

ComfortReady HOME

Heat Pump Maintenance: Protect Comfort, Safety & Savings

A quick, practical guide for homeowners to keep a heat pump running efficiently, quietly, and reliably—season after season.

Heat pumps are an investment in year-round comfort. With simple, regular care, they can avoid common performance issues and keep operating costs down. The U.S. Department of Energy notes that the energy use of a well-maintained heat pump compared with an undermaintained one can differ by roughly 10%–25%, and recommends professional service at least once a year.

Why maintenance pays off

- **Lower utility bills:** Keep utility bills low, maintain airflow and heat transfer to help the system maintain performance.
- **Fewer surprise repairs:** Dirty filters and blocked drains are common triggers for service calls—basic checks can prevent them.
- **Longer equipment life:** Routine care reduces strain on motors, fans, and compressors and helps preserve warranty expectations.
- **Prevent short cycling:** Keeping up on maintenance can help keep your heat pump from short cycling, which is when the system stops and starts more frequently than normal, something that can create extra wear on your compressor.

What to look out for

- **Concerning Noises:** Whether they are from the inside unit or outside; hissing, clanging, and banging are not sounds you should hear from your heat pump.
- **Not Heating or Cooling Properly:** A sure sign that maintenance has been deferred too long is if there is a drop in the system's performance.
- **Visual Changes:** Grime, dirt, water pooling, and plant growth near the system can be signs the system needs to be checked. If you can't remember when it was last serviced, best practice is to schedule one now.
- **Ice Build Up:** Most systems have a defrost function on the outdoor unit for the coldest days. Frost or ice on coils is common before and during the defrost cycle. Ice build-up at other times may indicate that your heat pump should be serviced.

While many of these issues can feel like cause for alarm, there are some simple steps that homeowners can do regularly to keep their investment maintained providing high efficiency and maximum reliability.

Heat Pump Maintenance Checklist

Regularly

- ❒ Check and replace or clean air filters as needed (typically every 1–3 months).
- ❒ Make sure indoor supply and return vents are open and unobstructed.
- ❒ Listen for unusual noises such as rattling, buzzing, or grinding.
- ❒ Verify that the thermostat is operating correctly and maintaining the desired temperature.
- ❒ Check that the indoor unit is not producing unusual water or condensation and make sure it's not producing any odors.
- ❒ Make sure the outdoor unit is not blocked by plants, fencing, snow, or other obstructions.

Every Season (Spring & Fall)

- ❒ Clear leaves, grass, and debris from around the outdoor unit.
- ❒ Maintain at least 24 inches of clearance around the outdoor unit.
- ❒ Gently rinse the coil from the top of the unit with water flowing towards the outside of the unit.
- ❒ Inspect refrigerant lines and insulation for signs of wear or damage.
- ❒ Check the condensate drain for clogs and ensure water is draining properly.
- ❒ Test heating and cooling modes before the season begins.

Annually

- ❒ Schedule a professional heat pump inspection and tune-up.
- ❒ Have electrical connections, capacitors, and controls inspected.
- ❒ Have refrigerant levels and system pressures checked.
- ❒ Verify proper airflow and blower performance.
- ❒ Inspect ductwork for leaks, damage, or disconnected sections.
- ❒ Review thermostat programming, calibrate, and update settings for seasonal efficiency.

Tips

- **Set a reminder:** Put filter checks on your calendar (monthly is a good starting point; adjust for pets, smoke, or heavy use).
- **Date the Filter:** When replacing or cleaning a filter, it is best practice to make a not of the date cleaned. This can help determine the best cleaning schedule for your home.
- **Pre-Schedule a yearly tune-up:** Adding a professional check up to the schedule ahead of time can reduce forgetting when the time comes.

Safety reminder: Turn equipment off before performing any cleaning or inspection. If you notice burning smells, loud grinding/banging, persistent icing, or leaks, stop and contact a qualified professional.

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