

HOME DECOR & MORE



Preparing your Fireplace or Stove for the 2017-2018 Heating Season

Fireplaces and wood-burning stoves not only can be beautiful focal points within a home, but they also provide an additional source of heat and can be used to keep rooms or entire homes comfortable without the need for additional and potentially costly heating sources.

Just like more modern home heating systems, stoves and fireplaces need to be maintained, and that maintenance includes readying them before winter when they are used more heavily. Ensuring a fireplace or stove is in good

working order helps to guarantee efficiency of use and safety during the winter months.

Open-flame heating sources carry with them certain risks. The National Fire Protection Association states that, between 2009-2013, American fire departments responded to 56,000 home structure fires that involved heating equipment. The NFPA notes that the leading factor contributing to home-heating fires is a failure to keep things clean, principally from solid-fueled heating equipment. The

following are a handful of ways to stay safe as you get ready for another cozy season around the fire.

- Start with the chimney. Begin by having your chimney thoroughly cleaned and inspected. Creosote can build up inside of the chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and becomes more difficult and expensive to clean the longer it builds up inside your flue lining. In addition, animals may have created nest inside of the chimney since the last time the fireplace was used. A professional chimney sweep should be hired in this situation. He or she will be able to effectively clean the chimney in a manner that is the least messy and disruptive to residents.
- Install or check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Operational alarms are essential to preventing injury or death resulting from smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation. Such detectors are inexpensive safeguards that should be installed on every floor of

the house. Batteries should be replaced every six months, and the alarms themselves should be changed every five to 10 years.

- Inspect the chimney from outdoors as well. Inspect the mortar around any bricks in the chimney and surrounding areas for cracks. If left unaddressed, these can cause dangerous fires. If there are serious cracks, a professional may need to make repairs or the chimney may need to be replaced. You also can have the chimney capped with a screen to keep animals and debris from entering.
- The damper. A damper is a valve or plate that stops or regulates the flow of air inside a chimney. It should be checked prior to the first use of a stove or fireplace so homeowners can be certain it opens and closes smoothly.
- Clear out flammable items. Move flammable items away from the front of a fireplace or stove. Be sure curtains or other home furnishings are far enough

away that they will not catch fire from any errant sparks or flames.

- Order wood now. Be sure there is plenty of wood for the season. Ask a wood supplier to estimate just how much will be needed, and double-check that the

wood will arrive in time for the start of the season.

By preparing for fireplace and wood stove use now, homeowners can ensure their winters are comfortable and safe.



Prepare fireplaces, chimneys and heating stoves for another season of regular use.

Money-Saving Shopping Tips

Sticking to a budget when shopping can help shoppers stay out of debt and avoid buying items they don't need. But staying within budget is a challenge for many shoppers, especially when they come upon items that are hard to resist.

Breaking the budget is imprudent, and savvy shoppers know it's oftentimes unnecessary. By employing a handful of money-saving strategies on their next shopping trip, shoppers can have their cake and eat it, too.

- Embrace coupons. The days of clipping coupons from store circulars or catalogues may seem like a thing of the past, but shoppers can still use coupons to save substantial amounts of money. While national retailers may be unlikely to offer customers coupons, many small local businesses still utilize coupons to compel shoppers to visit their stores. Small businesses may not have the advertising budgets to promote their coupons as much as their larger competitors, but savvy shoppers willing to put in a little work may find their diligence rewarded with discounts. Scan local newspapers or peruse small businesses' websites for coupons.

- Try negotiating. There was a time when negotiation was a big part of the shopping experience. While that time has long since passed, many retailers, particularly small, locally owned businesses, may be open to negotiation. Small business owners can often be found working in their stores, so budget-conscious shoppers should not hesitate to speak with business owners or managers in an effort to negotiate sale prices.

- Shop at the right time. Retailers must make room for new products by unloading their existing inventory. Study industry trends to determine when retailers mark down

items as they try to clear room for new products. For example, clothing retailers tend to discount summer clothing as autumn approaches, making late summer a great time to shop for swimsuits and other warm weather apparel.

- Be flexible. If a certain

item just won't fit into your budget, try to be flexible and find a similar item that's more affordable. When purchasing big-ticket items such as appliances, apply this approach by looking for last year's models instead of the newest models on the market. Last year's models might still be an upgrade over your existing items, and

retailers tend to greatly reduce prices once new models are introduced to the market.

Savvy shoppers working within a budget can still find great deals without accruing debt or spending more money than they're comfortable spending.



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