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HOMES

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How to prepare for winter storm season

Though it's now firmly in the rearview mirror, the winter of 2025-2026 may prove hard to forget for millions of people across North America. Marked by particularly cold temperatures and considerable snowfall in many parts of the continent, the winter of 2025-2026 has undoubtedly prompted countless individuals to wonder what they can do to prepare to make future winters a little more manageable.

No one knows for certain if a winter will be mild or marked by extended periods of chilly temperatures and heavy snowfall. But preparing for harsh weather can make life a little easier if such conditions prevail. As another winter approaches, these winter storm prep tips can make it easier to navigate inclement weather.

• **Test your home heating system.** Mid-Atlantic Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessment reports that winter temperatures in the mid-Atlantic were two to four degrees below normal for the entire region during

the winter of 2025-2026. Faced with such chilly conditions, many people leaned heavily on their home heating systems to stay warm. Prior to this winter, it can be beneficial for homeowners everywhere to conduct a home heating system audit to ensure a heater is working at peak capacity. A professional HVAC technician can run a battery of tests to assess an existing system. Such an audit can catch any issues before the cold weather arrives, and a tuneup can make sure the heater works efficiently, which can save homeowners lots of money on energy bills.

• **Inspect your tools and replace them, if necessary.** Items that help make life outside more manageable in winter also should be assessed prior to the arrival of cold weather. The winter of 2025-2026 was snowier than usual in some parts of North America, while other areas received considerably less snowfall than they're accustomed to. For example, the Blue Hill Observatory



Inspecting tools, including snow blowers, prior to winter can ensure they're working properly should harsh weather arrive.

reported a much snowier and stormier winter in the northeastern United States in 2025-2026. So chances are residents in areas that experienced heavy snowfall put their snow blowers to good use a year ago. In advance of this winter, inspect snow blowers to ensure they're operational and capable of handling another potentially stormy winter. If not, replace the items or repair parts that need fixing. It's also good to

examine snow shovels prior to the season. Doing so in advance of winter ensures the tools will be fixed and ready to go once the first snowfall occurs.

• **Gather some nonperishable provisions.** The American Red Cross urges people to gather food, water, and medicine if a storm is in the forecast. Stores might be closed once the storm approaches or touches down, so gather these items well in advance. Include bottled water

among the provisions as some storms can knock out access to drinking water. The Red Cross recommends keeping a one-month supply of medications and medical supplies on hand just in case a storm makes it hard to leave home or prevents access via delivery

• **Keep some supplies in a vehicle.** Even if a storm does not prevent travel, that does not mean a vehicle will find the roads smooth sailing. Prepare in advance for

potential car troubles by keeping emergency supplies in the vehicle. Blankets, an extra sweater, and a hat for each person who routinely travels in the vehicle, and a small but well-stocked first aid kit, can help should drivers find themselves stranded on the road during a winter storm.

Winter storm preparation should include actions that ensure the safety of residents both inside and outside the home.

The benefits of a fall roof replacement

A roof is a vital component of a home that protects the structure from the elements and ensures that sun, rain, wind, and snow do not compromise the integrity of interior spaces. Peak Performance Roofing says the average asphalt shingle roof found on many homes lasts between 15 and 30 years. Alternative roofing materials, such as metal or clay tiles, can last much longer.

Homeowners who stay in a home for many years will likely need to replace a roof at some point. Choosing when to replace the roof may come down to selecting the right season. Experts typically consider fall the prime time to upgrade a roof for a variety of reasons.

• **Moderate temperatures:** Fall weather tends to be comfortable in many regions

of the country. Magnolia Home Remodeling Group says fall temperatures are better suited for roofing and allow materials to work the best. When temperatures are too hot, shingles can become soft and prone to scuffing, while cold temperatures can make materials brittle and difficult to seal.

• **Comfort for workers:** The same moderate conditions can make it easier for roofing contractors to get the work done. It can be extremely hot on a roof during summer, necessitating frequent breaks for workers. Winter weather conditions are not ideal for working on a roof, with snow and ice making things slippery. Fall weather can help workers feel more comfortable.

• **Avoid the rush:** Earl W. Johnston Roofing, LLC says spring and early summer are peak seasons for roofing contractors due to post-winter repairs. Homeowners may experience shorter wait times, better pricing and flexible scheduling if they opt for a fall roof replacement.

• **Prepare for winter:** Getting a roof in the fall means having a new and functional barrier against winter storms that can be hard on old roofs. It also means the roof will be ready for rainy, spring weather.

Fall is an ideal time to replace a roof for many reasons. Homeowners can use the summer to vet various roofing contractors and come up with a package that fits their schedules and budgets.



Simple ways to curb winter heating costs

As fall gives way to winter, air conditioners typically get turned off and heaters get turned on. Home heating costs can quickly add up for homeowners. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, heating a space is the single largest energy expense for American households, accounting for roughly 42 percent of total residential energy consumption. However, individuals can implement certain strategies to cut down on heating costs and optimize energy efficiency.

Manage the thermostat

Managing a home thermostat is a cost-effective and simple adjustment. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, turning a thermostat back by 7° to 10° F from its normal

setting for eight hours a day can save up to 10 percent a year on heating bills. Utilizing the automated scheduling capabilities on programmable or smart thermostats enables people to program a lower baseline temperature when out at work or school and while sleeping.

Seal up the home

Warm air from indoors can easily escape through unsealed gaps in a home. Similarly, cold air from outdoors can infiltrate through the same spots. This causes heating units to work overtime. Studies from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy indicate combining window upgrades with high-efficiency heating systems can cut heating demands considerably. Also,

applying weatherstripping and caulking can prevent drafts, while ensuring adequate attic insulation will create a tight thermal barrier.

Change the heat delivery

Upgrading a heating system to a more efficient one can save homeowners money. According to research by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, replacing traditional fossil-fuel furnaces with electric heat pumps can drastically reduce energy expenditures. Modern heat pumps deliver more thermal energy than the electrical energy they consume.

Homeowners have different options that may help them reduce their heating and energy bills.

How to create more interior space for the winter

After a summer and fall spent outdoors, winter drives many people back inside. Homeowners may take inventory of their interior spaces in winter and find that there isn't as much room as they would like. When entertaining inside, a home may feel particularly cramped.

Creating an open, inviting indoor environment requires maximizing spatial design but not necessarily expanding square footage. By focusing on a few strategies, homeowners can maximize interior flow.

Change up the layout of furniture

Being able to move around a space more easily may come down to rethinking the furniture layout. Interior design experts often emphasize traffic flow in a space, which can determine how



comfortable homeowners and their guests feel. Universal design methodologies point to establishing clear, unobstructed routes to link different zones of a room. This will minimize physical congestion in the space. When entertaining, homeowners can push larger pieces of furniture against the perimeter of a room to open up a central gathering

area. Heavy coffee tables can be swapped out for smaller tables to allow the rearrangement of the layout depending on how many people are spending time in a given space.

Subdivide rooms

Open-concept spaces might have lost some their appeal in recent years. Designers are now going back in the direction of room-based layouts over open concepts, according to Martha Stewart and New York-based designer Madeline Merin. Some homeowners now have a greater need for definition of the spaces they have to work with. Instead of one open room, dividing the space can create the illusion of having more square footage while providing distinctive spots for privacy and other room functions. An open-concept family room, for example, can be divided into a gaming room

on one side and a home office space on the other.

Change how spaces are perceived

Lighting and visual elements can make spaces feel more roomy and inviting even if they haven't gotten larger. Painting walls in soft tones will help them reflect more light, making boundaries feel like they are receding. Incorporating more natural light by removing heavy draperies is one strategy. According to the Journal of Biophilic Design, biophilic design is the intentional integration of nature into buildings and spaces to improve human health and productivity. Homeowners can incorporate natural lighting, living plants, organic materials, and organic patterns into their interior designs to make spaces feel more inviting

Homeowners can look to various design strategies to open up interior spaces in their homes with a goal

toward making them more comfortable places to ride out the winter.

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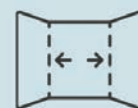
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Renovations with the biggest bang for your buck

Home renovations are a significant part of home-ownership. Naturally, people want to make their own personal marks on the homes they buy and ensure that their properties fit their needs and wants.

While many renovations add value to a home, some offer more value than others. When allocating dollars to renovations, particularly when finances are tight, homeowners may want to direct their efforts to those projects that will offer the highest rate of return on investment. Each year Zonda Home, in conjunction with Remodeling magazine, puts together a list of high-return projects. Exterior projects drive the most value for owners who are selling their homes, and

they consistently top the list of high-ROI improvements. Here are five projects offering a strong ROI that homeowners may want to consider.

1. Garage door replacement: A garage door replacement is part of the curb appeal improvements homeowners can consider. At an average cost of \$4,672, it offers a recouped cost of 267.7 percent according to the 2025 Zonda report.

2. Steel door replacement: Also boasting an ROI north of 200 percent, a steel door installation is a wise choice for homeowners who want to drive up the value of their homes.

3. Manufactured stone veneer: Manufactured stone veneer is a man-made masonry product



that looks like natural stone but is lightweight and easier to install. It can offer a recouped cost of 207.9 percent on the \$11,702 investment.

4. Fiber-cement siding

replacement: Homeowners in the market for new siding can consider fiber-cement siding, which will see the investment recoup slightly more than 100 percent of its cost.

5. Minor kitchen remodel: Kitchens are the heart of a home, and a minor remodel offers a 113 percent return. Inside the home the golden rule is to keep things simple. Minor remodels tend to

offer a better rate of return than major ones. Buyers will pay for move-in ready and updated, but sellers likely will not recoup the costs for luxury upgrades or over-the-top renovations.

It's important to note that 2025 was the first time a practical backup generator made the list of top improvements. Falling into the number seven spot, the generator averaged a return of 95.3 percent, which underscores how homeowners are gearing improvements toward the changing climate and unpredictable weather.

Those remodeling primarily to increase equity for future sales may want to consider exterior projects and basic kitchen improvements.

Key features for an outdoor TV room

An outdoor living area can provide a welcome space for residents and guests to gather on beautiful days and nights. The appeal of outdoor living is undeniable, and homeowners working with a blank canvas in their backyards, or working with an aging area in need of a complete overhaul, can tailor their spaces to meet their own unique wants.

Many homeowners are building outdoor living spaces around a TV room where they can host movie nights and game watches under the stars. Data from the National Association of Realtors® indicates that such spaces are worth homeowners' investment, as a new patio can recoup as much as 95 percent at resale. When planning an outdoor TV room, homeowners can look to these features to

make the space as enjoyable as possible.

• Outdoor TV enclosure: The cost of an outdoor TV enclosure will depend on the size of the television, but it likely won't break the bank regardless of how large a television is. Many enclosures for televisions up to 65 inches can be had for less than \$500. Enclosures are important because most are weather-resistant and some are shatterproof. In addition, an enclosure protects the television when no one is home or outside, ensuring windy or stormy afternoons when debris or branches might be flying near the television won't damage the device.

• Sound capability: An outdoor TV room likely won't be used as frequently as indoor spaces, so a sizable investment in a sound

system to accommodate outdoor viewing may not be necessary. But you may want to enhance the sound for outdoor movie nights or game watches. If you're mounting the television on an exterior wall, a pair of speakers can flank the TV on each side. If the television is going to be placed on an outdoor TV stand, a soundbar built for outdoor use should suffice.

• Lighting: It's easy to overlook lighting when planning an outdoor TV room. However, once the sun goes down, it may feel odd and a little uncomfortable if the only light is coming from the television itself. Some ambient lighting that's attached to a pergola or built into a pavillion can help illuminate the space where you'll be watching TV.

• Comfortable seating: It's



unlikely you would feel comfortable watching a movie or game indoors if you spent the whole time sitting in your dining room chairs. And it's equally important to prioritize comfortable seating in an outdoor TV space rather than just dragging patio dining

table chairs or even adirondack chairs over to the TV area when you're about to watch something. Some cushioned outdoor furniture will enhance the viewing experience for everyone.

• Fan: A ceiling fan attached to a pavillion or a wall-mounted fan or two

directing air toward the seating area can keep pesky bugs at bay and provide a little cooling relief on warm nights.

Outdoor TV rooms are wildly popular. A few creature comforts can make these spaces even more inviting.

Tips to winterize a home as cold weather approaches

It's not uncommon to spend a lot of time out of the house when the weather outside is warm. The popularity of outdoor living spaces has made it easier than ever to enjoy nature without leaving home, which can generally be done from late spring to mid-fall each year in many regions. But as fall creeps toward winter and temperatures drop, it's time to head back indoors.

As millions prepare to go back inside with winter approaching, it can be beneficial to winterize a home so interior spaces are more comfortable and exterior spaces are better able to withstand potentially harsh winter weather.

• **Check your carbon monoxide detectors.** Fall is a great season to open the windows in many regions that feature prototypical autumn air. But the crisp air of fall will eventually give way to much colder air, at which time the windows will be closed and likely remain shut for months to come. The Minnesota Department of Health notes that carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that cannot be detected by the senses. When windows remain closed for long periods of time, such as in winter, the buildup of CO, which can come from sources like water heaters, gas stoves, fireplaces, and clothes dryers, can poison residents over time. CO detectors are a safety net against such a fate, but they must be operating at peak capacity in order to be effective. As fall winds down, check all CO detectors to make sure they're working properly and replace any that are not.

• **Check for drafts.** Check around windows and doors throughout the home to see if there are any gaps that are allowing air from outside to enter the home. If daytime temperatures are mild well into the fall, then it can be difficult to see if there are any drafts before the sun goes down. Conduct this check in the evenings when temperatures are a little more chilly and leaks are easier to detect. If drafts are detected, apply weather stripping around doors and windows that do not require replacement. If there's drafts around aging windows and doors, consider replacing them.

• **Call a chimney sweeping service.** Cozying up beside a fire can make



Reversing ceiling fans in winter can help redirect warm air from the ceiling into living spaces below.

anyone forget the cold weather outside. But fireplaces should be subjected to a thorough cleaning by a skilled professional before each winter. Animals might have nested in the chimney since the fireplace was last used, and you will want any nests cleared prior to lighting your first fire of the season. In addition, the tar-like substance creosote, which forms when wood is burned in a fireplace, can build up and harden over time. That's a dangerous prospect, as creosote is highly flammable, which can lead to chimney fires. Creosote also can block the flow of air through a chimney, and that can trap gasses, including CO, in a home.

• **Reverse your fans.** It's a simple step but one people may not even realize they can make. In homes with ceiling fans, residents can reverse the fans so

the blades spin clockwise. This simple step pushes trapped warm air hovering around the ceiling into the living space below. This can make home interiors warmer without requiring residents to turn up the thermostat and increase their energy bill.

• **Replace your HVAC air filter.** Replacing the air filter on your HVAC prior to winter can make the unit operate more efficiently, which can help reduce your wintertime energy bill. Replacing the filter prior to winter also improves indoor air quality, which is a notable benefit during a time of year when the windows typically remain closed for months.

Winterizing a home is not a significant undertaking, but it can be very effective at making homes healthier and more comfortable once windows are closed for the season.



The benefits of a pro gutter cleaning

Gutters serve an important role on a building, catching rainwater from the roof and channelling it away from the structure. Without properly functioning gutters and downspouts, basements can flood, foundations may become cracked and soil can erode. Gutters also help maintain roof and siding longevity, ensuring that rainwater will not pool under shingles or siding. Wet leaves also create habitats for pests to live, notably for mosquitoes, termites, rodents, and birds.

Homeowners can clean their own gutters, but the job is often best left to professionals. Here are some of the reasons to leave gutter cleaning to an expert.

• **Pros have the equipment.** As with any project, having the right equipment means it will be done correctly. Handyman services and professional gutter cleaners already have the gear to reach gutters and tackle the mess, unlike some homeowners who will have to purchase tools.

• **Pros are trained in safety.** Gutter cleaning professionals are trained in proper safety procedures and have the right equipment to safely scale homes. Gutter cleaning involves climbing ladders, walking on roofs, and handling slippery debris. It also may require working close to electrical and cable wires entering the home. Homeowners who don't know how to navigate these conditions safely risk falls or other

injuries.

• **Pros can spot other damage.** Professionals may spot damage to a home that homeowners do not see. This may include cracked seams, loose fasteners, sagging sections, and even roof damage. This allows homeowners to get a jump on the problem early on before it progresses to something more serious.

• **Pros save homeowners time.** One of the obvious perks to letting a professional clean the gutters is that it saves homeowners time. The expert can get the job done in less time and more efficiently than a novice weekend warrior.

Mr. Handyman, a home improvement service, says the general recommendation is to get the gutters cleaned at least twice a year: once in the spring after trees have dropped their seeds, and again in the fall after all leaves have fallen. People with heavier amounts of natural debris may need more frequent cleanings. A professional gutter service will typically include inspection of the entire gutter system; removal of all debris from gutters and downspouts; flushing of gutters and downspouts to ensure water flows correctly; assessment of water being directed away; and identification of areas in need of repair.

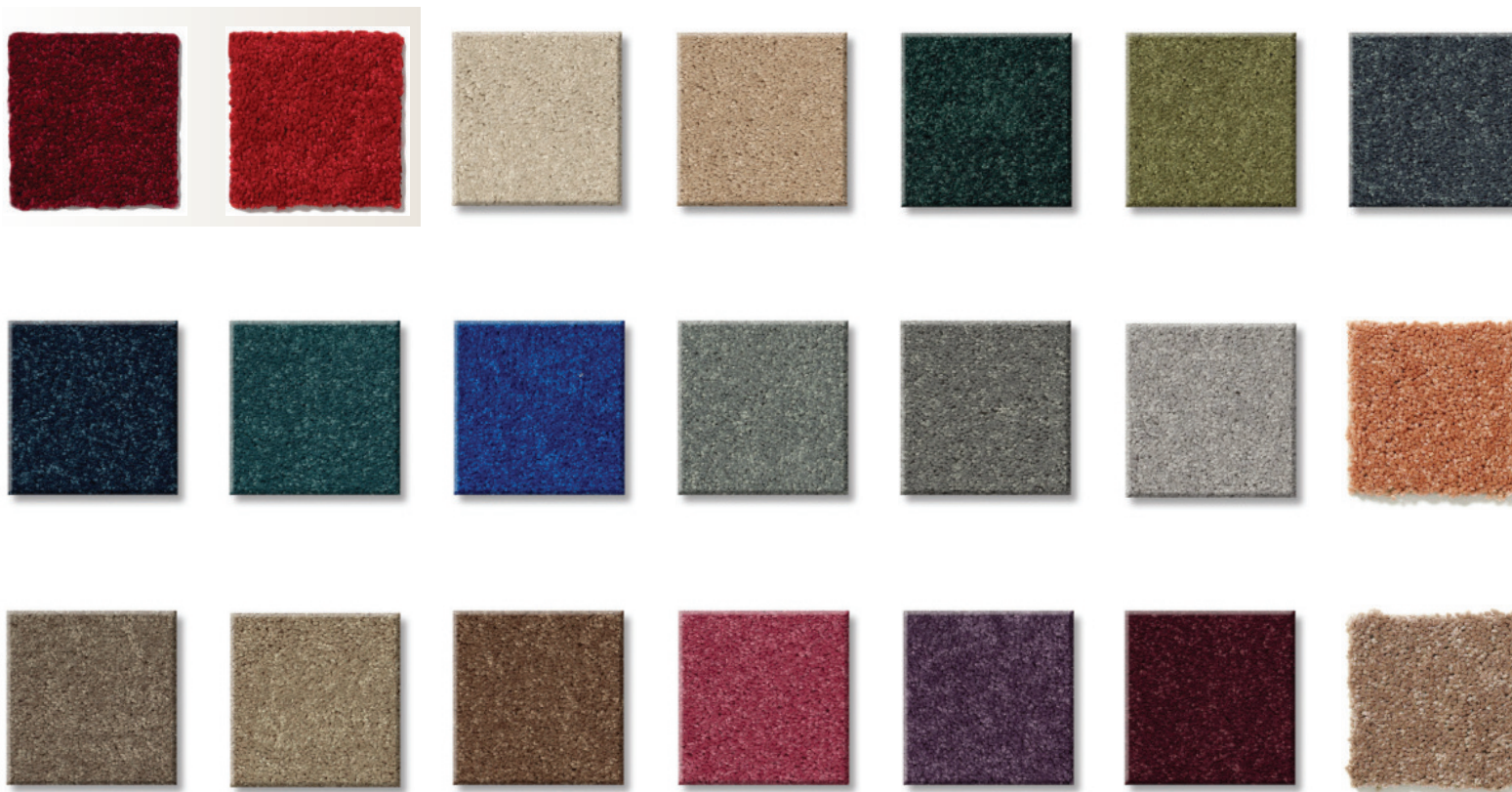
Gutter cleaning is an important step that safeguards a home by keeping gutters and downspouts in working order.

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