

Topic of the Month

August

Maintaining Your Home

QUESTIONS? Contact ANH at 1.800.556.1548

Maintaining Your Home



Purchasing a home is perhaps the biggest investment many of us make in our lifetime. Now that you've made the big step into homeownership (or are preparing to do just that), it's important to know that keeping your home in good shape is crucial to protecting your investment.

The first year of homeownership is a daunting experience since things you've never thought of come into your life. Make it a practice to take a good look at your home, inside and out, at least monthly.

Look for deteriorating areas, standing water, cracks, etc., and get any problems fixed as soon as possible. You can save a lot of money by catching problems early, before major damage is done.

To ensure that you're keeping up with, and anticipating your home's needs, use the following checklist to maintain your home properly and keep down the costs of repairs due to negligence:



Home Maintenance Checklist Monthly/Quarterly/Annual

Monthly	Quarterly	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check air filters and clean or replace as necessary. (Use your electric bill as a reminder.) ● Vacuum air supply and air return registers to remove dust and lint. ● Check all fire extinguishers to ensure that they are fully charged. ● Clean disposal blades by grinding up ice cubes. Freshen it with baking soda and by grinding up citrus fruit rinds. ● Check for cracks or separations in caulking around sinks, bathtubs, toilets, faucets, countertops, and back splashes, ceramic tile walls, ceramic floors, windowsills, and any other areas caulked by your builder. To repair these areas, use an appropriate caulking compound and follow the caulking instructions on the product. ● Clean or replace the dirty range hood filter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inspect and test smoke alarms and replace back-up batteries. ● Inspect and maintain proper drainage around home. ● Service heating and air conditioning system. ● Inspect and clean roof, valleys and gutters for debris for proper water drainage. ● Inspect exterior doors (finish and adjust weather stripping if needed). ● Inspect and repair exterior caulking at windows, doors, and siding. ● Drain and refill water heater. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inspect and repair settling cracks and inspect and lubricate garage door tracks. ● Scrape, prime, and repaint any interior and exterior areas that have cracking, peeling, or bubbled paint. ● Trim or remove trees, shrubbery, and vining plants to keep them from growing on and rubbing against the house. ● Have the coils cleaned on your furnace by an expert. ● Vacuum your refrigerator coils (underneath and on the backside). ● Repair sidewalks and other concrete surface cracks. ● Resurface the driveway before the asphalt or other surface wears. ● Check roof and around vents, skylights, and chimneys for any loose or damaged shingles or leaks.

Many of the above maintenance items can be remedied early before real damage occurs. Although you can attempt most repairs yourself with a little time, a little money, and some advisement by your local Lowe's or Home Depot associate, there will be those occasions when you will have to enlist the services of a professional repairperson or contractor. Remember, the most valuable asset you own is your home and protecting this investment should be your top priority.

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Choosing a Qualified Contractor

Whether you need to hire a contractor to make repairs to maintain your home or you want to make renovations to enhance your home, you will want to take your time now to ensure that he/she can do the job properly and help you to avoid costly mistakes later.

You can find a qualified, experienced contractor simply by asking neighbors, friends, and co-workers who have had similar remodeling or repair projects completed. Interview several different contractors before making your final choice.



Here's a list of questions you should consider and ask to garner essential information before making the hiring decision:

1. Does the contractor have a license? This may be mandatory depending on your state or local requirements.
2. How long has the contractor been in business? Check with the local Better Business Bureau for any history of consumer complaints.
3. Can you communicate effectively with the contractor?
4. Does the contractor have experience with your type of home?
5. How soon can the contractor get started, and how much time will he/she need to complete the project?
6. What type of guarantee does the contractor offer on the work performed?
7. How does the contractor expect to be paid? There are 4 main types of approaches to renovation and repair fees:
 - a. Guaranteed maximum price (GMP): The contractor states the maximum price that the project warrants and guarantees the project within that cost.
 - b. Bid or stipulated-sum: A fixed price is given for a defined scope of work. Cost savings on the job to the contractor and changes to the original plan are charged to you.
 - c. Cost-plus-fixed fee contract approach. All actual invoices are submitted to you and you pay the material costs plus a flat fee.
8. Can references be supplied? Follow through and call the references to see how well the contractor performed. Ask specific questions: Did the project finish when expected? Did the price conform to what was agreed upon? Did they arrive on time every day?
9. Is the contractor insured? Get a copy of their valid Certificate of Insurance and call the insurance company to be sure that the certificate is valid. Remember, you are responsible for all workers on your property!
10. Will there be any subcontractors, and if so, what are their credentials?
11. Are there any permits required for your project? And, if so, who will be responsible for obtaining these permits?
12. Will the contractor provide a written contract or proposal before commencing work?

Did you know....

According to Consumer Reports, most household appliances should be replaced if they're older than seven years or if the repair cost is at least half the price of a new unit. Here are samples of how long appliances and systems in a home should last.

Life spans for home systems and appliances

Item	Expected life (years)
Central A/C	15+
Window A/C	10
A/C compressor	15
Electric water heater	14
Gas water heater	11 to 13
Forced-air furnace	15
Gas or oil furnace	18
Trash compactors	10
Dishwashers	10
Exhaust fans	20
Dryers	14
Disposal	10
Freezers	16
Microwave ovens	11
Electric ranges	17
Gas ranges	19
Gas ovens	14
Refrigerators	17
Clothes washers	13

Source: National Association of Home Builders

Resources...

To learn more about protecting and maintaining your home, you may want to check out the following sources:

Books:

"The Virgin Homeowner: The Essential Guide to Owning, Maintaining, and Surviving Your First Home", by Janice Papolos.

"Home Maintenance for Dummies"

Internet articles and sites:

"Checklist for Maintaining Your Home", www.msucare.com/pubs/publications/p1505.html

"Tips for Finding Best Home Improvement Contractors" www.ezinearticles.com/?id=226191



For more information on this topic, call a Certified Credit Counselor at **1.800.556.1548** or visit our Learning Center at www.anewhorizon.org

