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Winter Home Repair Jobs

Winter's doldrums got you down? Grab a screwdriver and a hammer and fight back with easy home repairs that'll raise spirits and get your house ready for spring.



Stuck inside during these winter days? Take advantage of your indoor time by giving your home a few quick repairs.

Accomplishments — even little ones — go a long way toward a sunny outlook. Fortunately, there are plenty of easy, quick home repair chores you can do when you're mired in the thick of winter. For max efficiency, make a to-do list ahead of time and shop for all the tools and supplies in one trip. On your work days, put the basics in a caddy and carry it from room to room, checking off completed tasks as you speed through them.

What to look (and listen) for

In each room, look around and take stock of what needs fixing or improving. Focus on small, quick-hit changes, not major redo's. Here are some likely suspects:

1. Sagging towel rack or wobbly toilet tissue holder.

Unscrew the fixture and look for the culprit. It's probably a wimpy, push-in type plastic plasterboard anchor. Pull that out (or just poke it through the wall) and replace it with something more substantial. Toggle bolts are strongest, and threaded types such as E-Z Ancor are easy to install.

2. Squeaky door hinges.

Eliminate squeaks by squirting a puff of powdered graphite (\$2.50 for a 3-gram tube) alongside the pin where the hinge turns. If the door sticks, plane off a bit of the wood, then touch up the paint so the surgery isn't noticeable.

3. Creaky floor boards.

They'll shush if you fasten them down better. A low-cost option: Dust a little talcum powder into the seam where floorboards meet — the talcum acts as a lubricant to quiet boards that rub against each other. A small screw into the joint from the underside will also bind the two squeaking edges together. With sheet flooring you can screw the sheet down to hold it tight, another option is to glue and screw a small batten (say 42 x 19) at the side of the floor joist, remembering to glue the joist/floor joint thoroughly.

4. Rusty shutoff valves.

Check under sinks and behind toilets for the stop taps or shutoff valves on your water supply lines. These little-used valves may slowly rust in place over time, and might not work when you need them most. Keep them operating by putting a little machine oil or WD-40 on the handle shafts. Twist the handles back and forth to work the oil into the threads. If they won't budge, give the oil a couple of hours to penetrate, and try again. Still won't budge? Then time to call the plumber.

5. Blistered paint on shower ceilings.

This area gets a lot of heat and moisture that stresses paint finishes. Scrape off old paint and recoat, using a high-quality exterior-grade paint. Also, be sure everyone uses the bathroom vent when showering to help get rid of excess moisture.

6. Loose handles or hinges on furniture, cabinets, and doors. You can probably fix these with a few quick turns of a screwdriver. But if a screw just spins in place, try making the hole fit the screw better by stuffing in a toothpick coated with glue, or switching to a larger screw.

Safety items

You know those routine safety checks you keep meaning to do but never have the time? Now's the time.

7. Carbon monoxide and smoke detectors. If you don't like waking up to the annoying chirp of smoke detector batteries as they wear down, do what many fire departments recommend and simply replace all of them at the same time once a year.

8. Exhaust filter for the kitchen stove. By washing it to remove grease, you'll increase the efficiency of your exhaust vent; plus, if a kitchen stovetop fire breaks out, this will help keep the flames from spreading.

9. Clothes dryer vent. Pull the dryer out from the wall, disconnect the vent pipe, and vacuum lint out of the pipe and the place where it connects to the machine. Also, wipe lint off your exterior dryer vent so the flap opens and closes easily. (You'll need to go outside for that, but it's quick.) Remember that vents clogged with old dryer lint are a leading cause of house fires.

10. Drain hoses. Inspect your clothes washer, the dishwashers, and the icemaker. If you see any cracks or drips, replace the hose so you don't come home to a flood one day.

11. Check all wet areas for water leaks.

Water causes the most problems and costly damaged in homes throughout Australia. Check room by room, taps, tap handles, mixer taps, waste pipes and water connections under all basins, sinks troughs, baths, showers, and toilets.

12. Electrical cords. Replace any that are brittle, cracked, or have damaged plugs. If you're using extension cords, see if you can eliminate them — for example, by replacing that too-short lamp cord with one that's longer. If you don't feel up to rewiring the lamp yourself, drop it off at a repair shop as you head out to shop for your repair materials. It might not be ready by the end of the day. But, hey, one half-done repair that you can't check off is no big deal, right?

13 The bakers dozen bonus tip. During heavy rain events, grab your step ladder and torch so you can get up into the roof space or attic, shine the torch around slowly looking out for the tell tale signs of water drips. This will easily identify where that pesky leak is and when the weather clears up you do the repair needed. Before your ceiling lining and insulation lands on your lap one night watching the TV

To find out more and get your home inspected call your local independent property inspector on **1800 17 88 22** or email info@ipi.net.au

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