



SEASONAL HOMEOWNER GUIDE • SPRING

SPRING MAINTENANCE GUIDE

Spring up here is damage assessment season. Five months of snow load, ice, and freeze–thaw just finished working on the house, and the water from all of it is now moving through the soil. **Walk the property once the snow is off** and catch the small failures before summer humidity turns them into rot and mold.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN NOTE

Freeze–thaw is the most destructive force acting on a Northern Michigan home — more than heat, wind, or age. Water enters a hairline crack, freezes, expands, and widens it, dozens of times a season. Nearly every foundation, masonry, and flashing problem on this list started that way.

01 ROOF & EXTERIOR AFTER THE THAW

- ☐ **Scan the roof with binoculars** for lifted, cracked, or missing shingles, especially along the eaves where ice sat.
- ☐ **Look for ice–dam evidence** — stained soffits, peeling eave paint, or marks on upstairs ceilings.
- ☐ **Check flashing** at chimneys, valleys, and roof-to-wall joints. Ice loosens it every year.
- ☐ **Clean gutters and downspouts** of grit and shingle granules from winter.
- ☐ **Inspect the chimney crown, cap, and mortar** for freeze–thaw cracking and spalling brick.
- ☐ **Check siding, trim, and soffits** for ice, wind, and animal damage.
- ☐ **Test exterior hose bibs** when the water goes back on — a freeze split only shows under pressure.
- ☐ **Reseal gaps at windows, doors, and penetrations** before the summer insect season.

02 FOUNDATION, DRAINAGE & GRADE

- ☐ **Walk the foundation perimeter** and note new cracks. Photograph and date them to track movement.
- ☐ **Check for frost heave** — lifted porch slabs, steps pulling away, sticking doors, or a settled driveway apron.
- ☐ **Confirm grade still slopes away** from the house. Winter erosion reverses it more often than expected.
- ☐ **Extend downspouts 4–6 feet** and make sure the discharge isn't dumping against the foundation.
- ☐ **Test the sump pump** by pouring a bucket of water into the pit. Spring runoff is when it earns its keep.
- ☐ **Check the sump's battery backup** — outages and heavy runoff arrive together.
- ☐ **Look for staining at the basement floor line** and for efflorescence, a chalky white residue.
- ☐ **Clear window wells** of leaves and debris and confirm their drains still take water.

DON'T DISMISS A WET BASEMENT IN SPRING

Owners write off April water as “just the thaw.” Sometimes it is. But the path that lets snowmelt in will let storm water in, and a basement that wets annually is where mold problems begin. Trace the entry point while the ground is still saturated — far easier now than in August.

03 WELL, SEPTIC & WATER SYSTEMS

- ☐ **Test well water for bacteria and nitrates.** Spring runoff is the highest-risk period for surface contamination reaching a well.
- ☐ **Inspect the well cap and casing** — the cap must be sealed, intact, and at least 12" above finished grade.
- ☐ **Check that ground slopes away from the well head** so meltwater can't pool around the casing.
- ☐ **Watch for pressure-tank short cycling**, which points to a waterlogged tank or a failing pump.
- ☐ **Walk the drainfield** for soggy ground, standing water, odor, or grass that is suspiciously greener than the rest of the yard.
- ☐ **Pump the septic tank** if it has been three to five years, and keep the receipt for the file.
- ☐ **Confirm the tank lid and risers are secure** after frost movement — a shifted lid is a serious safety hazard.
- ☐ **Repair plow and vehicle damage** over the tank and field before the ground fully dries.

RURAL WATER IS THE BUYER'S BIGGEST BLIND SPOT

A large share of homes across Antrim, Benzie, Leelanau, Charlevoix, and Emmet counties run on private well and septic, with no municipal backstop. Well and septic testing is not routine in most purchase agreements up here unless someone asks for it — and a failed drainfield is commonly a five-figure repair. Order both early enough that results land before the inspection contingency expires.

04 MECHANICAL SYSTEMS

- ☐ **Service the air conditioner or heat pump** before the first warm stretch, and clear leaves and debris from the outdoor unit.
- ☐ **Replace furnace and HVAC filters** after a hard heating season.
- ☐ **Confirm the condensate line drains freely** and isn't backing up into the pan.
- ☐ **Check the water heater** for corrosion, moisture at the base, and a properly piped relief valve.
- ☐ **Test every smoke and CO alarm** and replace batteries on a spring schedule you'll remember.
- ☐ **Run bath and kitchen exhaust fans** and verify they actually move air to the outside.
- ☐ **Open crawl space vents** if the design calls for seasonal venting; leave sealed crawls sealed.
- ☐ **Have the wood stove or fireplace swept** now, at the end of burning season, rather than waiting for the fall rush.

05 DECKS, DOCKS & GROUNDS

- ☐ **Probe deck posts, joists, and stair stringers** with a screwdriver — soft wood means rot, and rot at a ledger is a collapse risk.
- ☐ **Check the deck ledger connection** to the house for proper flashing and lag bolts, not nails.
- ☐ **Tighten railings and replace fasteners** that have rusted or worked loose over winter.
- ☐ **Inspect docks, hoists, and seawalls** for ice damage before putting anything back in the water.
- ☐ **Look for carpenter ant activity** around damp wood, sill plates, and firewood piles. Large black ants indoors in spring signal moisture.
- ☐ **Move firewood well away from the foundation** and store it off the ground.
- ☐ **Trim branches back from the roof and siding**, and remove limbs damaged by ice load.
- ☐ **Clear culverts and drainage ditches** along rural driveways before spring rains.

TERMITES? NOT OUR PROBLEM — CARPENTER ANTS ARE

Subterranean termites are effectively absent from Northern Michigan, so the termite letter that dominates southern transactions isn't part of our closings. What we do find is carpenter ant galleries, powderpost beetle damage, and moisture-driven rot in sills, rim joists, and deck framing. All three trace back to water, which is why we treat wood-destroying organisms as a moisture question rather than a pest question.

06 SPRING DAMAGE TRIAGE

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING	MOST LIKELY CAUSE UP HERE	URGENCY
Ceiling stain below an exterior wall	Ice dam backed water under the shingles. The leak stops when the ice melts, so it gets ignored.	Address before next winter — the cause is attic heat loss
New crack in the foundation	Frost heave or settlement. Hairline vertical cracks are common; horizontal or stair-step cracks are not.	Monitor hairline; evaluate horizontal now
Water in the basement only in spring	Saturated soil plus poor grade or a clogged downspout. Rarely the foundation itself.	Fix drainage this season
Spongy ground or odor over the drainfield	Drainfield struggling with saturated soil, or a system at end of life.	Evaluate promptly — often five figures
Cloudy or off-tasting well water	Surface water reaching the well through a bad cap, shallow casing, or nearby runoff.	Stop drinking it; test now
Large black ants indoors	Carpenter ants nesting in wood kept damp by a leak. They're a symptom of moisture.	Find the water source, then treat
Deck feels bouncy or soft underfoot	Rot at posts, joists, or the ledger after years of snow load and ground contact.	Stay off it until evaluated

SPRING FINDINGS WORTH A SECOND LOOK? WE'LL TAKE A LOOK.

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