

The background of the cover features a photograph of a technician wearing safety glasses and working on a complex HVAC system. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter and a grid of squares in various shades of blue and grey, creating a modern, technical aesthetic.

MONTH-BY-MONTH GUIDE TO HVAC MAINTENANCE

Just like any critical piece of equipment, your heating and cooling systems require regular HVAC maintenance to keep them running properly. Home and business owners should stay on top of maintenance tasks year-round to improve system performance and efficiency.

Don't know exactly what to do as far as HVAC maintenance goes? We've put together a month-to-month guide that details the exact steps you should take throughout the year to keep your furnace, air conditioner, heat pump, or other HVAC equipment operating smoothly. We'll start in the spring and take you through the winter with the necessary steps.

January

- Change your air filter. If you have a disposable filter, remove the old one and insert a clean replacement. If your filter is reusable, wash it according to the manufacturer's directions and allow it to dry entirely before reinserting it into the filter compartment.
- Inspect all registers and return air grilles in your home to ensure they have not been blocked or shut. These vents should never be blocked, as doing so will restrict airflow through your HVAC systems, which could create performance issues and system overheating.

Move all carpets and rugs, furniture, and other items away from vents. Check to see that vent louvers are open; if you wish to shut off heating to unused areas of your home or building, never close more than 20 percent of the structure's HVAC vents. If you have many unused areas, consider investing in a zoning system which will allow you to reduce energy waste while facilitating proper HVAC system performance – work with a trusted HVAC contractor to design and install zoning solutions for your home or business.

- Keep the area surrounding your heating equipment clear. Never store items directly by the furnace, especially flammable or combustible material such as rags, wood, gasoline, paint, solvent, and cleaners.
- Check your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors monthly throughout heating season. Test batteries each month, using the unit's TEST button. Vacuum away any dust which has accumulated on the detectors.
- Keep exterior vents and chimneys clear of ice and snow. Flue pipes allow the heating process's combustion byproducts to exit the home or building safely – a blockage could cause carbon monoxide to leak indoors. Fresh air intake piping should also be cleared for proper ventilation.

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April

- Schedule preventative HVAC maintenance with your contractor for your air conditioning or heat pump unit. Professional cooling system maintenance will give your system the tune-up it needs to run smoothly during the coming spring and summer months. Preventative maintenance troubleshoots performance issues and helps your system operate more efficiently.

Don't have an HVAC contractor to call? Find a local cooling contractor serving your area by searching the HVAC.com [Contractor Directory](#).

- Change your air filter. If you have a disposable filter, remove the old one and insert a clean replacement. If your filter is reusable, wash it according to the manufacturer's directions and allow it to dry entirely before reinserting it into the filter compartment.
- Check the area surrounding your exterior condenser or heat pump. Remove any items stored in the surrounding area. Take off the unit's cover if it was covered over the winter. Trim away any vegetation that has grown around the unit. These steps will improve airflow through the system.
- Inspect all registers and return air grilles in your home to ensure they have not been blocked or shut. These vents should never be blocked, as doing so will restrict airflow through your HVAC systems, which could create performance issues and system overheating.

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May

- Start your air conditioner. Even if the outdoor temperatures aren't quite hot enough to use the cooling system yet, it's smart to fire up your system ahead of the season. You'll be able to identify system start-up issues and other performance issues, such as a lack of cool air or frequent cycling, and have them repaired prior to rising temperatures. This way, your system issues will be resolved before you need to use your air conditioner or heat pump, and you won't be stuck waiting for repairs when the first hot day of the year rolls around.
- Set your programmable thermostat schedules for cooling season. Create temperature schedules that fit the occupancy schedules of your home or business. Programmable thermostats may allow for different schedules each day, for the week and weekend, or for the week and each day of the weekend, depending on the model, and typically accommodate up to four temperature adjustments daily.

Remember, setting temperatures back 10 to 15 degrees for periods of 8 hours or more can save you one percent on energy costs for every degree you set your thermostat back. Perfect times for setbacks are overnight or during hours your home or business will be unoccupied. Set temperatures to adjust to occupied comfort levels about 15 minutes before the dwelling or building will be occupied to avoid discomfort without wasting energy.

During occupied hours, keep everyone comfortable while conserving energy. Keeping the thermostat's temperature at 78 degrees is optimal for energy efficiency when people are indoors, and will help them stay cool without consuming excessive energy.

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- Inspect your exterior cooling equipment. Gently brush away any grass clippings and debris which have gathered on the unit. Trim away vegetation that has grown around the unit. Never store outdoor furniture or other items in the area immediately surrounding the unit.
- Inspect your cooling system's drip pan and condensate drain lines for clogs. If these components become clogged with mold or algae growth, condensation from the cooling process cannot exit your home or building properly. This can cause the cooling system to malfunction, or water to back up indoors, causing water damage. If water has backed up, clear clogs within the drip pan or condensate drain lines. Turn off power to the system for safety before doing so. Use a wet/dry vacuum to clear water from the drip pan, or use rags to soak it up. Clean the drip pan using a mild soap. Clear clogs from the condensate drain lines using your wet/dry vacuum.

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- It's time to start thinking ahead to heating season! In September, schedule professional HVAC maintenance for your heating system. A skilled contractor will tune up your furnace, heat pump, boiler, dual fuel hybrid heating system, or other heating equipment to improve performance over the winter. Your contractor will give system components the TLC they need to operate correctly and efficiently throughout heating season.
- Set your programmable thermostat schedules for heating season. Create temperature schedules that fit the occupancy schedules of your home or business. Programmable thermostats may allow for different schedules each day, for the week and weekend, or for the week and each day of the weekend, depending on the model, and typically accommodate up to four temperature adjustments daily.

Remember, setting temperatures back 10 to 15 degrees for periods of 8 hours or more can save you one percent on energy costs for every degree you set your thermostat back. Perfect times for setbacks are overnight or during hours your home or business will be unoccupied. Set temperatures to adjust to occupied comfort levels about 15 minutes before the dwelling or building will be occupied to avoid discomfort without wasting energy. During occupied hours, keep everyone comfortable while conserving energy. Keeping the thermostat's temperature at 68 degrees is optimal for energy efficiency when people are indoors, and will help them stay warm without consuming excessive energy.

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- In many areas of the country, temperatures may dip low enough this month to warrant the use of the heating system. Before this point, fire up your heating system for a test run. Doing so will allow you to make sure it comes on and works properly. If it doesn't, you'll have the opportunity to have repairs made before cold weather hits – HVAC contractors may be overwhelmed with repair work at the beginning of heating season, as home and business owners who didn't take their heating systems for a test run are calling for emergency repairs.
- Keep the area surrounding your heating equipment clear. Never store items directly by the furnace, especially flammable or combustible material such as rags, wood, gasoline, paint, solvent, and cleaners.
- Check your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors monthly throughout heating season. Replace batteries now, and test them each month, using the unit's TEST button. Vacuum away any dust which has accumulated on the detectors.

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