



How to:

**Winterize Your
First Home**

HOW TO: WINTERIZE YOUR FIRST HOME

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WELCOME HOME

Your [first home](#) is more than a place to live. It's where you learn how to mow the yard the "right way." It's where you figure out whether a dishwasher is a necessity or a luxury. That first house is where you begin to fully realize the benefits – and responsibilities – of adulthood through home ownership. Now that fall is here, it's time to start thinking about how you will handle winter in your first home.

Yes, you could simply let the snow fly and play catch up all season out in the cold, windy winter (at least that's how it is in our northern states and our home state of Michigan). You'll end up with icicles and ice dams and possibly water damage in the spring, simply because your gutters and downspouts are clogged. Or you could get up on the roof in the winter and brave the icy pitch. You might even consider just knocking the icicles off the roof and make it a game. But all of these solutions pale in comparison to just being prepared for winter.

Have you checked the furnace? Is your thermostat programmable so it's warm when you get home from work? What about putting up holiday decorations like Christmas lights? Do you want to wait until a snow storm makes it feel like winter?

It's time to think about winterizing your first home, while it's nice enough outside to get the work done. You can even set up a weekly schedule of things to do so you're not scrambling on Thanksgiving to get it all done before the Detroit Lions play. Or before you fall into a turkey coma.

This guide will help you get ready for winter. From DIY furnace preps to full blown inspections by an HVAC professional, you need to make sure you're ready. You don't want this first winter in your new house to become a story of braving drafty doors and icy steps you tell your family for years to come.

This guide is meant to be just that – a guide. It's not the end-all, be-all when it comes to preparing for Old Man Winter. But we sure hope it's helpful. In fact, if you like, please consider sharing it. Post the link on Facebook, Tweet it and share it on Pinterest. We're on all of those social networks with you. We'd love to connect!

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SECTION 1: AVOID ICICLES

Icicles look nice on a Thomas Kincaid painting. But they're dangerous on your house. They can fall and hit people (Seriously, it happened to my daughter. She's okay, but it was scary.) Icicles can become heavy, ripping down your gutters. They're a precursor to ice dams, which can cause major water damage to your roof and walls.

One of the easiest ways to minimize icicles is to clean out your gutters and downspouts in the fall. You can do this with a tall ladder, or from the roof itself. Use caution – we don't want you falling off.

Take care to make sure your downspouts are also clean. A jam at the bottom of a downspout can act like a dam, filling up that pipe all the way to your roof. Keeping these clean before winter will also ensure a clean and efficient thaw in the spring.

Adding insulation to your attic (up to recommended amounts) will also help keep the warm air of your home in your home. Warm air in the attic will melt snow at the edge of the roof, creating icicles.



Products some homeowners use to keep icicles away:

- Leaf guards over the gutters so they stay clean
- Electric heater wire at the edge of the roof to keep snow and ice from accumulating

SECTION 2: DRAFTY DOORS AND WINDY WINDOWS



When the winter wind blows and you can feel it in your living room, you have a problem. Maybe your front door isn't as solid as you thought when you bought the house. Or maybe the windows have seen better days. It's okay – there are inexpensive solutions to these problems.

DRAFTY DOORS

If your exterior doors need a little help keeping the wind out, consider weather stripping around the door jamb. You can also stick some at the top or bottom of the door itself in some cases – just make sure it closes when you're done!

Maybe it's not the door jamb but the trim and lack of insulation between the door and the walls. You can remove the trim that's there, adding foam insulation from a can or caulk into the area. You'll need to replace the trim once you're done, so make sure you **have time set aside for this project.**

WINDY WINDOWS

These same tips can apply to windows and the area around them. However there's another solution to thin glass: plastic. Home improvement stores sell kits where you cut the plastic to fit the outside measurements of your window, and you tape it up.

Sometimes they require a hair dryer to shrink wrap the windows, keeping a nice layer of insulated air between winter and you.

Storm windows and doors are common in many homes. Make sure you install these and have them working properly. If the windows need to be put down to cover the screen, make sure you do so. It's a simple step many of us forget.

Bonus Tips:

- ▲ Replace Cracked Glass.
- ▲ Prime and paint exposed wood to keep drafts out.

SECTION 3: THE FURNACE

A yearly furnace inspection can help keep away the major headache of a failed furnace in the middle of the biggest snow storm of the decade. Calling a professional HVAC maintenance company will ensure a qualified technician is in charge of the inspection.



Replacing the filter will help keep the air cleaner as the furnace works its magic, too. Many manufacturers and home heating experts suggest changing your filter every month. Air duct cleaning has another powerful effect on the cleanliness of the air and the efficiency of the furnace. And make sure all flammable material is well away from the furnace. You don't want have an extra fire in the furnace room.

A programmable thermostat will help keep your home at the right temperature in an efficient way. Not only can you come home to a toasty home at the end of your long day, you won't feel as much pain at the end of the month when it comes time to pay your energy bill.

If your home is heated by a hot-water radiator, bleed the valves by opening them slightly and when water appears, close them. Much of this is likely found in the literature with your equipment, but we've gathered in this handy guide to make the process a little more streamlined.



Check or install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms. You should have smoke detectors near your bedrooms at the very least. Some cities require them in every room. Stock up on batteries, and change them at least once a year – some experts say twice a year is optimal. Also make sure you have a fire extinguisher on hand that's less than a few years old.

SECTION 4: FORGET THE FLOOD - PLUMBING PREPARATIONS

You really don't want your pipes to freeze do you? Frozen pipes lead to flooded basements. Make sure you disconnect any hoses attached to outside faucets around your house. This will help ensure water in the hoses or faucets doesn't freeze and back up into the pipes in the home.

Another good idea for your home is to insulate any exposed pipes. You can find pipe covers at a home improvement store or hardware in town. It's usually a foam style wrap, and it keeps the water in the pipes protected. This also keeps the water at a good temperature during the entire year and helps with efficiency.

One preparation many homeowners ignore until it's needed is to find the water main (the main shut-off valve) in case they need to shut it off in an emergency. If a pipe does burst, you need to know where the main valve is for your house. Locate this, and make sure you can get to it.

If your first house has an air conditioner with a water shut-off valve, be sure to turn it off. Drain the AC pipes as well, to keep them from freezing and cracking.

If you're going away for an extended time, be sure to leave your heat on at least a little warm. Set your furnace to around 50 degrees so your pipes don't freeze – but you're still saving on energy costs.



SECTION 5: WINTERIZE YOUR GADGETS

Keeping your lawnmower in working order for next year begins this year. You don't want to leave it outside all winter. Drain the gas from your mower after your final cutting of the season. While you're winterizing the lawn care equipment (clean it and get it ready for storage), begin to gather and service any winter gadgets. Tune-up the snow blower before the first snowfall.

Any other summer toys need attention during this time of year, too. Motorcycles, ATV's, boats and other gadgets. If your garage is heated, it's not as big of a deal. But before the snow falls your outside equipment should be all set so you're not dealing with wet snow now and rusty or broken equipment in the spring.

Make sure you have your salt/sand/ice-melt stocked up and your snow shovels at the ready before winter hits. You don't want to run to the store on that first major snow fall with every other unprepared homeowner.



Be sure to also store outside furniture. When the snow falls, it can really add up to a lot of weight on chairs, stretching out the material. Get that patio furniture put away before winter hits. The same goes for kid toys, trampolines and bicycles.

Prepare landscaping and other outdoor surfaces for winter. Trim trees if the branches hang too close to the house or electrical wires. You don't want limbs falling onto power lines during an ice storm, knocking out power in the middle of winter.

Find out from a gardener when your trees should be pruned. You want to prevent winter injury to your plants. You can also plant spring flower bulbs and lift bulbs that cannot winter in areas where the ground freezes. You can also move sensitive potted plants indoors or to a sheltered area.

You don't want limbs falling onto power lines during an ice storm, knocking out power in the middle of winter.

SECTION 6: MISCELLANEOUS TIPS AND TRICKS

GET THE FIREPLACE READY

If you have a fireplace, make sure it's ready for the winter. Make sure the top of the chimney has a cap or screen to keep out rodents and birds. If the chimney hasn't been cleaned for a while, call a chimney sweep to remove soot and creosote. Using the "as-seen-on-TV" products isn't the best bet for keeping your house safe. Plus a professional should inspect the fireplace damper for proper opening and closing, as well as check the mortar between bricks and tuckpoint.

Buy or chop firewood now, so you're not doing it in the middle of a snowstorm. Be sure to store it in a dry place away from the exterior of your home – you don't want termites finding the tasty wood and infesting your home.

THE CEILING FAN TRICK

A ceiling fan blowing down on you during the summer feels great. But don't just turn it off in the winter. Use the reverse switch and run it on low to help move the air up near the ceiling (hot air rises) down the walls and into the room. This not only helps keep you warm, but saves on furnace usage.

PREPARE AN EMERGENCY KIT

If the power goes out in the winter, panic will probably set in. But if you're prepared, a winter outage won't be the end. Buy indoor candles and matches or a lighter for use during a power shortage. Find the phone numbers for your utility companies and store them in your phone. You can also write the numbers down and put them on your fridge. Store extra bottled water and non-perishable food supplies (including pet food, if you have a pet), blankets and a first-aid kit in a dry somewhere you can get to easily.

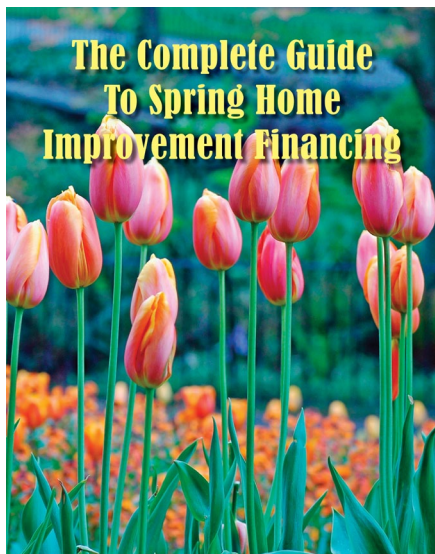
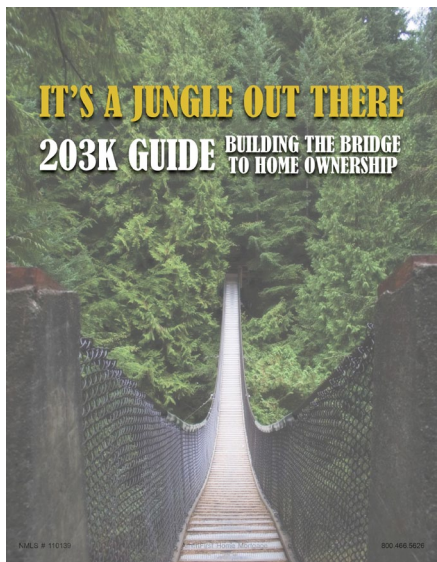
CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND OTHER DECORATIONS

Putting up lights and decorations in the snow is not only annoying, but it can be dangerous. You don't have to light up the house before Thanksgiving if you don't want to, but getting the lights up on your roof before it's icy and cold means you won't hate Christmas like the Grinch. Prepare your house for winter in the fall, and winter won't leave a bad taste in your mouth.



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