for you. You would be amazed at what I see in gutters during home inspections. Airplanes, bottles, dolls, balls, dog toys, clothing and just about anything else that can be thrown into the air! Once these objects make it to the downspout they create a "logjam" and eventually block all the water from draining. Remove all debris so water can properly drain, which minimizes standing water and slows the freeze/thaw expansion process that occurs in cold weather. Clogged gutters can cause landscaping, lawn and shrubbery, walls, foundation, basement, crawl spaces and existing gutter system damage. Consider installing "gutter guards," which are screens that prevent debris from entering the gutter. If you have gutters that are leaking they can be sealed with silicone sealer. Although patch kits are available for repairing rust holes in steel gutters, the patches will prove to be only temporary. Consider aluminum seamless gutter or plastic gutters, which can be purchased at Home Depot or Lowe's. Last but not least, check your gutter extensions or drains. During the summer the extension gets knocked out of place or damaged. Drains frequently get disconnected through normal earth movement.

### **A Safety Tip**

*Remember that gutter maintenance often means working on a ladder. As you work, make safety a priority. Make sure your ladder is firmly planted, and don't stretch to make repairs. Having a second person to "foot" the ladder and hand you tools is recommended.*

### 2. Trim your trees and remove dead branches.

Trees can tear up a roof faster than anything other than a hailstorm. Many people like the idea of having trees close to the house to give that "forest feeling" but if the tree is touching the house it will cause damage. Tree branches will strip shingles from a roof, tear up trim and can break windows. Inspect larger trees

that have large branches overhanging your home. High winds and heavy snows could cause those limbs to break and if so, they will be falling on your home! Keep an eye out for large dead branches in trees; detached branches hanging in trees; cavities or rotten wood along trunks or major branches; mushrooms at the base of trees; cracks or splits in trunks. If you see any signs of hazards, call a professional tree service to inspect the tree.

### 3. Inspect your roof.

Be proactive and prevent emergency and expensive repairs. Roofs can be inspected from the ground with binoculars or if you can safely do so, from a ladder. Things to look for include raised, damaged or loose shingles; gaps in the flashing where the roofing and siding meet vents and flues; and the chimney (especially at the joints, caps and washes). If you see any signs of damage, call a professional to repair the damage.

### 4. Inspect your home's exterior walls.

Look for possible weather-related damage, like cracks and loose or crumbling mortar. Wood trim and siding can suffer from deteriorating paint or become loose. Pay special attention to the south and west exposures as the sun will accelerate the deterioration in those areas. Windowsills may be cracked, split or decayed. Caulk exterior joints around windows and doors. Caulking helps keep your house weather-tight and prevent water intrusion. It can also help keep insects and other "critters" out of your house.

### 5. Heating and Air Conditioning Checkup

Most likely at this point you know whether your air conditioner is working properly but when was the last time you checked the compressor? Shrubs, plants too close or blocked cooling fins all degrade its efficiency. Trim shrubs and plants back and take your garden hose and wash the cooling fins down. A broom with soft bristles will also work.

This is also a good time to schedule your heater's annual maintenance checkup. Heating companies are usually taking a breather between seasons and they may even offer "early bird" specials on this maintenance. At minimum you should change your filter. Dirty filters reduce the overall life of your heater dramatically. A filter should be changed at least every 4 months.

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