

February home-maintenance checklist

The transition between winter and spring is the time to get a jump on moisture damage and heat loss, make quick work of organizing storage areas and work in some garden prep before spring.

By Marilyn Lewis of MSN Real Estate

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Don't let winter slip away without using the cold, wet weather to help you detect where your home is leaking water and heat, giving you a chance to seal it up tight and develop a wish list for energy-saving improvements. Your first order of business inside your home is to make sure no water is getting in.

Carefully check every spot where condensation or water could enter your living areas and storage spaces. Take along a pad of paper and a pencil and take detailed notes as you scrutinize ceilings, under the roof, under the eaves and along window and door frames and ventilation seals. Be particularly careful to check under toilets, sinks, tubs and showers. Use a flashlight to check the crawl space or basement walls and floors and the underside of the first-story floor. You're looking for visible moisture and for stains caused by moisture. When you find something, the remedy will depend on the source of the leak. You may just need to recaulk around a tub or window, or you may need to call a plumber to replace a leaking fixture. ([Compare prices of caulk guns on Bing Shopping](#))

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Here are some other tasks to tackle inside your home this month:

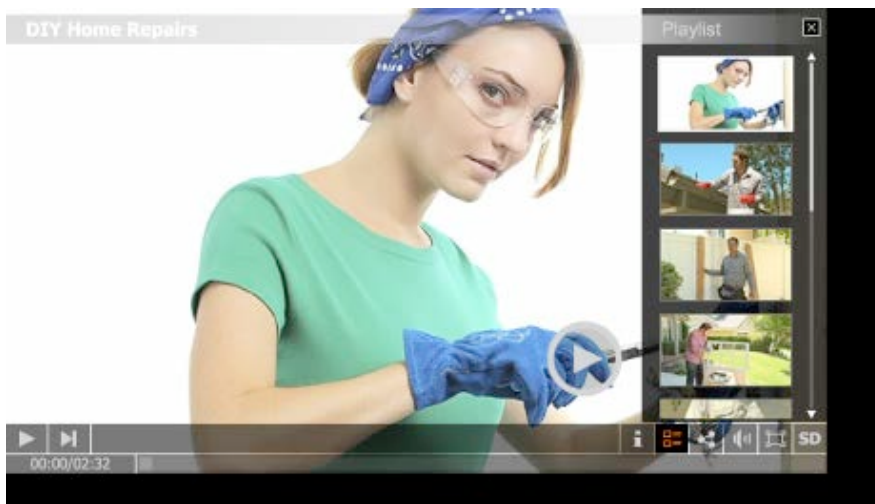
Change the shower curtain. While you're checking for leaks in the bathroom, see if the shower curtain needs replacing. Damp shower curtains can grow unhealthy mold and mildew and

contribute to mold problems in the tub and shower, so swap yours out periodically and make sure to open and air out the shower enclosure when you're done bathing. (**Bing:** [Identify toxic mold](#))

- On our blog 'Listed': [Woman goes to jail over messy yard](#)

Batten down the hatches. Find and seal energy leaks. Grab a pad and pencil to note any spots that you can't address right away. Arm yourself with a tube of caulk to fill small cracks and a spray can of insulating foam sealer for larger gaps. Tour your home feeling for cold air entering through cracks in chimneys and window and door frames, and cracks around appliance vents, electrical and plumbing fixtures and furnace ducts. Remedies might include adding weatherstripping to a door frame or applying fresh caulk to window frames. (**Bing:** [How to make your windows draft-proof](#))

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Date: 9/25/2011 Duration: 002:0032 Video By: Your Money Resources for you to learn to make simple repairs yourself.

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Run the numbers. Get an idea of how much energy a home the size of yours typically uses by entering detailed information about your dwelling into the [Home Energy Saver tool](#). The tool lets you calculate your home's energy use. It also lets you estimate the energy savings from a variety of improvements, such as adding insulation, replacing windows and purchasing high-efficiency appliances. Experts from the Energy Department, the Environmental Protection Agency and other state and federal agencies collaborate in sponsoring the site.

 [Read: The essential guide to weatherstripping](#)

Conduct a home energy audit. If you've sealed the obvious leaks and your home is still inefficient, you'll get more detailed information from a professional energy audit. The auditor can recommend energy-saving improvements and point out those that will most improve efficiency. Learn more about energy audits and how to find a professional auditor [at the Energy Department's Energy Savers site](#). Auditors use a [blower door test](#), a [thermographic scan](#) and, occasionally, a [perfluorocarbon tracer gas air-infiltration measurement technique](#) to learn how weather-tight your home is. **Tips:** Check a contractor's references thoroughly and check for complaints at the [Better Business Bureau](#) and your state attorney general's consumer protection office (find your attorney general through [the National Association of Attorneys General](#)). The Energy Department advises finding a contractor who uses a calibrated blower door and who does thermographic inspections. Expect to pay roughly \$300 to \$500. In some cities, utility companies or government agencies do the work or help with the fees. For example, in Austin, Minn., the [city utility performs and subsidizes audits](#) so homeowners pay only \$50 or \$150, depending on the type of audit. Austin screens and recommends contractors, too. (**Bing:** [Find a repair profesional](#))

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Clean out storage areas. Get a head start on spring cleaning by attacking a cluttered storage space. Whether you go after the garage, attic, laundry room or garden shed, your home benefits when you get rid of rusting tools, leaking fluids and household chemicals. Start by taking everything out of the space and piling it up outside. Clean the empty space, then go through the items, trying to let go of everything you haven't used in the last year. Make four piles: stuff to keep, trash, donations and recycling, and hazardous waste. Open paint cans to dry the paint completely before disposing. Recycle batteries so the lead they contain doesn't contaminate ground water. Rules for disposal vary by locale. Call your waste-disposal company or the county landfill to learn where and how to dispose of hazardous waste.

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Get a fire extinguisher. Better yet, get several. Buy fire extinguishers for each type of fire you might encounter at home and place them where you'll need them. For example, use the A-B-C class for living areas and in workshops and garages. For the kitchen, get a specialized extinguisher capable of putting out class B (grease) and C (electrical) fires. For living and sleeping areas and fireplaces, get a multipurpose A-B-C that also works on fires consuming wood, cloth, trash and paper. (Read "[9 tips to be prepared and stay safe in home emergencies](#).") Inspect extinguishers regularly to ensure the gauges read 100%. The city of Renton, Wash., explains [how to purchase, use and service and where to place residential fire extinguishers](#).

Outside

February is a transitional month in much of the U.S. Winter storms may continue to cause damage to home exteriors and landscaping, but spring is in sight and you can begin working in the garden to prepare for warmer weather.

Check for storm damage. While you're outside, walk around the house looking for missing or damaged siding and shingles. Remove fallen branches and storm debris from around the house.

What's your home worth?

monthly if your home is surrounded by trees. For more information, see "[Gutter cleaning and care](#)." (**Bing:** [Shop for gutter guards](#))

Clean the gutters. It's easier to scoop up the leaves and debris in your gutters when the stuff is wet, so pull out your ladder and clean the gutters after a soaking rain. You should do this at least twice a year, but may need to do it

Mulch garden beds. By the end of the month, the ground has thawed in many parts of the country and it's time to start warding off weeds. If you didn't mulch in early winter, now is the time to add a layer to discourage weeds.

Prune ornamental grasses. Clean up pampas grass and other ornamental grasses by cutting them in early spring, before new green shoots get tall. Cut the old grass about 2 to 4 inches above the new green shoots. Wear gloves and use a chain saw on big, unwieldy pampas grasses. Tackle others with pruning shears or hedge clippers. Cut straight across the top of the clump and rake away the dead stalks to clean up the plant.

Professional Services

Try corn gluten meal on weedy garden paths. Corn gluten meal, a yellow powder or pellet, is used in livestock feed but it also is an organic "pre-emergent" weed control. You'll find it in garden supply or agricultural supply stores. Spread it on garden paths (find inspiration for garden paths from this slide show on [16 beautiful garden paths](#)) or beds where you do not want seeds to take root. Read label directions for correct application. Corn gluten meal stops seeds from forming roots when they are germinating. It also contains nitrogen that feeds the established plants in your garden. Apply it early in the season: If you wait until weeds have sprouted, it will be ineffective. Avoid using it on beds where you have seeded ornamentals or where you are counting on plants to self-seed from last year. Learn more at [Iowa State University's Department of Horticulture Corn Gluten Meal Research Page](#).

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ThemsTheBreaks

Feb 3, 2012 8:08AM



Looks like Wealthy copied sky's remarks. Wealthy isn't Wealthy if he can't pay for 2 fridges, and he says single yet "our" and "we ". If foreign (note his "B" isn't english letter) people want to spam sites they should at least copy something original. We insulated double layers in attic, put the timer on the attic fan to "always on" to better keep any chance of moist air flowing quickly outside. I do need to seal outside doors better but not until spring.

2 0

Just saying . . .

Feb 3, 2012 4:55AM



@MarilynMoney. Check out the Department of Energy's Energy Savers website. It contains a lot of great information, including doing your own energy audits for your home, links to helping you find professional auditors, and even preparing for your professional energy audit. And then after you have done your own or had a professional do the audit, it has great information on how to carry out those actions you need to do. This helped me a great deal when we were trying to make out home more energy-efficient and our electric bills have certainly shown a difference.

Before hiring a professional, however, you might want to contact your utility company or your state energy office to inquire about any programs in your area that might provide no-cost or low-cost audits. A lot of organizations around the country are providing these but they may have certain eligibility requirements that you would need to meet. But it is worth checking in to . . .

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MarilynMoney

Mar 4, 2010 3:10PM



I'm interested in the energy savings that people mentioned above. Skywarrior, how did you choose a company to do your energy audit? I wonder what they charged and what tools they used to audit your house?

Marilyn Lewis

3 6

Songstar

Feb 24, 2010 4:30AM



In Oregon and Pacific Power, we have a choice of which energy source we want to buy from. I split 50/50 between hydro and wind. Cost is little more than the standard power, however, much more environmentally friendly. It has been very dependable.

6 7

DianeY

Feb 18, 2010 6:50AM



We have a Whirlpool frig that is 20 years old - wondering if it should be replaced with a more energy efficient one? It has been great - no problems in

the 20 years even with the ice maker. Does anyone have information on this?

 8  6

Mark (hesback)

Feb 17, 2010 6:48AM



A fan costs less than \$3.00 a month to run continuously. Sorry for the typo.

 6  4

Mark (hesback)

Feb 17, 2010 6:46AM





Weather permitting, Feb, is a good time to check the air conditioner unit . Clean the exterior, and keep it covered, you will eventually get to use it, and you'll feel a bit better about the weather doing this.

Also, ignore the decorators and keep your ceiling fans. A fan costs less than 43.00 a month to run all the time. A fan on slow speed moves the air, and can save \$10.00 to \$50.00 a month on heating. In the summer, it can save the same on cooling, depending on insulation, windows etc.

Also, NEVER paint a cast iron radiator. Automatic loss of 10% efficiency. And covering it with a pretty cabinet or grid will cost you 30% more. You bought the place for the charm, a cast iron radiator is part of it. Decorators make pretty, not efficient.

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skywarrior

Feb 13, 2010 10:48AM



We had an energy audit done. Based on his recommendations we replaced our two 30 yr old fridges,,turned down the freezer setting and put our waterfall pump on an 8 hr timer. It cut our electric bill by 45% which meant we saved enough in 2 months to pay his bill :). We are now working on the cost of the two new fridges.

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