

Essential Fireplace and Gas Log Maintenance for Homeowners



BY CTW FEATURES

As temperatures drop and the appeal of a crackling fire grows stronger, proper fireplace maintenance becomes crucial for both safety and efficiency. Whether you have a traditional wood-burning fireplace or gas logs, a little preventive care goes a long way toward ensuring your heating season is both cozy and safe.

Annual Maintenance for Wood-Burning Fireplaces

Before lighting your first fire each fall, dedicate time to inspecting and cleaning your wood-burning fireplace. Start by examining the firebox for cracks or deteriorating mortar between bricks. These gaps can allow heat to reach combustible materials in your walls, creating a serious fire hazard.

Check the damper to ensure it opens and closes smoothly. A stuck or damaged damper wastes energy when closed and can fill your home with smoke when you're trying to enjoy a fire. While you're at it, look up the flue with a flashlight to check for obstructions like bird nests, leaves, or excessive creosote buildup—the shiny, tar-like substance that accumulates from burning wood.

Remove all ash from previous fires, but leave about an inch at the bottom to protect the firebox floor and help insulate future fires. Inspect the fireplace screen or glass doors for damage, as these prevent sparks from escaping into your living space.

Outside, examine the chimney cap and crown. The cap keeps rain, animals, and debris out of your chimney, while the crown seals the top of the masonry. Cracks in either can lead to water damage and deterioration. Also check for loose or missing bricks on the exterior chimney structure.

Gas Log Fireplace Maintenance

Gas log systems require less hands-on maintenance than wood fireplaces, but they still need attention. Begin by turning off the gas supply and allowing everything to cool completely. Remove the logs

carefully, noting their arrangement so you can replace them correctly—improper placement affects flame patterns and can create dangerous carbon monoxide.

Vacuum dust and debris from the burner and log compartment using a soft brush attachment. Even small amounts of dust can interfere with proper combustion. Inspect the logs themselves for cracks or significant wear, as damaged logs should be replaced.

Check the glass doors or screen for cracks and clean them according to the manufacturer's instructions. Many gas fireplaces have specific cleaning requirements, as standard

glass cleaners can damage special coatings.

Test the ignition system and thermocouple. The pilot light should ignite easily and burn steadily with a blue flame. A yellow or orange flame often indicates incomplete combustion and requires professional attention.

Warning Signs That Require Professional Help

Some maintenance tasks absolutely require a certified chimney sweep or gas fireplace technician. Schedule a professional chimney inspection and cleaning at least once a year for wood-burning fireplaces, or every other year if you burn fewer than 40 fires annually. These experts have specialized tools to remove creosote buildup thoroughly—accumulation of just one-eighth inch creates a fire risk.

For gas systems, call a technician if you smell gas, notice the pilot light frequently going out, observe soot buildup on the logs or glass, or



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