

Seasonal maintenance guide



Be prepared for Winter by reviewing these 12 pointers, *each* Autumn :-

1. *Guttering & drains*: clear-out leaves & debris which can block guttering & cause “spill-overs” which might result in expensive damage if rainwater or melting-snow cannot escape, safely. Consider adding grille-covers to gutters and to outlets over downpipes (“*crapauds*”) if you have trees closeby.



debris forming a serious dam in a valley gutter...

2. *Roof & exterior walls*: check the roof-covering from street-level for any signs of potential trouble from leaks, especially loose or missing tiles/slates. Examine wall-coverings (rendering, *crépi*, “shingles” etc.) for splits, cracks or damaged surfaces which might admit moisture and so be made worse by frost-action. Consider having a single strand of copper wire installed along the ridge of the roof so that copper in solution will drip onto the roof-covering, during rain. This deters the growth of algae, moss and lichen (or even conventional plants, in succession!) which can disturb roof-coverings or guttering and block essential ventilation-vents and are expensive to have cleaned-off. (This is risky, especially if not undertaken by skilled properly insured craftsmen. Damage is easily caused to interior decorations if the roof has no waterproof membrane under the tiles. Many older properties do not have that protection. In France, *underfelt* is only required at 500 metres altitude – although the weather does not discriminate!). Check that any climbing plants, like ivy, *wisteria*, *hedera* etc which penetrate the masonry surface are not damaging it or nearby guttering, downpipes, spouts or tiles & slates which are easily disturbed. *Wisteria* can constrict timberwork, too if not correctly pruned. Ensure that any air-bricks which provide essential ventilation for floors, a *cave* or cellar or a crawl-space (“*vide-sanitaire*”) are not blocked. Good ventilation helps remove condensation & prevents damp-triggered problems like rot in timber which is expensive to repair, for it may go un-noticed for

months. Is your loft properly insulated? Consider “topping-up” the insulation, noting carefully whether a *vapour-barrier* is needed & where it should be positioned (to prevent the material becoming damp *from stale moist air rising-up from the living-space below!*)

Glycine/Wisteria will throttle a balustrade unless restrained!



3. *Chimneys*: Have the flues of operational chimneys properly swept to remove potentially serious blockages, like birds’ nests or deposits of flammable tar; check their water-proofing (“flashings”) for signs of wear, cracks or loss of adhesion.

4. *Boiler & radiator*: Have your boiler serviced well before onset of Winter & ensure that the radiators function efficiently, especially by removing “trapped air” (“bleeding” means running some radiator-water through the exit valve so that any trapped air is driven out).

5. *Windows & doors*: Blocking draughts can reduce heat-loss. Faulty seals around windows & doors allow expensively heated warm air to escape, being replaced by cold air! An old-fashioned “draught excluder” or a curtain, are also effective cheap measures!



Glass-fibre insulant, outmoded and useless when damp!

6. *Insulation*: Heat rises. The roof area is the largest single loss of heat from the home – about 30%; so check your loft/*Grenier* to see whether extra insulation is needed. (About 20 cm is recommended). If it resembles the damp, degraded material in this photo, it provides almost no thermal insulation. Insulation, when correctly installed can reduce heat-loss through the roof by half! Also, lagging pipes & water tanks prevents heat escaping & so reduces the risk of ice forming & the horror of burst pipes when it thaws! Pipe lagging *must* be continuous as frost exploits vulnerable bends & “cold-bridges” where pipes pass through dense, un-insulated walls or roof & floor voids.

7. *Balcony*: Check the rain-water outlet or spout for blockages which can become blocked causing damage which is expensive to repair.

8. *Locks & fastenings*: Check that all locks gates & shutter-fastenings are secure to prevent those from swinging-open (when damage can result!) To apply a drop of light oil helps to stop hinges & bolts from seizing-up. Special lock lubricant is formulated to repel moisture & provide the reduced friction required to operate smoothly.

9. *Smoke & carbon monoxide alarms*: Check all alarms every 6 months, especially their batteries, for lasting peace of mind!

10. *Pool & "hot-tub"*: Check for leaks & that covers are properly fastened & that filters and heating are operating correctly.

11. *Emergency supplies*: Most power-cuts occur in Winter. In the event of a power-failure when it is dark (very probable!), having a torch, candles & matches in a handy place really helps to stay in control.

12. *Emergency contact numbers*: Having all of your essential 'phone numbers in one place will also help to manage a stressful situation calmly!

Bonne chance!

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