



SEASONAL HOMEOWNER GUIDE • FALL

FALL MAINTENANCE GUIDE

Fall is the most consequential maintenance season in Northern Michigan. Everything on this list is cheap and easy in October and expensive or impossible in January. **Target completion by the first hard freeze** — typically mid to late October inland, a few weeks later close to the water.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN NOTE

Book the furnace service, chimney sweep, and propane top-off in September. Every heating contractor and sweep in the region is buried from the first cold snap onward, and a no-heat call in December can mean days of waiting. The homeowners who stay comfortable are the ones who scheduled before the rush.

01 HEATING & FUEL — DO THIS FIRST

- ☐ **Schedule professional furnace or boiler service** and keep the invoice for the home file.
- ☐ **Replace the filter** and stock a season's worth.
- ☐ **Run the heat for a full cycle** on a cool day. Find the problem now, while it's a service call and not an emergency.
- ☐ **Bleed radiators and baseboard** and check the boiler's pressure and expansion tank.
- ☐ **Fill the propane or fuel oil tank** and set up automatic delivery for the season.
- ☐ **Have the chimney and wood stove swept and inspected** before the first fire.
- ☐ **Lay in seasoned firewood**, stacked off the ground and away from the foundation.
- ☐ **Test the generator under load**, change the oil, and store fresh stabilized fuel.

02 ROOF, GUTTERS & ATTIC — ICE DAM PREVENTION

- ☐ **Clean gutters after the leaves are fully down**, then check again in November. Packed gutters are where ice dams start.
- ☐ **Flush downspouts** and extend the discharge well past the foundation.
- ☐ **Repair loose shingles and flashing** while a roofer can still seal them.
- ☐ **Verify attic insulation is at R-49 to R-60** and evenly distributed, with none blocking the soffit vents.
- ☐ **Air-seal attic bypasses** at can lights, plumbing stacks, chimney chases, and the attic hatch.
- ☐ **Confirm soffit and ridge ventilation is open and balanced.** A cold attic is the real ice-dam fix.
- ☐ **Check that bath and dryer vents terminate outdoors**, with insulated duct through cold space.
- ☐ **Look for daylight, stains, or rodent activity** while you're up there.

WHERE THE MONEY ACTUALLY GOES

Heat cable at the eaves treats the symptom; air sealing and insulation treat the cause. If you only have budget for one item this fall, seal the attic bypasses. It cuts ice dams, lowers the heating bill through a long Northern Michigan winter, and doesn't need to be re-done every year.

03 PLUMBING & FREEZE PROTECTION

- ☐ **Shut off and drain exterior hose bibs**, and disconnect every hose — a hose left on will split a frost-free sillcock.
- ☐ **Blow out irrigation lines** and shut down the system.
- ☐ **Insulate pipes in crawl spaces, rim joists, and unheated garages.**
- ☐ **Insulate the well pressure tank and exposed well line**; confirm the well cap is sealed and above grade.
- ☐ **Tag the main water shutoff** so anyone in the house can find it fast.
- ☐ **Test the sump pump and its backup** and confirm the discharge won't freeze shut.
- ☐ **Pump the septic tank if due** — three to five years is typical, and access is much easier before the ground freezes.
- ☐ **Mark the septic tank, drainfield, and well head** with tall stakes for the plow.

04 EXTERIOR CLOSE-UP

- ☐ **Seal gaps at the rim joist, siding penetrations, and foundation.** Mice come in the week the temperature drops.
- ☐ **Re-caulk windows and doors** and replace worn weatherstripping.
- ☐ **Trim limbs over the roof, driveway, and service lines** before ice loads them.
- ☐ **Confirm grade slopes away** from the foundation before the ground freezes.
- ☐ **Store or cover deck furniture**, and pull docks, hoists, and boat lifts.
- ☐ **Clear culverts and roadside ditches** so meltwater has somewhere to go in spring.
- ☐ **Stake the driveway edges** and flag culverts, hydrants, and low walls for the plow operator.
- ☐ **Service the snowblower** and confirm you have fuel, shovels, and ice melt on hand.

05 SAFETY & STORM READINESS

- ☐ **Test every smoke and CO alarm** and replace batteries. Replace any unit over 10 years old.
- ☐ **Add a CO alarm on every level** if the home burns wood, propane, or fuel oil.
- ☐ **Check fire extinguishers** near the kitchen and any combustion appliance.
- ☐ **Clear the path to the electrical panel, meter, and shutoffs.**
- ☐ **Build the outage kit:** flashlights, batteries, water, blankets, and a charged power bank.
- ☐ **Save the utility outage number** and confirm the account contact is current.
- ☐ **Keep egress window wells clear** and plan to keep them clear of snow.
- ☐ **Test radon after the house closes up.** Sealed-up heating season is when levels run highest.

CLOSING A SEASONAL PROPERTY?

If the cottage will sit unheated, winterize completely: shut off the water, drain the supply lines and water heater, and add RV antifreeze to every trap and toilet. If you'll leave heat on instead, hold 55°F minimum and add a low-temperature alarm that texts you. Either way, tell your insurer the home is unoccupied — most policies restrict coverage after 30 to 60 vacant days. Full detail is in our Winter Maintenance Checklist.

BEAT THE FIRST FREEZE. GET IT INSPECTED NOW.

Radon, mold, well water, septic, sewer scope, and full inspections across Northern Michigan.

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