

LIVING IN COMFORT

FALL 2019

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Fall Fireplace Checklist

Nothing says “fall” quite like lighting the fireplace for the first time. You might be all set to cozy up with a blanket and a good book, but is your fireplace ready? Follow these steps to ensure you’re able to enjoy a safe, comfortable blaze free from smoke, soot, and fire hazards.

Chim Chim Cheree

The first step is to hire a professional chimney sweep to come out and do a thorough cleaning and inspection. The National Fire Protection Association recommends that your chimney be swept once a year. You know your home’s condition best, so beforehand do a visual assessment of your chimney surfaces and surrounds, paying attention to loose bricks and mortar that may need to be addressed.

Evade Invasion

An often unexpected feature of having a fireplace is the occasional critter who descends down the chimney and waltzes (or flaps) into your living room. If playing catch with a bat is not your thing, consider installing a chimney cap, which will keep the animals, leaves, and debris out of

your fireplace and home. Keeping the damper shut when you’re not enjoying the fireplace will help in this regard as well.

Log Some Prep Time

Your fire is only as good as your wood. A stockpile of dry, seasoned hardwoods will burn cleanly and easily. If you don’t have your own supply, be sure to buy locally, as wood pests such as Emerald Ash Borer can be transported on firewood and spread to new regions. A nice, handy stack of split logs inside or in the garage will keep you from having to dash out in the cold.

Safety Measures Up to Snuff?

Take a few minutes to review this year’s needs when it comes to barriers around your fireplace. If you have new pets or children in the home, take the time to adequately protect them from the heat source. This might include adding new glass doors or a fireplace safety fence around the perimeter of the hearth space.

Speaking of Safety

Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors...we know you have them, but are they in working order? Batteries fresh and ready for the season? Now is the time to do a room by room check to ensure they are all humming along and ready to alert you to any issues that might occur.

Grab the Cocoa

And there you have it! You and your fireplace are now ready to for many warm and cozy hours this chilly season. Enjoy!



Helpful Heat-Saving Tricks

“Shut the door! You’re letting all the heat out!” This often becomes the chorus of the winter months, when it seems the temperature of your cozy home can dip in an instant as people come and go. Shutting the outside doors is the obvious solution for retaining heat, but it’s not the only method you can use to keep your home snug and the heating bills under control—there are many simple ways to incorporate heat-saving tricks into your daily routine that will lend you a boost when trying to battle the cold winter months.

Lower Your Thermostat

Yeah, we know, this one’s pretty obvious. But what might be new to you is the way smart thermostats keep your home heating costs low by optimizing energy during the hours of the day when you’re away. You can also streamline your ability to have the heat lower during nighttime hours which, in addition to helping you sleep better will save you money across the heating season. Program the heat to kick on shortly before your alarm goes off, and you will keep your piggies warm and comfortable when you jump out of bed to get ready for the day.

Use Your Curtains Wisely

They’re more than just a pretty face. Open curtains and other window coverings to allow the winter sun to warm your home during the day (especially on southern-facing walls), then close them once the sun has gone down to keep your home insulated at night. Windows are often vulnerable to heat loss, so the extra layer can come in handy. Lined curtains, or even doubling up on curtains, will ensure the heat stays where it belongs.

Turn Off Those Fans

Ventilation fans in the bathroom and kitchen are wonderful for whisking away humidity and cooking odors, but they are also excellent at sucking up your precious heat and depositing it in the great outdoors. Using them sparingly in the winter months will help keep the heat in and, in the case of bathrooms, serve to add a little moisture back into the home. If you or others in the home have trouble remembering to turn off the fan, consider installing a timer.

Close the Damper

Enjoying a cozy evening around a crackling fireplace is a lovely thing, but don’t forget to close the damper in between uses. An open fireplace provides a nice vertical escape route for warm air. Glass surrounds will also help keep the area nicely insulated.

Change Your Filters

A fresh filter makes for a happy furnace, and replacing it on a routine schedule will help keep the warm air moving easily throughout your home. This means your furnace won’t have to work as hard and, as a bonus, your air will be nice and clean.

Consider a Humidifier

The benefits of balancing the moisture in your home are numerous, including easier breathing and more comfortable skin, but there are heating benefits as well. Simply put, moist air retains heat better than dry air. By upping your home’s humidity levels, you will feel and see the difference in no time.

We’re happy to have added a few more lines to your winter playlist: “Close those curtains!” “Turn off the fan!” “Change that filter!” Take it from the pros—paying attention to the small things will keep your heat and your dollars where they belong.

How Does Budget Billing Work?

Budget billing, also known as an Equal Payment Plan, can be quite helpful for your pocketbook. But what is it? It breaks down like this; rather than paying a varying monthly bill to a utility company (gas, water, electric), they spread it out over the year. The utility company will find your average energy use pattern from the previous year and divide how much you paid by 12 months. Instead of paying a lot in the winter and a little in the summer, you pay the same amount every month. If their estimates are off, you will either accumulate a surplus or a deficit. Budget billing helps you plan your monthly expenses better, because now your utilities are a fixed cost with no surprise bill spikes.

Insulation: Our Hidden Household Friend

The average homeowner doesn’t give much thought to the insulation in their attic or walls. We assume it’s there and doing its job. But you might want to take a peek in the attic and check in on your insulation—you might be surprised. Having insulation that is thick enough, with a good R rating, is important for:

- Reducing energy consumption—the furnace and air conditioner won’t have to work as hard or as often to keep the temperature constant.
- Saving you money—with your HVAC system running less, your bills will start going down.
- Keeping the house comfortable—those consistent temperatures will let you sneak in a couple extra degrees on cold winter nights.
- Reducing noise in the house—weather isn’t the only thing to insulate yourself from. Noise won’t travel as fast or get as far when you have good insulation.



Furnace Shopping 101



It may not make your Top 10 List of Homeowner Shopping Joys, but shopping for a furnace is a task nearly every homeowner faces at some point. A new furnace is a big investment, and choosing the right one will pay dividends in both monthly expenses as well as enhancing the comfort of your home through the highs and lows of an Indiana winter. We've put together a few basic guidelines to help keep the experience as easy as can be.

Choose Your Own Furnace Destiny

Sure you can allow your aging furnace to limp along until it randomly issues its final thump in the night, and you wake up with frost on your toes. But if a sudden, mid-winter furnace emergency is not on your agenda, then be proactive. A fall check-up of your system allows us to do an assessment and let you know if it makes sense to schedule a planned replacement. If you are unsettled by the idea of not getting every last week or month's worth out of your old furnace, consider that your new unit will likely be far more efficient, and your installation cost during non-peak emergency times will be less.

Assess Your Needs

There are numerous considerations when choosing the correct size of furnace unit. Although square footage is the biggest indicator of what size you'll need, ceiling height, number of windows, and insulation play a big part in the final equation. First, ask yourself if the size of your existing unit is keeping you adequately cozy. If it is, you can likely replace with a similar size. If you struggle to keep the home heated to your comfort level, you might consider increasing the size of the unit (measured as BTUs), or adding insulation to mitigate areas of heat leakage in your home. It makes little sense to upgrade to a bigger or more efficient furnace only to have that warm air escape. Our comfort home advisors will complete a load calculation on your home to perfectly size your HVAC equipment—no guessing needed!

Evaluate Efficiency

The efficiency of a furnace is standardized in AFUEs, which stands for Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency. It's measured in percentages, which reflect the amount of energy produced with one gallon of fuel. An AFUE of 80% means that 80% of the fuel is converted into energy, and 20% is lost to exhaust. Although this is a handy way to compare units within the same fuel category, ie: gas furnaces, it cannot be used to

compare heating costs across various types of furnaces—gas, oil, or electric. For instance, electric heat is more efficient in terms of energy produced, but overall is a far more expensive way to heat your home. So, keep your apples to apples, and remember it does little good to have a high-efficiency furnace if you don't have a high-efficiency home, in terms of insulation.

Opt In for Two Stage

The old fashioned standard furnace has a valve that essentially is either open or closed. Newer, two stage furnaces have a mid position that helps your furnace not consume as much fuel when regulating the temperature of your home. Think of it as a sprint or a marathon. A one stage furnace is sprinting, while a two stage unit doesn't kick into gear as quickly, but stays level and steady. This mid open position will get you through the majority of an Indiana winter while still allowing a full on blast when it is most needed. It's also best for maintaining a comfortable temperature inside your home during those 50 degree days when some heat is needed to keep things cozy but not a lot.

Read Those Warranties

When making an investment in a furnace, the warranties really do matter. There are a few types of warranties to peruse when buying a new furnace. The first is the Manufacturer's Warranty, which covers defects in materials or workmanship. The second is the Installation Warranty, which is provided by the HVAC company who installs and maintains your unit. And finally, you might want to consider getting an Extended Labor Warranty—it may seem like an unneeded expense at the time, but it will pay for itself after just one major breakdown.

To avoid potential issues with voiding or lessening your protection, be sure to register your unit and only use licensed HVAC professionals to install and maintain your system. As warranties vary between manufacturers, a side by side comparison may be exactly what you need to make your final choice.

There you have it, a crash course in furnace shopping. Remember though, your best shopping resources are your certified and friendly Appel professionals. We have the experience to assess your needs and point you in the right direction to the furnace of your dreams. Give us a call!

Humidity and Your Skin

Do you channel a crocodile as your spirit animal during the winter months? As the temperatures outside plummet and the heat kicks on in the house, skin that was once comfy and cushy during the humid summer months may now begin to launch an all out itch attack.

The outer layer of your skin is uniquely designed to protect you head to toe, and it typically does its job in a spectacular manner. But the rigors of increasingly dry outdoor air and cold winds, combined with drier air indoors due to forced heat through your furnace, can wreak havoc on its ability to retain moisture.

Without this necessary moisture, your skin can become compromised and develop dry, itchy patches and painful, unsightly cracks—especially on your hands and feet. Skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis that are sometimes held at bay during the summer months may creep back into your life in a very unwelcome way. The dewy days of summer may quickly seem like a faint memory as you lather on lotion and try to acclimate to the new itchy you.

Whether you suffer from just a bit of uncomfortable dryness or battle with infuriatingly parched skin over every inch of your body, the solution to alleviate this discomfort is to introduce humidity back into your living environment. Your body's outer layers will gratefully receive the added moisture as your hydrated skin begins to perform more efficiently.

How do you know your home needs more humidity? The most accurate way is to purchase a digital hygrometer, which measures the humidity levels in your home. (You can pick one up at your local hardware store or on Amazon.) Humidity in certain rooms such as the kitchen and bathrooms may fluctuate wildly throughout the day as they are used, so for the most accurate reading, measure the moisture levels in a bedroom or living room.

Aiming for 30%-50% humidity is a good place to begin if you are experiencing issues with dry skin. You can achieve this in a variety of ways, but the most effective method is via a whole-house humidifier, which helps achieve consistent moisture throughout your home. Portable humidifiers are okay at keeping individual rooms hydrated, but nothing does the job as well as one that's fully integrated into your HVAC system.

It's also worth noting that the benefits of a whole-house humidifier don't just go skin deep. Balancing your home's humidity levels can help ease respiratory conditions, alleviate snoring and dry eyes, and keep winter colds at bay.

If you think your home would benefit from more humidity this winter, give us a call. We are happy to come out to test your air and come up with a solution that's right for you and your skin!

Winter Aromatherapy for Your Home

This winter, keep your home a healthy and happy place with aromatherapy. Essential oils can give us all a boost and offer some relief from cold and flu season. There are so many winter essential oil blends out there, but only a few powerhouses have a real effect when you're not feeling the best. These superstars can help you get back on your feet and maybe even prevent illness in the first place.

- **Flu Bomb:**
 - 4 drops Lemon
 - + 2 drops Oregano
 - + 2 drops Melaleuca
 - + 2 drops Shield
 - + 2 drops Frankincense
- **Sweet Sleep:**
 - Equal drops Lavender
 - + Sandalwood
 - + Cedarwood
- **Immune Booster:**
 - 2 drops Clove Bud
 - + 2 drops Lemon
 - + 1 drop Cinnamon Bark
 - + 1 drop Eucalyptus
 - + 1 drop Rosemary
- **Sinus Refresher:**
 - 3 drops Peppermint
 - + 1 drop Wild Orange
 - + 1 drop Lavender
 - + 1 drop Eucalyptus



Do Your Furnace a Favor (or Four)

If you're like many homeowners, your furnace is mostly out of sight and out of mind. After all, it's one of the few household systems that may last as long or longer than the time you own your home. This is all well and good until something goes "thump" in the night, and you realize... during the coldest weekend of the year...your furnace isn't keeping up.

How do you prevent such a crisis and keep your furnace humming along happily for years to come? The answer is easy—regular maintenance is the key. Some items on the list are easily done on your own. Others require the expertise of a heating professional, which can be scheduled yearly.

1. Change Your Filter

It is the official mantra of any HVAC professional. When your filters are filled with debris, your furnace has to work harder to pull in the air. Household dust, pet dander, and all sorts of airborne particles can clog the weave of the filter and affect its efficiency. We recommend changing your filter every 30-60 days, depending on the unique variables in your home.

2. Invest in a Programmable Thermostat

This isn't exactly maintenance, but the fact of the matter is that if you can figure out a way to make your furnace work less, the longer it's going to last. Having the option to reduce set points during the daytime hours when the house is empty and keeping things cooler when you are traveling are big steps to limiting the amount of work your furnace has to do.

3. Keep it Clear

If your furnace is tucked away in the recesses of your home, be sure to keep the perimeter from becoming crowded and cluttered. We know it's tempting to use that space to store holiday decorations and toys your kids have outgrown, but your furnace needs its personal space in order to draw in air. And due to the heat generated during the process, any items too close end up becoming a fire hazard. Not to mention, your HVAC service technician will thank you for not having to dig their way to the unit!

4. Tune Up Yearly

It's vitally important to schedule yearly maintenance for your furnace. A professional check will include all sorts of things that extend past what you can do yourself. The check should include a thorough cleaning, inspection of all parts for wear, tear, and cracking, and tests for leaks (especially carbon monoxide). Additionally, certain parts will be lubricated as necessary to keep things running smoothly. All machines rely on their various parts and pieces working effectively to ensure the whole system is operating in an optimal manner, and your furnace is no exception. If one part is beginning to fail, identifying it early helps the other components to do their job more efficiently.

Your care and vigilance paired with an HVAC professional's expert touch is the perfect recipe for a long-lasting furnace that will keep you comfortable for years to come. Call us today to schedule a visit!

HVAC Myth Busting: THERMOSTATS

Heating myths. They abound, and nearly all of them surround the humble thermostat. It should be simple...set it to your favorite temperature, and walk away, right? Not so fast.

We've gathered the top four thermostat myths and some new findings that debunk commonly held thermostat beliefs. Take a look to see if your thermostat habits are hurting or helping your heating costs!

MYTH #1:

Changing the Set Point Makes Your Furnace Work Harder

There is a long held belief that lowering the temperature of your home while you are away will only cause your system to struggle to recover the desired temperature when you arrive back home, thus expending more energy. However, if you are going to be gone for more than 8 hours, lowering the temperature 10-15 degrees will pay nice dividends on your heat savings. The ability to do these adjustments day-to-day can be optimized by installing a smart thermostat.

MYTH #2:

Cranking Up the Heat Will Get You Warm Faster

We want it to be true as much as you do, but walking in the door and turning the heat up to 85 won't get you toasty any quicker. The fact is, when your furnace is on, it's just plain on in a constant way. This means getting to your desired temperature is a matter of time and can't be hurried along. What this practice CAN do is use way more energy than necessary. Instead of diving for the thermostat as soon as you get home, keep yourself warm with a steaming mug of hot chocolate.

MYTH #3:

Smart Thermostats Will Save You Money

Well...yes and no. Smart thermostats can save you money—as much as \$180 a year according to Energy Star—but with one caveat. You have to be smart about it. Be sure to take those fancy options for changing set points while you're away and while you're sleeping and put them to good use. A smart thermostat hanging on the wall without taking advantage of the features may look high tech, but it won't save you any money on your heating costs. The good news is, our fine Appel service technicians can install a smart thermostat for you and teach you how to use it to its full potential.

MYTH #4:

Nobody EVER Changes the Thermostat When People Aren't Looking

Okay, so you may have suspected this one. Studies show that 30% of couples disagree on temperature settings, and a whopping 27% sneak to the thermostat and change it while the other isn't looking. We tend to think the percentages are higher, but who's going to admit to such a thing? What we do know is that when it comes to thermostats, the woman is always right. Or is it the man?

Next time you reach for the thermostat (stealthily or not), take a moment to make sure your next move is going to save you energy and money. Some habits are hard to break, but we believe in you!

Don't Forget Our Feathered Friends

Bird Feeding Through the Cold Months

The smart ones have already made it south before the first snow, but a few hearty souls hang back. Don't forget about the little birds that tough it out during the long winter months! Here are a couple tips for keeping them happy and well-fed:

- Get a feeder that has a cover and a perch. This will keep the feed accessible even after the first snow of the season.
- Place your feeders in areas of your yard that are sheltered from the bitter Indiana winds. This will keep those little bodies comfy cozy, and making the feeders as convenient as possible will ensure you have bird-watching enjoyment throughout the season!
- Fill the feeders with foods high in fat and oils to help the birds keep up their energy. Sunflower seeds, peanuts, suet, and peanut butter are all great options!

If stomping through the snow isn't your scene, that's okay too. Just throw a few handfuls of seed on the ground—they will find and enjoy it.





Recipe: Maple Bacon Sweet Potato Soup

Warm the hearts and tummies of your family on a brisk autumn day, and welcome the season with this hearty sweet potato and maple bacon soup recipe. Bring everyone to the table with the smells of autumn, bacon, and cinnamon. The bright orange color will remind you of pumpkins and the turning leaves.

- 4 strips of bacon
- 2 tablespoons of maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- ½ of a yellow onion, diced
- 2 pounds of sweet potato
- ¼ tablespoon of cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon of nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
- salt and pepper to taste
- 3 cups of chicken broth
- Optional: heavy cream, pumpkin seeds, cinnamon

Fully cook the bacon until crisp, and let cool. Brush syrup onto both sides of bacon. Bake for 3-5 minutes @400 degrees. Chop the bacon into bits and set aside.

Peel, wash, and cut sweet potatoes into small pieces. Melt the butter in a large pot, and add the diced onion. Cook the onions until fragrant. Next, add sweet potatoes, chicken broth, and spices. Cover the pot and bring soup to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer for 15-20 minutes or until the sweet potatoes have softened. Lastly, stir in 2 tablespoons of maple syrup.

Spoon the soup into a blender and blend until smooth. Garnish with heavy cream, maple bacon, pumpkin seeds, and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Enjoy!

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