THE PROOF SERIES

A PLAYFUL GUIDE TO HOME MAINTENANCE

Home Proof

Caring for your house, from leaky taps to winter storms — in plain language, with big type and a few laughs.



John Marshall

PROUDLY CANADIAN



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FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER

By John Marshall

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THE YEARLY RHYTHM

Your Home's Yearly Rhythm

A house is happiest when it gets a little attention each season. Think of it like a garden: small, regular care beats one frantic rescue.

Spring check › Summer watch › Fall prep › Winter guard

1. Spring: wake up the house — Walk the property after the snow melts. Look for roof damage, cracked caulking, and gutters full of leaves. Spring is for spotting what winter did.

2. Summer: keep it breathing — Clean dryer vents, check the attic ventilation, and keep water away from the foundation. Heat and humidity are quiet troublemakers.

3. Fall: button it up — Seal drafts, service the furnace, and put away hoses before the first hard freeze. An hour in October saves a crisis in January.

4. Winter: guard and watch — Keep pipes warm, clear snow away from vents, and watch for ice dams on the roof. Winter rewards the prepared.

TALE

E STORY

Ruth, 71, once spent an entire November afternoon chasing a whistle in her living room.

It was a gap in the window caulking, whistling like a kettle. A five-dollar tube of caulk silenced it for good.

! Put two reminders on your calendar: one in April, one in October. Most of this book's seasonal jobs fit inside a single weekend each.

Take care: Never climb onto a roof or a tall ladder alone. If a job needs height or heavy lifting, that is what neighbours, family, and handypeople are for.



SPRING CHECKLIST

The Spring Walkaround

After the last snow melts, your house tells you everything winter did to it. A slow thirty-minute walk, inside and out, catches problems while they are small.

Circle the house › Look up › Look down › Write it down

1. Circle the outside — Walk around the house with your eyes open for cracked siding, peeling paint, and loose trim. Bring a notepad; memory is a poor filing cabinet.

2. Look up at the roof — From the ground, scan for missing or curling shingles and sagging spots. Binoculars turn this into a safe armchair inspection.

3. Look down at the ground — Check that soil slopes away from the foundation and that downspouts dump water at least a metre from the house. Puddles near the wall are a warning.

4. Walk the inside — Sniff the basement for mustiness, check under sinks for drips, and look at ceilings for new water stains. Stains are the house waving a little flag.

TALE

Frank, 76, found a soft spot in his deck boards during his spring walkaround.
He replaced two boards in an afternoon. His neighbour ignored a similar spot and replaced a whole deck two years later.

! Photograph anything odd with your phone. A photo dated this spring makes it easy to see next spring whether something got worse.

Take care: If you spot a large crack in the foundation or a sagging beam, do not investigate further. Photograph it and call a professional.

RAIN CONTROL

Gutters and Downspouts

Gutters (also called eavestroughs) are your roof's rainspouts. When they clog, water goes where it should not: into your walls and basement.

Scoop the muck › Flush it out › Check the slope › Aim the spouts

1. Scoop out the debris — With gloves and a small scoop, remove leaves and gunk from the gutters. Do this in late spring and again after the autumn leaves fall.

2. Flush with a hose — Run a garden hose through the gutter toward the downspout. If water pools instead of flowing, the gutter may need its slope adjusted.

3. Clear the downspouts — If water backs up, the downspout is likely plugged. A strong hose blast from the top usually clears it; a plumber's snake handles stubborn ones.

4. Aim water away — Downspouts should end at least a metre from the foundation, on a slope that carries water away. Splash blocks or short extensions do the trick cheaply.

TALE

REAL STORY

Walter, 73, wondered why his basement carpet was damp every spring.

The answer was a downspout dumping water right against the foundation. A ten-dollar extension ended the mystery.

! Gutter guards reduce cleaning but do not eliminate it. Seeds and shingle grit still sneak through, so peek inside once a year.

Take care: Cleaning gutters means ladder work. Keep three points of contact, never lean sideways, and skip the job on windy or icy days.

HEALTH CHECK

Filters, Detectors, and Batteries

Three tiny jobs, done twice a year, protect your lungs, your furnace, and your sleep. Set a date — say, when the clocks change — and make it a ritual.

Furnace filter › Smoke detectors › CO detector › Thermostat

1. Swap the furnace filter — Find the filter slot near your furnace, slide the old filter out, and note its size printed on the frame. Slide in a fresh one with the arrow pointing toward the furnace.

2. Test smoke detectors — Press the test button on each smoke detector until it beeps. If it stays silent, change the battery and test again. Replace the whole unit every ten years.

3. Check the carbon monoxide detector — Homes with a furnace, fireplace, or attached garage need a CO detector on each floor. Test it the same way, and replace it when it expires — the date is printed on the back.

4. Peek at the thermostat — Confirm the thermostat still follows its program and the furnace or heat pump kicks on. A furnace that short-cycles or bangs deserves a service call.

TALE

E STORY

Dorothy, 79, put a sticky note on her furnace that reads 'Filter: April and October.' Her heating bills dropped, and she swears the note is the best home upgrade she ever made.

!

Write the filter size on a card taped inside the furnace door. Future-you will be grateful when standing in the hardware aisle.

Take care: If a CO detector ever sounds for real, leave the house immediately and call your local emergency number. Do not go back in to check.

SUMMER WATCH

Summer Heat and Ventilation

Summer asks your house to breathe out heat and keep moisture moving along. A little airflow attention now prevents mould and stuffiness later.

Bathroom fans › Dryer vent › Attic peek › Basement sniff

1. Run the bathroom fans — Switch bathroom fans on during showers and for twenty minutes after. They carry steam out before it can settle into walls and ceilings.

2. Clean the dryer vent — Pull the dryer out once a year and clear lint from the hose and the outside vent flap. Lint is both a fire hazard and a drying-time thief.

3. Peek into the attic — On a mild day, look into the attic for signs of moisture or daylight where it should not be. Good ventilation keeps the attic close to outdoor temperature.

4. Sniff the basement — A musty basement in August usually means damp air. A dehumidifier set around 50 percent humidity keeps mould from throwing a party.

TALE

E STORY

Stan, 72, finally cleaned a dryer vent packed solid with lint.

His dryer went from two cycles per load to one, and he joked that the lint alone could have stuffed a pillow.

! Never vent a dryer or bathroom fan into the attic. They must exhaust outdoors, or all that moisture just moves the problem upstairs.

Take care: If you see black mould covering more than a small patch, do not scrub it yourself. Call a mould remediation professional.

FALL PREP

The Fall Weatherproofing Weekend

Pick one crisp October weekend and button up the house. Every draft you seal now is money that stays in your pocket all winter.

Find the drafts › Caulk the gaps › Service furnace › Store the hoses

1. Hunt the drafts — On a windy day, hold a lit incense stick or a damp hand near windows, doors, and outlets on outside walls. Fluttering smoke marks the leaks.

2. Caulk and seal — Run a bead of exterior caulk around window and door frames where they meet the siding. Inside, add weatherstripping to doors that show daylight around the edges.

3. Book the furnace service — Have the furnace or heat pump serviced each fall before you truly need it. A technician cleans, checks for cracks, and confirms it is safe.

4. Disconnect the hoses — Unhook garden hoses, drain them, and store them indoors. Then shut off the outdoor taps from the inside valve if your house has one.

TALE

E STORY

Mabel, 74, caulked her drafty back door on a Saturday and called her sister to brag that the hallway 'finally stopped sighing.' Her January heating bill agreed.

! Furnace technicians book up fast in October. Call in September and you will get your pick of appointment times.

Take care: Do not seal every gap in an older home's basement or attic. Houses need some air exchange; sealing everything can trap moisture indoors.

WINTER GUARD

Winterizing Against the Cold

Canadian winters test every weakness in a house. A few hours of preparation keep pipes flowing, roofs intact, and you comfortable.

Protect pipes › Clear the vents › Mind the roof › Stock the kit

1. Keep pipes from freezing — Let faucets on outside walls drip during deep cold snaps, and keep the thermostat at 15 degrees Celsius or higher even when you travel.

2. Keep vents clear — After heavy snow, clear the furnace and water-heater exhaust vents outside. A blocked vent can push dangerous gases back into the house.

3. Watch for ice dams — Icicles along the eaves can mean ice dams: melted snow refreezing at the edge and backing water under the shingles. A roof rake pulls snow down safely from the ground.

4. Stock a winter kit — Keep flashlights, batteries, blankets, and a battery radio handy. Power outages are rare, but being ready turns them from emergencies into inconveniences.

TALE

ICE STORY

Albert, 77, learned about ice dams the expensive way: a brown stain bloomed on his bedroom ceiling in February.

Now his roof rake hangs by the garage door like a winter sword.

! If you travel in winter, have someone check the house every few days. Many insurance policies require regular check-ins during cold snaps.

Take care: Never use a barbecue, generator, or camp stove indoors during an outage. They produce carbon monoxide, which you cannot see or smell.

BELOW GROUND

Basements, Sump Pumps, and Thaw

Basements collect whatever the rest of the house ignores: water, humidity, and forgotten boxes. Spring thaw is their annual exam.

Test the pump › Check the walls › Control humidity › Store smart

1. Test the sump pump — Pour a bucket of water into the sump pit. The pump should kick on, drain the pit, and shut off. If it hesitates, call a plumber before the spring melt.

2. Scan walls and floor — Look for white powdery patches (efflorescence), which signal water seeping through concrete, and for new cracks wider than a pencil.

3. Keep humidity in check — Run a dehumidifier in damp months and empty it regularly, or connect a drain hose so it empties itself. Aim for 30 to 50 percent humidity.

4. Store things wisely — Keep boxes off the floor on shelving or pallets, and store valuables in plastic bins, not cardboard. Cardboard wicks up dampness like a sponge.

TALE

E STORY

Irene, 70, tested her sump pump on a whim one April Saturday.

It groaned and died on the spot. The replacement cost far less than the flooded basement she narrowly avoided.

!

Consider a battery backup for your sump pump. Storms that knock out power are exactly when you need the pump most.

Take care: Standing water and electricity are a dangerous pair. If the basement floods near the breaker panel or outlets, stay out and call for help.



WATER COMMAND

Know Your Shut-Off Valves

Every home has a master switch for water. Knowing where it is turns a burst pipe from a disaster into a mop-up.

Find the main › Test it now › Label fixtures › Teach the house

1. Locate the main valve — Find where the water line enters your house, usually in the basement near the front wall or by the water meter. The main valve is there: a wheel or a lever.

2. Test it while calm — Turn the valve off, run a tap to confirm the water stops, then turn it back on. A valve that has not moved in years may be stiff; test it now, not during a leak.

3. Find the fixture valves — Under each sink and behind each toilet is a small valve for that fixture alone. These let you fix one tap without shutting off the whole house.

4. Show everyone — Make sure everyone in the house knows where the main valve is and how it turns. In an emergency, seconds matter and panic forgets.

TALE

STORY

George, 75, labelled his main water valve with a bright red tag after a supply hose burst at 11 p.m.

His son shut the water off in thirty seconds. George calls that tag the cheapest insurance he owns.

!

Wheel-style valves turn clockwise to close, like a tap. Lever-style valves close when the handle sits across the pipe.

Take care: If the main valve is seized and will not budge, do not force it with a wrench. Call a plumber to replace it before you need it.

TAP ANATOMY

Anatomy of a Tap

A tap is simpler than it looks: water comes up, a washer or cartridge holds it back, and the handle decides. Meet the parts and the drip loses its mystery.

Water rises › Washer seals › Handle lifts › Water flows

1. Water waits below — Pressurized water sits in the pipes under your sink, ready and waiting. The tap's job is simply to hold it back or let it through.

2. The seal does the work — Inside, a rubber washer or a small cartridge presses against a seat to block the water. When these wear out, water sneaks past: that is your drip.

3. The handle lifts the seal — Turning the handle lifts the washer or rotates the cartridge, opening the path. Quarter-turn lever taps use cartridges; twist taps usually use washers.

4. Aerator finishes the job — The little screen at the spout tip, called the aerator, mixes air into the stream. It unscrews for cleaning when the flow turns weak or crooked.

TALE

E STORY

Ethel, 78, unscrewed her tap's aerator and found it packed with grit.
She rinsed it, screwed it back on, and announced the tap had 'found its manners again.'

!

Take a photo of the tap's brand and model before shopping for parts. Faucet parts are brand-specific, and the photo saves a second trip.

Take care: Always shut off the fixture valves under the sink before opening up a tap. Water under pressure has a sense of humour you will not enjoy.

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