

FREE PUBLIC FIELD GUIDE

The Essential Home Maintenance Guide

A calm, year-round plan for knowing what matters, spotting meaningful changes, and taking the next useful action—without turning homeownership into a second job.



No account required



15 essential tasks



Technically reviewed



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01

START HERE

Do the work in this order

Start with the three cards below. Each step opens into a short checklist with a clear finish line, then you move to the current seasonal walk.

STEP 1

Opens the safety & controls card - 20 min

STEP 2

Run a five-minute moisture check

Opens the water & moisture card - 5 min

STEP 3

Check airflow and the HVAC filter

Opens the air & systems card - 5 min

STEP 4

Walk this season's route

Continue below - About 45 minutes

Now open Step 1 and work straight down

The cards below match the path above exactly. Finish Step 1, then Step 2, then Step 3. After that, jump to the seasonal route.



STEP 1 · SAFETY & CONTROLS



Build your emergency map

Know how to protect people and stop damage

Build your emergency map

🕒 20 min

📅 Do once, review yearly

Why it matters: A labeled shutoff and a working alarm are most valuable before the moment you need them.

- 1 Locate and label the main water shutoff. Never force a stuck or corroded valve.
- 2 Locate the electrical panel and main disconnect, and keep the area clear.
- 3 Test smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms with their test buttons.
- 4 Save utility emergency numbers and review two ways out of sleeping areas.

Done looks like: Every adult knows where the controls are and what to do for water, electrical, fuel-gas, fire, or carbon-monoxide danger.

Get help if: An alarm fails, a control is damaged or inaccessible, you smell fuel gas, or you see heat, scorching, sparks, or active leaking near electricity.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration [↗](#)



STEP 2 · WATER & MOISTURE



Run a five-minute moisture check

Catch small leaks before they become hidden damage

Run a five-minute moisture check

🕒 5 min

📅 Monthly

Why it matters: Water often leaves a stain, odor, swollen surface, or mineral deposit before it becomes an obvious leak.

- 1 Look beneath sinks and around toilets without disconnecting anything.

- 2 Check the water heater, dishwasher, refrigerator, and washing machine area.
- 3 Notice new staining, swelling, rust, damp odor, drips, or standing water.
- 4 Photograph anything new, dry the area when safe, and recheck after normal use.

Done looks like: The checked areas are dry, firm, and free of new staining, corrosion, or musty odor.

Get help if: Water is near electricity, a ceiling is sagging, material feels soft, active water will not stop, or moisture returns after drying.

Source: U.S. EPA moisture guidance [↗](#)



STEP 3 · AIR & SYSTEMS



Check airflow and the HVAC filter

Notice performance changes before peak-weather failure

Check airflow and the HVAC filter

🕒 5 min

📅 Every 1–3 months

Why it matters: A serviceable filter and unobstructed airflow support comfort and help you notice system changes early.

- 1 Use the equipment instructions to confirm the correct filter size and type.
- 2 Inspect the filter and clean or replace it when the instructions call for it.
- 3 Make sure supply and return openings are not blocked by furniture or belongings.
- 4 While the system runs, notice new water, ice, harsh sound, odor, or repeated cycling.

Done looks like: The correct filter is serviceable, vents are open, and the system runs without a new warning sign.

Get help if: You find water, ice, burning odor, damaged wiring, repeated shutdowns, or a meaningful loss of heating or cooling.

Source: ENERGY STAR [↗](#)

Your progress stays in this browser session only. This field guide teaches the rhythm; your free dashboard handles ongoing tracking.

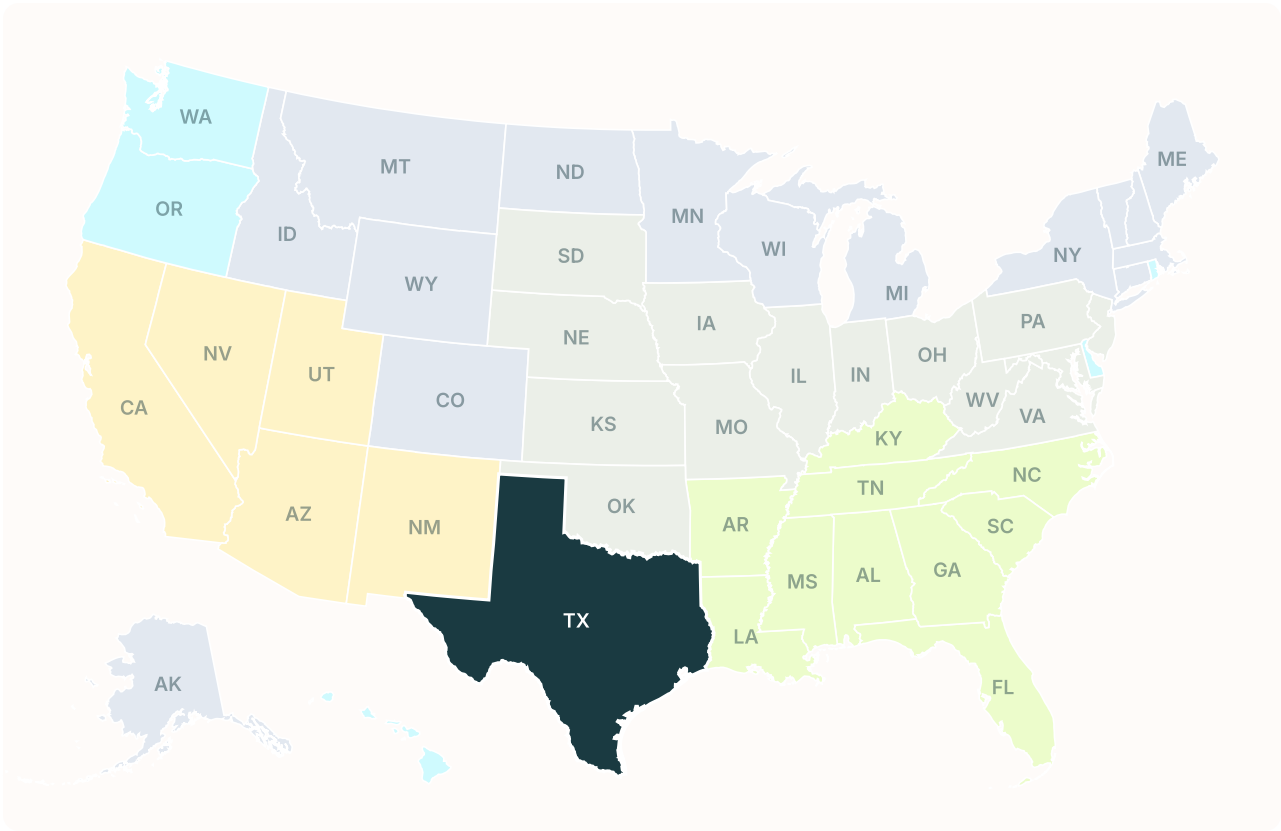
REGIONAL MAINTENANCE

Climate tips for your region.

Click a state to see common climate risks and seasonal maintenance reminders. This is general regional guidance. Your Home Health Score creates a checklist for your home.

Choose a state

Texas



- Hot & dry
- Hot & humid
- Mixed seasons
- Cold / snow
- Marine / wet

Texas Home Maintenance Tips

Extreme heat with hail, wind, tropical, and freeze exposure

Start here

1

Replace the HVAC filter

Then clear leaves and debris around the outdoor condenser.

2

Check roof flashing after storms

Look from the ground for lifted edges, gaps, or debris.

3

Walk the foundation perimeter

Watch for pooling, soil gaps, new cracks, or sticking doors.

Use this guide



Best first check

Replace the HVAC filter, then clear debris around the outdoor condenser.



Best month to do it

March or April



What to inspect

AC airflow, roof flashing, gutters, downspouts, foundation perimeter, soil gaps, and exterior pest entry points.



When to call a pro

Call a pro for weak cooling, roof damage after hail or wind, widening cracks, doors that suddenly stick, or standing water near the slab.

Why this matters: Texas heat stresses cooling systems, and clay-heavy soils make drainage and foundation monitoring more important than in many states.

Key climate risks

- 📍 Extreme heat & UV exposure
- 📍 Heavy rain & flash flooding
- 📍 Foundation movement in expansive soil
- 📍 HVAC strain & high energy use
- 📍 Pests: termites, ants, mosquitoes

What to prioritize

- ✓ Keep AC system clean & efficient
- ✓ Check roof & flashing after storms
- ✓ Monitor foundation for movement
- ✓ Maintain gutters & drainage
- ✓ Seal gaps to keep pests out

Regional guidance is a starting point, not a property inspection. Follow current local alerts, permit requirements, and professional findings for your home.



Spring

Storm prep & AC maintenance
Before peak heat



Summer

Monitor cooling & humidity
Airflow, condensate



Fall

Foundation & roof inspections
After heat and storms



Winter

Mild, but stay protective
Freeze plan ready



Walk one route each season

Each walk has only three or four high-value tasks. Open one task at a time, finish it, and ignore the other seasons until they arrive.

Spring

Fall

Winter

3 essential tasks

Summer home walk

Control heat, humidity, and hidden water while systems are under load.

About 45 minutes

A hot afternoon when cooling and ventilation are operating normally.

FOLLOW IN ORDER

Bring: Phone camera, Flashlight, Paper towel, Vacuum attachment

Your summer route

1 Observe cooling on a demanding day



Every conditioned room ⌚ 15 minutes

Peak weather reveals weak airflow, condensate trouble, and rooms that the system cannot serve properly.

Walk every room while the system is running.

Check that supply and return openings are not blocked by furniture or belongings.

Inspect the equipment area and visible drain path for water or staining.

Done looks like: Airflow is unobstructed, rooms remain reasonably consistent, no water appears around equipment, and the system runs without new odor, noise, or repeated cycling.

Get help if: You find water, ice, burning odor, damaged wiring, repeated shutdowns, or a meaningful loss of cooling.

Source: ENERGY STAR maintenance checklist [↗](#)

2 Inspect laundry water and dryer airflow ✓

Laundry area, then exterior dryer vent ⌚ 15 minutes

A failed washer hose can release a large amount of water, while restricted dryer airflow increases drying time and fire risk.

Look and feel around washer connections for bulges, cracks, rust, rubbing, or seepage.

Clean the lint screen and inspect the accessible duct without disconnecting unsafe or inaccessible sections.

Run the dryer briefly and confirm strong airflow opens the exterior flap.

Done looks like: Hoses and connections are dry and undamaged, the dryer duct is not crushed, and the exterior flap opens strongly during operation.

Get help if: A hose is damaged, a connection leaks, the duct is concealed or damaged, or clothes take substantially longer to dry.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration dryer safety guidance [↗](#)

3 Hunt for moisture and pest entry points ✓

Bathrooms, kitchen, closets, then exterior gaps ⌚ 15 minutes

Warm weather accelerates mold, insects, wood decay, and small openings that later become expensive repairs.

Run bathroom and range exhaust fans and confirm they move air.

Inspect screens, door sweeps, pipe penetrations, and visible exterior gaps.

Check closets, cabinets, window corners, and exterior walls for dampness or musty odor.

Done looks like: Bathrooms and kitchens exhaust properly, screens and exterior penetrations are intact, and no new damp odor, staining, or soft material is present.

Get help if: Moisture returns after drying, materials feel soft, staining grows, or insects appear to be entering structural wood.

Source: U.S. EPA moisture-control guidance [↗](#)

Know the five systems—and the first signal to notice

You do not need to diagnose equipment. You need a mental map of where problems begin and what a meaningful change looks like.



Roof and drainage

Keep weather outside and move water away.

Notice first

Overflow, pooling, staining, daylight, displacement, or musty odor

[Explore exterior guides](#) →



Water and plumbing

Catch moisture before it damages hidden materials.

Notice first

Drips, swelling, corrosion, staining, damp odor, or unexpected water use

[Explore plumbing guides](#) →



Electrical and fire safety

Keep protection working and notice heat early.

Notice first

Heat, buzzing, scorching, failed tests, repeated trips, or burning odor

[Explore electrical guides](#) →



Heating and cooling

Notice loss of performance before peak-weather failure.

Notice first

Weak airflow, water, ice, harsh sound, odor, or repeated cycling

[Explore HVAC guides](#) →



Structure and moving parts

Find looseness and weakness before someone is hurt.

Notice first

Movement, softness, sagging, displacement, widening, or failed safety controls

[Explore whole-home guides](#) →

Is this actually a DIY task?

DIY is the right lane only when every condition is true. One unknown is enough reason to pause and schedule qualified help.



The four-part DIY test

- ✓ Clear instructions
- ✓ Safe access
- ✓ Low consequence if wrong
- ✓ No licensed trade work



DIY: YES

All four tests are true

You can describe the finish line, reach the work safely, reverse course easily, and the task does not involve a permit, code decision, or licensed repair.

EXAMPLE: TEST AN ALARM OR REPLACE THE CORRECT FILTER



DIY: NO

One test is uncertain

Access requires a risky ladder, the diagnosis is unclear, specialty tools are needed, a warranty may be affected, or getting it wrong could create water, fire, structural, or equipment damage.

SCHEDULE HELP: PHOTOGRAPH THE FINDING AND REQUEST A SCOPED RECOMMENDATION



DIY: STOP NOW

A danger sign is present

There is fuel gas, smoke, active fire, sparking, scorching, structural movement, sewage, active flooding, a fall hazard, or water near electricity.

MAKE PEOPLE SAFE FIRST; CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES WHEN APPROPRIATE

How this guide was built

Homevisory maintains a larger structured task library behind this guide. We ranked the Essential 15 using five questions:

1. Could skipping this create a safety hazard?
2. Could skipping it cause major water or structural damage?
3. Does early detection materially reduce repair cost or disruption?
4. Can an ordinary homeowner safely observe the warning signs?
5. Is there a clear finish line so the task can actually be completed?

Cosmetic, highly property-specific, manufacturer-specific, and service-contract tasks can still matter. They do not belong in a default plan for every homeowner.

Where this free guide stops

This field guide helps a new visitor learn the rhythm and take the next useful action. It intentionally does not save history, send reminders, manage equipment, or build a

comprehensive schedule.

Those are ongoing-management jobs. The [free Home Health Score](#) identifies the top priorities for your specific home. A free Homevisory account then provides the dashboard for upcoming tasks, how-to guidance, maintenance tracking, and one free contractor quote check each month.

Methodology and evidence

The guide was reviewed against government, university extension, and equipment guidance. Core references include:

- [University of Georgia Extension: Home Maintenance Checklist](#)
- [Utah State University Extension: Home Maintenance Checklist](#)
- [ENERGY STAR: Heating and Cooling Maintenance Checklist](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration: Smoke Alarms](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration: Carbon Monoxide](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration: Fire Extinguishers](#)
- [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission: GFCI Guidance](#)
- [U.S. EPA: Moisture Control](#)
- [U.S. Department of Energy: Detecting Air Leaks](#)
- [Ready.gov: Emergency Preparedness](#)

Frequencies and observations are general planning guidance, not universal service intervals. Local emergency guidance, manufacturer instructions, warranties, codes,

association documents, and site-specific professional findings take priority.

Free sharing and distribution

Homeowners, home inspectors, HOAs, libraries, lenders, real estate professionals, and community organizations may link to this guide or distribute the unmodified field kit at no charge.

Homevisory offers a [home maintenance app](#), but our editorial content is independent. Product recommendations are based on merit, not business relationships.

Topics:

Home Maintenance

Seasonal

Safety

Preventive Maintenance

New Homeowner



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Mark Carter is a home maintenance expert with over 20 years of experience helping homeowners maintain and improve their properties. He writes practical, actionable guides for Homevisory to help you tackle common home maintenance challenges.

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