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## Palo Alto Online Real Estate

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### Post-ownership reality:

*Homeownership means never having to say you're done*

by Nick Gosling  
Palo Alto Online Staff

Every long-term homeowner knows that owning a house means weekly and sometimes daily upkeep and maintenance. Even with constant attention, though, items tend to fall apart after a while.

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Knowing what to look for and when to look for signs of replacement and wear-and-tear are essential to keeping one's home in working order.

Here's what some local experts recommend to keep one's household systems operating at their best.

#### Cleaning gutters and windows

Cleaning the gutters and windows can be a tricky and dangerous task best left to professionals. However, clearing debris from gutters is mandatory to prevent water from leaking onto the roof and into one's home, causing major damage to walls and ceilings or rotting the roof and eaves.

Randy Mills owns and operates Pioneer Services in Sunnyvale and offers professional window, gutter and skylight cleaning to homeowners in Silicon Valley. Mills suggests cleaning the gutters once a year if trees or other greenery are present near one's house.

Citing that approximately half a million homeowners are hurt on ladders each year, Mills advises using a ladder stand-off to lean the ladder against the roof without touching the gutters or creating a precarious situation where the ladder can slide off.

Two smart investments are screens to place in the gutter downspouts to prevent them from clogging, Mills said, and gutter covers, which go over the top of or inside gutters to prevent leaves from falling in them.

"If homeowners determine they want gutter covers, they need to make sure they get the right cover for the job," he said. "A professional should determine the gutter cover type a home requires."

An expert at double-pane window cleaning and repair, Mills said a leading mistake homeowners make with windows is failing to paint and caulk them properly, reducing the windows' ability to properly insulate. Mills suggests inspecting windows, doors with windows, and window and door screens each year, looking for holes in the screen and rotting or poor caulking.

While cleaning windows is not a necessity but more of a luxury, he said, it does add to the appearance of one's home.

#### Exterior painting

Whether your home is wood or stucco, keeping the paint fresh and clean is a major part of annual maintenance. Licensed painting contractor Bob Chesnos of San Jose suggests taking a walk around one's house in the springtime, keeping an eye out for peeling paint or areas that may need to be caulked.

For small spots, peeling paint or rotting wood, have them fixed, scraped, spot primed and repainted immediately to prevent future damage. A spot of peeling paint the size of a quarter can double or triple in size in one year's time, making for an even larger problem. Also, renewing the caulking located between board joints will reduce moisture leaks.

"Some houses I go to every year," Chesnos said, adding that it's a good idea to keep a record of the house's original color.

"It might be to paint just one fascia board exposed to the weather, but that's better than painting everything every five years."

Additionally, Chesnos advises dealing with a licensed contractor who has liability and workers' comp, and trimming bushes away from the house, allowing the wood to breathe better while reducing rot caused by a wet environment.

#### Plumbing

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After years on the job, Michael Riley of He-Man Plumbing in Palo Alto has come up with a few suggestions to reduce damage to one's plumbing and drainage system.

First, remove the garbage-disposal unit as it's a plumber's best friend, he said.

"If you use a garbage disposal it will rot out the kitchen plumbing and drain pipes," Riley said, adding he has seen far less damage and rarely backed up sinks at homes without garbage disposals installed in them. Where garbage disposals are present, the disposed of food pieces have a tendency to rot and harden in the pipes, causing acidic rust.

An alternative to using garbage disposals, Riley said, is bacterial preventative maintenance, done by using powder or liquid bacteria fighters present at most plumbing and hardware stores.

For toilets, Riley suggests purchasing a \$40 toilet auger to clear up clogs. Also, switch to Scott 1000 toilet paper, some of the flimsiest toilet paper on the market but also the most forgiving on sewer lines, he said.

For homes with galvanized water pipes, the hotter the water the faster the pipes will rust out, he said, so turning the thermostat down on hot-water heaters will save the life of water pipes.

For annual preventative maintenance, Riley suggests snaking out the main sewer line and cutting away any roots in it, best done by a professional. Using a root killer such as RootX can help reduce rooting if applied once a year.

#### Appliances

Home appliances are easily the most replaceable items within a home, sometimes making them the least difficult problem to deal with. However, turning to a licensed repairman may save you money in the long run.

Frank Apodaca, owner and operator of Peninsula Appliance Repair in Palo Alto, lists plenty of signs on his website at [Peninsula Appliance Repair](#) that let appliance owners know it's time to call in the professionals. For example, if the washing machine isn't spinning, it's likely a door switch or faulty motor, he said. If the washing machine isn't pumping out water, check for a clogged drain pipe, and if the machine fills and drains at the same time, the drain hose is most likely below 36 inches.

For a cook-top or oven range, Apodaca suggests looking for any number of signs, including the gas burner is not heating evenly (likely a blocked gas line), the oven won't heat to desired temperature (adjust the calibration on the thermostat) or the oven will not open (set the self-clean dials to the off position and open locking mechanism).

#### Chimneys and fireplaces

David Nagle, owner and operator of Inspector Flue-seau Chimney Services in San Carlos, advises homeowners to have their brick chimneys and fireplaces cleaned after every cord of wood burned, or at least once a year, according to the National Fire Protection Association Standard 211.

For woodstoves, have them serviced once a year, Nagle said, and avoid burning soft woods such as pine, oily woods such as eucalyptus, and Duraflame logs, as the latter leaves a waxy build-up in the flue. Instead, burn seasoned firewood, such as almond, oak and maple.

Additionally, have the chimney and fireplace inspected after a major earthquake, because broken chimneys, along with dirty chimneys, are both major causes of house fires, he said.

"Make sure to have a spark arrester on top of the chimney, as they'll prevent sparks from flying out and causing a fire," he added. Spark arresters -- devices fitted to the top of the flue that prevent embers from floating out -- are mandatory on many chimneys now.

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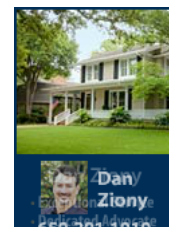
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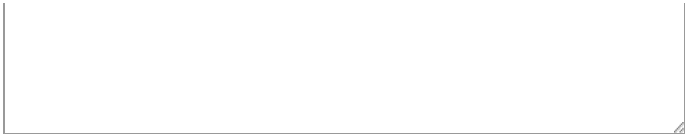
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