



Home Care Guide

Air Condition

Have annual system maintenance done one month before the air conditioning season begins. Keep the condensing unit free of debris. While construction is being done on other homes in your surrounding area, change filters every 30 days. After the neighborhood has been established, every 90 days is recommended. Make sure to change your filters on schedule or your unit may freeze. When replacing the filters, inexpensive filters are recommended to use. They can provide better airflow and may prevent a noisy unit.

Bathroom Caulking

Caulking may need to be touched up in the bathroom area as regular maintenance. Common touch up areas includes the sink, toilet, tub, inside and outside the shower, and the countertop.

A clean joint is the first and most important step. Clean away all old caulk and loose paint or dirt and apply new caulk to dry surfaces. The most common and easiest to use caulking comes in cartridges for which you will need a caulking gun. Cut off about 1/2 inch of the cartridge tip on a 45-degree angle and puncture the tip seal with a nail. You can use the nail later to act as a stopper for any unused caulk. With a little practice on a joint that's not visible you'll soon be able to lay a uniform wide bead that overlaps both sides for a good seal. Finish the surface with a moistened finger if you like but that's not necessary. Remember to use a filler, like oakum, for wide joints before you caulk. Wipe down with a wet sponge for a better finish.

Carpet

Eventually carpets need some type of cleaning to remove soil that sticks to the fibers. How often depends on amount of use and soil carpet gets; some areas will need cleaning before others. Basic methods are: dry absorbent powder, foam, shampooing, and hot water extraction (sometimes called steam cleaning or extraction). Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Costs in dollars, time, and energy vary. Always vacuum thoroughly before starting your cleaning method.

Here are some general precautions for all methods:

- Pretest before using.
- Protect the carpet from rust stains by putting aluminum foil, wax paper, or plastic wrap under furniture legs, until carpet is dry.
- Follow the cleaner and equipment instructions as directed.
- Do not over wet the carpet. Excess moisture can cause shrinkage, streaks, or mildew.
- Keep mechanical action to a minimum to avoid carpet damage or streaks.

Caulking Windows and Doors

Unfilled gaps and cracks around windows and doors, vents, and so on, may let cold air in the same as leaving a window open. In fact, a 1/8 inch opening around just two door frames can let in as much cold air as a 12-inch window opened 6 inches all winter long.

Caulk is used around outside window and door frames. The money you spend on caulking or weather stripping is usually recovered in one heating season or less. This one season "pay-back" period means that money for heating fuel is saved equal to or greater than what you spend for caulking and weather stripping materials.

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Some, but not all the places you should look when surveying your home before caulking, are around doors and windows, dryer vents, faucet pipes and wires, where porches attach to the house, seams between masonry and siding, chimneys and inside corners. Also check the stripping around the doors.

Ceramic Tile Floors

If unglazed, seal with special sealer. If glazed, seal mortar between tiles. If not sealed or glazed, it can be stained by grease. Glazed tile is easily scratched like porcelain enamel.

Dishwasher

Load properly following manual suggestions. Use only dishwasher detergent in recommended amounts. Do not put any other cleaning compound inside dishwasher, as it may interfere with dishwashing action. Store detergent in a dry, cool place, and do not keep extra packages on hand for a long time as it takes up moisture from the air and then loses cleaning ability.

Electrical System

To prevent power outages, be sure there are not too many appliances plugged into one circuit. Too many appliances on one outlet will trip your GFI and it will have to be reset. Reset it by pushing on the white or red button on the outlet.

Fireplace

Have your wood burning fireplace inspected annually and cleaned and repaired as required to prevent chimney fires, carbon monoxide poisoning and mortar and flashing failure. Use only enough fuel to keep the fire at the desired temperature. Avoid "roaring" fires. They can start chimney fires from soot and creosote deposits in the flue.

Floor/Tile Caulking and Grout

A clean joint is the first and most important step. Clean away all old caulk and loose paint or dirt and apply new caulk or grout to dry surfaces. The most common and easiest to use caulking or grout comes in cartridges for which you will need a caulking gun. Cut off about 1/2 inch of the cartridge tip on a 45-degree angle and puncture the tip seal with a nail. You can use the nail later to act as a stopper for any unused caulk. With a little practice on a joint that's not visible you'll soon be able to lay a uniform wide bead that overlaps both sides for a good seal. Finish the surface with a moistened finger if you like but that's not necessary. Remember to use a filler, like oakum, for wide joints before you caulk. Wipe down with a wet sponge for a better finish.

Forced Air Heating Systems

Conventional filters on forced-air systems should be checked monthly and cleaned or replaced as needed. All types of furnaces and boilers should be inspected by a qualified technician every year to ensure that all the components are operating properly and no connections are loose or burned.

Garbage Disposal

Use a strong flow of cold water and keep it running at least 30 seconds after noise of grinding has stopped to flush all food particles through the drain line. This prevents stoppages. Always use cold water when operating the disposer to solidify fatty and greasy wastes so they will be chopped up and flushed down the drain. Putting a tray full of ice cubes in the disposal and running it may help sharpen the blades

and clean out the unit. Make sure to run cold water when doing this. If the unit stops running, try the reset button on the bottom of the unit. Just push to reset.

Kitchen Cabinets

Kitchen cabinets collect more grease, food spills, and moisture than most other parts of the house. Grime builds up fastest around handles of doors and drawers, which are constantly opened by sticky hands. Greasy soil comes off more easily if it isn't allowed to build up too long. Painted wood, metal, laminated plastic or wood-grain vinyl surfaces can be cleaned with detergent and warm water solution. Rinse with a cloth or sponge dampened in clean water. Using a dry cloth or paper towel to wipe the surface dry prevents streaking. Most all-purpose household cleaners may also be used; read the label to be sure it can be used on that surface, and follow directions exactly. Test inside a door to be sure it will not harm the finish.

Natural-finished wood cabinets may be cleaned with a variety of commercial products, usually sprays, made for this purpose. Read the label to be sure it can be used on the finish, and follow directions exactly. These have a solvent base, so carefully read and follow cautions about ventilation, and make sure there is no spark or flame or pilot light burning in the area that could cause a fire. Dispose of cloths used in a tightly sealed container, again not near a spark or flame. Test inside a door to be sure the cleaner will not harm the finish before starting on other surfaces; they can damage some, or make a smooth floor slippery.

Laminate Counters

Laminate counters resist scratches. However they can be cut by knives or other sharp objects so slice or chop on a cutting board, not on the counter. Never hammer heavy items on the counter, as hard blows or heavy objects dropped on the counter, can gouge it. Avoid exposure to materials which can stain such as tea, coffee, food dyes and indelible inks.

Pans coming from the oven or range-top at temperatures over 275 degrees (F) should never be placed on the counter as they can soften and burn the laminate. Keep an insulated hot pad or mat handy to set such pans on. Also never put heated irons or cigarettes on the laminated counter as they can burn holes in it. Never dry dishes or allow water to stand in or on the seams of the countertops in order to prevent any damages.

Strong acids and alkalis in such household cleaners as rust removers, oven cleaners, metal cleaners, drain and toilet bowl cleaners can etch, corrode, and permanently discolor the laminated surface. Never put such cleaners on plastic laminates. If some is spilled accidentally, immediately wipe it off, and rinse thoroughly.

For regular cleaning, use a warm water-detergent solution and sponge, and rinse off. Never use scouring powders, or other abrasive cleaners or pads, as they can permanently damage the surface, making it readily stained. Mild general purpose household cleaners may also be used, according to directions.

Microwave Oven

Do not use pans or dishes that are metal or have a metallic trim. Only use mild soap and/or baking soda to clean the interior. Abrasive cleaners or scouring pads can damage the lining.

Paint Touch-up

After painting any wall or trim, it's a good idea to store some paint for touch-ups. Label them with the color and where it was used. Keep out of children's reach.

Plumbing System

Avoid flushing any paper products other than toilet paper down the toilets. Check for corrosion, leaks, and add a clean out compound to system once a year.

Range and Oven

To avoid damaging the burners, do not use extra-large and heavy cooking pots or pans. If you have a self-cleaning oven, do not use any other method to clean it.

Refrigerator

Clean the interior shelves, shell and gaskets every three months. Once a year, clean the coils on the back or underneath and make sure temperatures are set correctly.

Roof maintenance

At a minimum, annually visually inspect the roof for signs of wear and tear and have repaired as needed. Clean all debris to ensure proper drainage from roof. Flat roofs should be inspected for blisters, bubbles, and flashing details. Tar and gravel roofs should be inspected for areas of gravel erosion. Tree branches should not contact the roof surface. Make sure that you do not make any types of penetrations on the roof surface or parapet walls (such as nail holes). It will result in a voided warranty.

Stainless Steel Sinks

Perforated rubber or plastic mats in the sink will cut down on scratching and marking by pans and tableware. Wash with a solution of hand dishwashing liquid detergent and water; or a solution of baking soda and water. Rinse and polish dry with paper towel or soft cloth. Never use scouring powders or steel wool as they will scratch stainless steel. You can brighten them by polishing with a cloth dipped in vinegar, or in ammonia. Or you can dampen the sink and a sponge; sprinkle a little baking soda on sponge and rub sink gently; rinse. You may also polish dry with a paper towel.

Water Heater

Once a month draw off a bucket of water from the spigot at the bottom of the water heater tank, until water runs clear. This removes sediment that reduces efficiency of the water heater.

Window Screens

Fill a large pail or washtub with hot water and soap or detergent suds. Attach a hose to a faucet, and turn the nozzle to give a fine spray of water. Lean the window screen against a wall, railing, porch, or other handy support. Scrub both sides of the screen mesh with a stiff brush dipped into hot suds. Wash the frame all around with a sponge dipped into sudsy water. This will wash off dirt and "drip" from the metal screening. Rinse all sides of the screen with a good hosing of clean water. Let the screen drip a little, then wipe it with a dry cloth, and stand it up to dry in a breeze.

Before you put screens back, wash out the window grooves where the screens slide. Wind a strip of cloth around a ruler or screwdriver which will fit into the narrow slots. First dip this into suds then into clean water. Finish up by wiping with a dry cloth. Wash window frames and sills before putting in clean screens.