

Tackle These Winter Chores to Keep Your Home Efficient

It's winter, which often means high energy bills, tons of snow and blocked driveways.

But it doesn't have to be that way. While some people find home maintenance tedious and exhausting, our [Four Seasons of Homeownership](#) series breaks down scores of chores into simple punch lists.

Here are some tips to stay warm and comfortable without breaking the bank — and to keep snow out of travel paths without breaking your back!



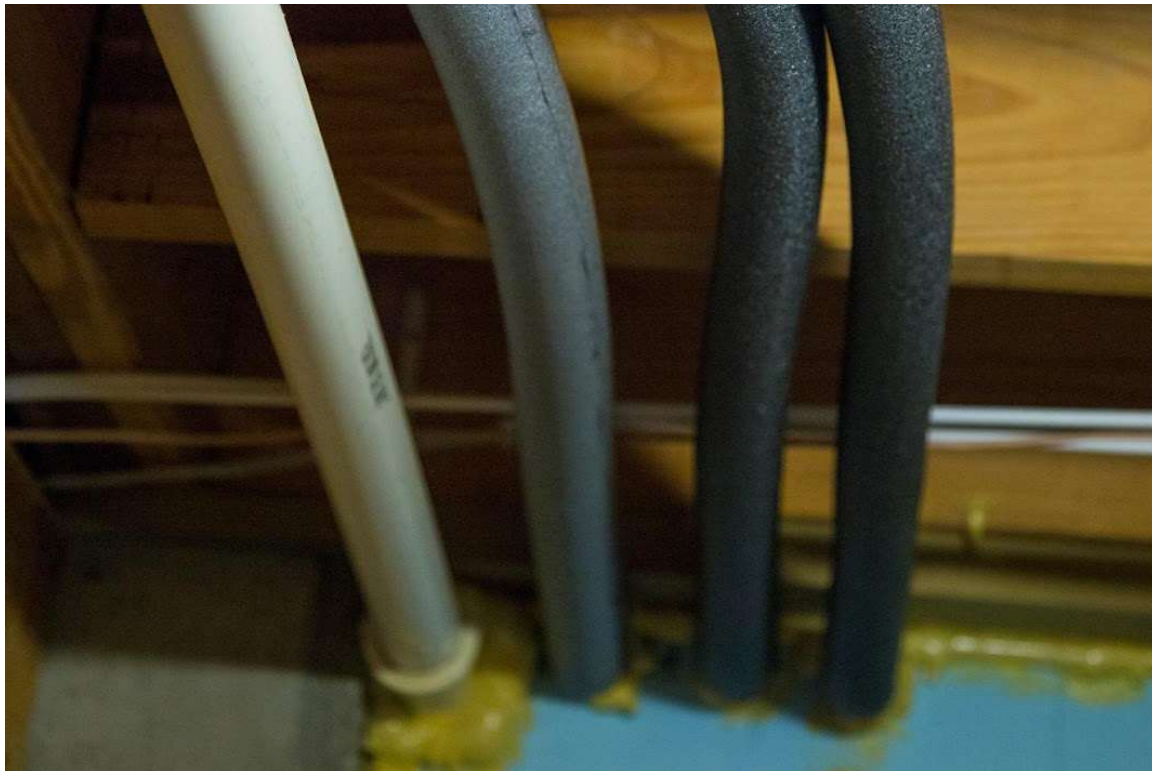
Set Your Ceiling Fans Clockwise

Let's start with something simple that can make you feel warmer and lower your heating bills.

Ceiling fans make you feel cooler in the summer, but they can produce the opposite effect in the winter. For optimal results, just clean the blades and set the fan to rotate clockwise on low — either at the switch on the unit or with a remote control.

The low setting prevents a strong draft that would cool you down as it does during the summer. Since heat rises, the fan pushes air trapped near the ceiling upward and outward, causing it to circulate near the room's perimeter.

Because this ceiling fan hack makes the air at floor level feel warmer, you can lower the thermostat, saving you money and helping the environment!



Insulate Your Home's Water Pipes

When the forecast calls for freezing weather, many people think of frozen pipes, which often lead to burst pipes. But you can easily prevent that.

If your home has bath or kitchen sinks on an outside wall, open the cabinet doors containing the sink to allow heated air to circulate inside.

Also, leave water dripping on one of your faucets so water continues moving through those water lines. And you can easily insulate outside hose bibbs by slipping on protective foam covers to prevent problems.

If your house has a crawlspace, insulate all the water pipes. It's always a dirty job when you go under the house, so put on a [disposable crawlsuit](#), enter the crawlspace, and cover the water pipes with [pre-slit foam pipe insulation](#).

Installation couldn't be easier — just cut to size and hug the pipe with the foam.

Get the Right Gear

You know what they say — if you fail to plan, then plan to fail. Snowfall and winter go hand in hand, although that's true in some parts of the country more than others.

It's a good idea to [buy a telescoping roof rake](#) to clear dangerous snow build-up. You'll also need a snow shovel for removing the white stuff from walks and driveways.

The worst-case scenario is you won't need them — the best case is having tools hanging in the shed that are there when you do.

When that day comes, remember: prolonged use of a snow shovel can lead to back pain and muscle strain. Choose a lightweight snow shovel with an ergonomic, D-shaped handle.

The right tool will allow you to put safety first and get results — win-win!



Remove Snow Safely

If you live in a state that sees a lot of snow, you know shoveling the white stuff is all about technique. It will be a long winter, and you'll need a strong back to tackle the required chores.

So, grab the snow shovel, dig in, and lift with your legs, not your back. Otherwise, you'll cause more than sore muscles!

Also, step toward the direction you're throwing the snow; don't twist your waist. It's unnecessary to do so, and this technique is another back saver.

Of course, the best thing you can do in areas that receive lots of snow is to buy a snowblower from your local The Home Depot.

A single-stage model, starting at just \$300, should do the job for the average homeowner, clearing a 16-inch-wide path down to the pavement. A dual-stage model can move more snow, but it's a bit pricier, in the \$2,000 range.



Get a Generator

If power goes out during a winter storm, an automatic standby generator sure comes in handy. It transfers the power load to the generator, and you don't have to hook up a thing.

That means your family can still cook holiday meals and enjoy watching seasonal films.

Of course, you'll pay for this level of convenience — the [Briggs & Stratton 20,000-watt standby generator](#) with a whole-house transfer switch costs about \$5,249.

A portable generator, like the [DeWalt 4,000-watt gas-powered unit](#), is an inexpensive alternative that you can use with a manual transfer system.

Costing around \$650, it includes the transfer switch, power inlet box and power cord. You connect the switch to the main electrical panel so only circuits the generator will power are active during an outage.

Then you mount the power inlet box outside the home and hardwire it to the transfer switch that's connected to the generator by a power cord.

When a heavy snowstorm brings down a power line, you just have to shut off power from the utility at the manual transfer switch.

Then, you can start the generator to energize the selected circuits wired to it. This prevents your generator from back-feeding power into utility lines and possibly injuring repair crews.

[Make Your List!](#)

We've covered quite a bit. But wait...there's more! Check out our [Four Seasons of Homeownership Winter list](#) for items you must do, should do if time and budget allow, and we've even thrown in some extras!

