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Home Maintenance & Basic Upkeep

A frequency-based routine that keeps a Houston home in shape

A house, like a car, stays sound through small routine upkeep that blocks big repairs later. This guide lays maintenance out as a frequency checklist, adds the Houston-specific items - foundation watering, hurricane prep, freeze protection and termites - and draws the line between DIY jobs and work for licensed professionals.

1. The Frequency Checklist

Run it by the calendar

1. Monthly: HVAC Filter and a Leak Walk

Check the A/C filter every month and replace it when it looks dirty - in a Houston summer the system runs nearly around the clock, and a clogged filter wastes power and strains the unit. Then do a quick leak walk: under sinks, beside the water heater, behind toilet tanks and at the washer hoses. Small leaks are always found before they become big ones - if someone looks.

2. Quarterly: Drains, Seals and Alarms

When kitchen or bath drains slow down, clear hair and grease early instead of waiting for a full clog. Inspect door and window seals and caulk lines for cracking. Press the test button on every smoke and carbon-monoxide alarm to confirm it sounds and has not expired - alarm units themselves generally last about 10 years, then replace the whole unit.

3. Every Six Months: Gutters, Water Heater and Caulking

Clean the gutters and downspouts - leaf-clogged gutters are a common source of roof leaks. Drain and flush the water heater per its manual to clear sediment. Re-caulk cracked joints at window and door frames, pipe penetrations and masonry joints: it keeps water out, and insects too.

4. Yearly: Professional Service and the Big Check

Have a professional service the HVAC system once a year (spring and fall is even better). Get a termite inspection yearly. Walk the roof once a year for missing shingles, aged sealant and drainage. Then walk the foundation line and the yard drainage: rainwater should run away from the house, never pool against the walls.

Put this checklist into phone calendar reminders - one repeating reminder each for monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual. With upkeep, what fails is never knowledge; it is memory.

5. Foundation Watering: Managing Clay Soil Shrinkage

Much of Houston sits on expansive clay that shrinks in dry months and pulls at the foundation. Lay a soaker hose about 12-18 inches out from the foundation line and water slowly through dry spells, keeping soil moisture even - the goal is "even," not soaked; stop after rains and in wet months. If a door suddenly stops latching or diagonal cracks appear on walls, photograph them first, then have a foundation company evaluate.

6. Hurricane Season Prep (June through November)

Before the season: trim branches hanging over the roof, clear yard drainage, and check the roof and gutters. Photograph insurance policies, closing documents and key IDs into cloud storage, and stock flashlights, batteries and drinking water. After a storm, photograph everything before you clean up - for an insurance claim, the photos are where the evidence chain starts.

7. Freeze Protection: Remember the 2021 Freeze

Ahead of a hard freeze: cover or drain outdoor faucets and insulate exposed pipes. On the coldest nights, let faucets on exterior walls drip slowly and open the cabinet doors under sinks so warm room air reaches the pipes. Everyone in the house should know where the main shut-off valve is and how to close it - if a pipe does burst, shut the water off first, then deal with the mess.

8. Humidity, Mold and Termites

Houston is humid: bathroom exhaust fans must work and the A/C must dehumidify properly. Mold on a wall corner means find the water source first - wiping the surface alone solves nothing. Termite defense is three habits: an inspection every year, no wood in direct soil contact, and no firewood or cardboard stacked against exterior walls. Mud tubes along the foundation or a hollow sound when you knock on wood means call a licensed termite company promptly.

9. Safe to Do Yourself

Changing HVAC filters, re-caulking exterior joints, clearing small clogs (plunger, hair hook), swapping light bulbs and alarm batteries, patching small wall dings, oiling locks and hinges - the common thread is low risk: a mistake hurts neither the house nor you.

10. Licensed Professionals Only

Electrical work (panels, new circuits), gas (gas lines, gas water heaters), roof work at height, structural and foundation work, and main-line plumbing changes - here a mistake costs personal safety, a fire, or a denied insurance claim. Pull permits where the work requires them; unpermitted work becomes a problem again when you sell.

Gas safety: If you smell the rotten-egg odor of gas, leave the house immediately and call the gas company or 911 from outside. Do not switch any electrical device on or off indoors and do not light anything - no exceptions to this rule.

11. Keep the Records - They Pay Off When You Sell

File the date, invoice and before-and-after photos of every service and repair, one folder per year. When you sell, Texas's Seller's Disclosure asks you to state the home's condition truthfully - complete records keep you compliant and give buyers confidence. It is value protection you can prove.

Not sure about a repair, need a reliable contractor, or want a pre-listing check before you sell? Free consultation: (347) 774-5396 | owenrealestatetx.com

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This guide is for general reference only and is not repair or safety advice. For electrical, gas, structural and at-height work, always hire a licensed professional and follow local codes and permit requirements.

Feel free to share this guide with friends who may find it helpful.