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It's time to winterize your home

**By Amy Winn**

*For the Poughkeepsie Journal*

Now that the peak of leaf-peeping is past, thoughts must change with the season to preparations for winter.

Homeowners can do a lot in these relatively balmy weeks to ready their homes for harsher weather, local experts say.

Start at the top with the roof and gutters, suggested Frank Romanelli, owner of Romanelli Roofing in the City of Poughkeepsie.

"If the roof is old, depending on how bad the winter is, that can make gutters freeze up quicker - if there's no drainage, leaves and debris build up," he said.

If gutters are full, they can clog, creating trapped pockets of water that can do damage when they freeze. The ice can expand and crack structures, and melting and refreezing moisture can cause interior damage, including flooded basements and damage to walls.

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Denise DeVore/For the Journal  
Before winter arrives, make sure your furnace is working properly. Check that the air filter is clean and all hoses are tight. Arthur Davies of Airflow Air Conditioning in Milton checks a furnace for problems.

Debris-blocking guards are available to help ease the chore, but they still need checking and clearing.

Homeowners can look at the roof themselves, but of course, he said it's best to have a professional roofing contractor assess the overall condition.

This is important to do now, he said, because missing shingles must be replaced before snow and ice accumulates, and before air temperatures get too cool. Not only is cold weather tougher on workers, but the roofing materials may be more brittle, he said.

Moving inside, assessing the home's climate-control systems becomes important in terms of comfort and energy efficiency.

John Durkin, president and owner of Airflow Air Conditioning, Refrigeration and Heating Inc. in Highland and Milton, said there are many steps homeowners can take to help themselves save money and heat.

He suggests it may also be time to replace your heating system, even if it's still functioning acceptably.

"Heating systems, as old as 10 years or older, consume more fuel and use more energy than a new heater or boiler would - even if it still works fine. Manufacturers have come a long way (in the past decade). Efficiencies can be up to 95 percent now. Replacing a furnace could pay for itself in a relatively short amount of time," Durkin said.

If you choose not to replace your existing systems, note that woodburning stoves, fireplaces, flues and chimneys must be inspected by professionals, and likely cleaned, before their first use of the season to guard against fire hazards from soot buildup.

## Winterizing tips

**Keep cold out:** Seal all cracks in the walls. Basement walls are especially vulnerable. Close gaps, especially around windows and doors. Apply caulk, weather stripping or tape up plastic sheeting. Put in storm windows.

**Heating heads-up:** Before you turn on your furnace, make sure there is nothing flammable nearby. Be aware of any strange signs or smells when furnace starts, especially any that linger. Have heating system professionally inspected, or examine it carefully yourself and at least clean or change filters. Chimneys and fireplaces should be professionally inspected and cleaned before they are fired up for the season, as soot and debris can be a serious fire hazard.

**Outdoors awareness:** Check and clear gutters and eaves. Replace missing or damaged roof shingles. Assess driveways, walkways, steps and sidewalks for damage, which can be exacerbated during the winter. Cut back tree limbs, which may threaten power lines, roof and driveway. Rake vegetation away from foundations and seal cracks and gaps to prevent intrusion by water and various pests. Drain gas from lawn mowers and clean and store gardening equipment.

**Safety first:** Make sure fire and carbon monoxide alarms are fully functional. Test and/or replace fire extinguishers. Stock up on snow and ice management essentials such as shovels, blowers, rock salt and ice melters, etc.

**Water flow:** Insulate pipes to preclude freezing and bursting. Drain outdoor hoses and sprinklers and store them. Turn off water to these spigots and drain them. Drain air conditioner pipes and, if your air conditioner has a water shut-off valve, turn it off. You may wish to disconnect the unit.

### Resource

For a free copy of a brochure with energy-efficiency tips and links to organizations that offer more information, call Malcarne Contracting, 845-266-8333 or e-mail [info@malcarnecontracting.com](mailto:info@malcarnecontracting.com).

## Check everything

Oil-fired and propane-based systems generally require less maintenance, experts said, but it's still smart to regularly make sure they are in top working order.

"The heating system should be cleaned and tuned once a year and filters replaced. Tuning means adjusting the (oil or gas) burner to maximize combustion efficiency," Durkin said.

Joseph Malcarne, president of Malcarne Contracting in Staatsburg, specializes in building and retrofitting homes for top energy efficiency.

He discussed the importance of thorough insulation.

"If you have an attic access with stairs or a panel, if there's no insulated or airtight covering, then you're losing heat all the time," Malcarne said. Also, "make sure insulation is evenly spread through the attic - this can be done by a professional or yourself," he said.

Having proper insulation also means sealing leaks and cracks throughout the home - windows, doors and air ducts.

Cleaning can also make a difference, Malcarne said.

"If you have radiators or fin-tube radiators, around eight inches tall, dust will collect behind them. We've been in homes with lint and (pet) hair clogged behind them, which cuts efficiency," Malcarne said.

It's also essential to use care with elements related to water, to reduce likelihood of freezing and burst pipes. Valves should be shut off, spigots drained and hoses stored. Pipes should be insulated, especially in basements or crawl spaces.

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A photograph showing the interior of the Bavarian Manor restaurant. In the foreground, there is a dining table set with a white tablecloth, plates, and glasses. In the background, there is a fireplace with a mantel decorated with a taxidermy specimen (possibly a deer head) and other items. The room is warmly lit.

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