

# HOME MAINTENANCE GUIDE



*First American  
Home Warranty<sup>SM</sup>*

Your toolkit to help keep home systems  
and appliances running smoothly



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# HOME MAINTENANCE GUIDE

In this guide you'll find maintenance tasks, troubleshooting tips, the tools you need, and more to help maintain your home systems and appliances.

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## Understanding Your Home Warranty

With First American home warranty protection, when one of your covered home systems or appliances fails, all you do is contact us.

We'll find a qualified service provider who will contact you to schedule a convenient appointment, diagnose the problem, and begin the repair or replacement process.



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# Home Maintenance 101

Even though you have the protection offered by a First American home warranty, practicing routine maintenance will help keep your home systems and appliances running safely and efficiently.

This guide includes helpful home maintenance practices and tips that you can do yourself or with the help of a service professional.



## Attic and Exhaust Fans

Clean attic exhaust fan blades every few years to keep dirt and grime from building up and to help prevent blade imbalance.

Clean kitchen and bathroom exhaust fan blades once per year.

Clean kitchen exhaust fan filter once every six months by removing and soaking it for an hour in a vinegar cleaning solution. Then scrub off any remaining grease and grime, rinse, air dry, and replace.

### TIP

*Run the bathroom exhaust fan for at least five minutes after each shower to prevent moisture damage and decrease buildup of mold.*

*If unsure about your home's attic fan and roof ventilation system, schedule a roof inspection and ask about the ventilation equipment in the attic.*

## Ceiling Fans

Clean the dust off the tops of the fan blades regularly to help prevent blade imbalance, which can be a safety hazard and lead to burnout of the fan motor.

### TIP

*During colder months, set the fan to run in a clockwise direction, which pushes warm air down from the ceiling to help keep your home warmer. In warmer months, set the fan to run in a counter-clockwise direction to create a cooling effect.*

*Use a ceiling fan instead of the air conditioner in summer to decrease energy use and save money. On average, a ceiling fan uses approximately 60 watts of energy per day, whereas a central air conditioner uses 3,500 watts of energy per day.*

## Central Air Conditioning

Schedule a yearly professional maintenance in early spring to discover any problems before high usage months.

Clear vegetation or debris from around the outside air conditioner condenser unit.

### TIP

*If system is blowing hot air, replace the filter.*

*Replace disposable air filters monthly during high usage months. If your system uses a washable filter, clean it monthly during heavy use.*

## Your Perfect Toolbox

If you're a homeowner, you need some tools. Make sure your toolbox has all of the essentials:

- Adjustable crescent wrench
- Adjustable pliers with locking mechanism
- Claw hammer
- Flat-head screwdriver
- Handheld level
- Heavy-duty flashlight and extra batteries
- Heavy-duty scissors
- Outdoor electrical extension cord (minimum 25 feet)
- Phillips-head screwdriver
- Power drill and drill bits
- Putty knife
- Safety goggles
- Tape measure (minimum 12 feet)
- Work gloves
- Utility knife



# Home Maintenance 101

## Central Vacuum System

Empty the central vacuum system's dirt canister at least twice per year, or more regularly with heavy use.

Clean or change filters according to schedule in manufacturer's guidelines to continue maintaining cleaner indoor air benefit of systems.

### TIP

*Low suction may indicate it's time to clean or change the filter, and check and empty the dirt canister. If low suction persists, use a shop vacuum to clear blockages from hose outlets.*

## Clothes Dryer

Clean lint screen after every load.

Occasionally wash the lint screen with warm, soapy water to remove buildup from fabric softeners.

Use a long-handled, narrow brush to remove excess lint from lint trap opening.

Periodically check for kinks in dryer exhaust duct or exterior vent to ensure dryer is venting effectively.

Have a professional check and clean dryer vent and ducting as needed.

### TIP

*Do not overload a dryer — crammed loads can't dry properly and waste a lot of energy.*

*If dryer is taking a long time to dry clothes or not blowing hot air, check that drying cycle is set to heat; the air dry cycle only blows air and tumbles laundry but will not produce heat.*

## Clothes Washer

Replace hoses every three to five years. A plumber can also inspect and replace hoses as needed.

Periodically check the balance of machine with a level. If it is off balance, adjust the feet and test again.

### TIP

*If machine is not spinning or draining, check that the lid switch is engaging. If it is bent or broken, the lid will not close properly, which may cause unit to not complete its cycle. A broken belt can also keep a washer from draining.*

*To check if a front loading machine is out of balance, run a cycle without laundry and if unit thumps, a shock absorber or spring may be broken.*

## Dishwasher

Run an empty cycle with a cup of vinegar solution to deodorize and clear out old food particles every few months.

Clean the dishwasher trap and seals regularly to remove any old food bits or clogs.

Clean the rubber door gasket and the inside of the dishwasher monthly to remove accumulated gunk and soap residue to help maintain a tight door seal.

### TIP

*If the dishwasher is leaking or won't drain, the door may not be sealing properly. Also, check to see if something may be jamming the float at the bottom of the dishwasher (it looks like the cap of a laundry detergent bottle).*

*Push the Cancel or Drain button after every load completes to clear any sitting water from the drain hose. This cycle is also handy for testing that the dishwasher's relay and pump are working correctly.*



## Did You Know...

Vinegar is an easy, cheap, and better-for-you cleaning solution for many cleaning tasks.

Whether you need a cupful or a bucketful, simply mix equal amounts of water and vinegar and you're ready to clean.



# Home Maintenance 101

## Ductwork

Every three years, schedule a professional air duct cleaning service.

Inspect exposed ducts and connections in the attic, basement, or crawl space yearly for potential leaks and, if found, use a sealant to plug them, or contact a professional.

Remove the wall grates that cover the vents in every room once per year and clean the grates.

**TIP** For homes with flexible ductwork, schedule yearly inspections to ensure the ductwork is maintaining its shape.

## Electrical

If any sockets appear to be loose when plugging in an electric device, contact an electrician as this can be a safety hazard.

**TIP** If any lights or outlets aren't working, check the circuit breakers at the main electric panel to ensure they are in the on position and try turning them off then back on again.

If a GFCI outlet isn't working, push the Test button followed by the Reset button and try the outlet again.

## Garage Door Openers

Periodically lubricate the garage door's chain the same way as a bicycle chain, by spraying a lubricant on the chain.

Regularly use a blower to clear dirt and debris from around the tracks on either side of the door.

Inspect the door's roller brackets and bolts every six months and tighten as needed using a socket wrench.

**TIP** Periodically check the safety feature that detects objects or people in the doorway as it closes to be sure it is working properly.

## Garbage Disposal

Once per month, clean the garbage disposal by filling the drain with ice cubes, adding a cup of salt, turning on the cold water, and running the disposal until it breaks up all of the ice.

Periodically sanitize the disposal drain by pouring in a half cup of baking soda and a cup of white vinegar. Let the mixture fizz for a few minutes, then pour boiling water down the drain.

**TIP** Never put fibrous or starchy items, such as banana peels, potato peelings, rice, egg shells, poultry skins, celery, or coffee grounds in the disposal.

If the garbage disposal is not working, ensure it is plugged into the outlet securely, then hit the "reset" button on the bottom of the disposal.



## Did You Know...

You can make this easy fruit and veggie spray to help clean off pesticide residue.

In a glass spray bottle, mix one tablespoon of lemon juice, two tablespoons of white vinegar and one cup of water. Shake thoroughly before spraying your produce.

Rub mixture in by hand, or with a vegetable brush, and rinse thoroughly in cold water.



# Home Maintenance 101

## Heating

Schedule an annual professional service before the cold season.

At the start of cooler weather, turn the thermostat to heat and listen for the furnace to turn on to be sure that the heating system is working properly.

Check filters in forced-air heating systems once per month and change every three to six months, depending on usage.

Once every two years, hire a professional to bleed valves on hot-water radiators to release air that may be trapped inside to increase heating system efficiency.

**TIP** Replace the furnace filter regularly for maximum efficiency and improved indoor air quality.

## Kitchen Refrigerator

Clean door gaskets twice per year with a vinegar cleaning solution and an old toothbrush to help keep the door seal working well.

**TIP** Set refrigerator temperature to between 37 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit and set the freezer temperature to 0 degrees.

If refrigerator isn't cold enough, check that the condenser coils are free of dust.

## Plumbing

Schedule checkups with a professional for routine maintenance of plumbing systems and water heater.

Schedule a snake of sewer lines via home's clean-out, as needed, to keep pipes free of clogs and buildup.

Fix leaks and clogs immediately so simple repairs don't turn into expensive ones.

Periodically inspect exposed pipes for any signs of cracks or leaks, and if you detect problems have the pipes repaired immediately.

**TIP** Learn locations of all shutoff valves, including washing machine, sinks, toilets, and water heater, as well as all outside clean-outs, and water main shutoff valve.

For leaks from plumbing fixtures, turn off the valve bringing water to the fixture or turn off the home's main water shutoff valve to prevent secondary water damage.

If you live where temperatures reach freezing, wrap exterior and exposed plumbing pipes with heat tape and check them regularly.

## Plumbing Stoppages

Install properly fitting drain screens and sink stoppers to prevent food, hair, and other items from going down your drains.

For minor clogs or slow drains, try pouring a half cup of salt down the drain followed by boiling water, then flush with hot water. For stubborn clogs, try a non-toxic drain cleaner such as a solution of baking soda and vinegar.

**TIP** Never pour fats, grease, cooking oils, or butter down the drain since they can harden in your pipes and cause clogs.

Never flush cotton balls, swabs, hair, or wet wipes down a toilet. They don't dissolve and can cause clogs.



## Did You Know...

**Studies show having a pet can benefit your health.**

Having a cat or dog can relieve stress and lower blood pressure. Having a First American home warranty to cover your appliances and home systems can help relieve stress too. You'll be protected from unexpected repair or replacement bills for covered items, and you can place service requests online or by phone, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

We're not saying a home warranty will benefit your health, but we will take care of repairing or replacing covered items so that you can spend more time playing with your cat or dog!



## Range – Electric

Regularly check the prongs of the burner and the socket for charring and replace the socket if needed.

Use only a solid element or all-surface cleaner for solid surface, smooth-top, or solid metal burners without coils.

### TIP

*With a non-working burner, try replacing it with one that does work to test the element.*

*If all burners have stopped working, check that the range is plugged in, and/or check the circuit breaker to see if the one powering the range is flipped to the off position.*

## Range – Gas

Clean gas stoves made with stainless steel tops with a degreasing cleaner and only non-scratch pads.

If cooktop burner doesn't light, check that pilot light is lit. If it is out, follow the range manual's instructions for relighting the pilot light.

If pilot light won't remain lit, be sure the burners are turned off and try using a small wire brush to clean out the pilot port.

### TIP

*If you smell gas, be sure the burners are off and open doors and windows to air out the room. If the smell of gas persists, immediately call local gas company.*

*Learn where your home's gas shutoff valve is in case of emergency, and how to turn off gas at the valve. If you turned off the gas, contact your gas company to schedule a professional to come out and safely turn gas back on again.*

## Septic Tank Pumping/System

Have septic system professionally inspected annually to determine a recommendation for scheduling regular septic tank pumping and maintenance.

Have septic tank pumped out by a licensed professional. Regular pumping is vital to properly maintaining the system. This may be covered by your home warranty.

Schedule regular sewer main snaking to prevent main line stoppages, particularly in areas where tree roots cause problems.

### TIP

*Learn location of septic tank and leach field. Keep a sketch of it with other service maintenance records in your Homeowner Manual.*

*Keep records of repairs, pumping, inspections, permits issued, and maintenance.*

*Keep septic tank cover accessible for pumping inspections and install risers if necessary.*

## Sewage Ejector Pump

Schedule annual inspections and have the pump serviced regularly by a licensed professional.

### TIP

*If possible, set up the sewage ejector pump on its own circuit to ensure continuous power and avoid having to share power with other household systems.*

*Consider having a professional install a backup generator in the event of power outages.*

*If it's time to replace a sewage ejector pump, consider installing a model equipped with sensors that provide an alarm for problems.*



## Did You Know...

All of these items important to your kitchen's function and comfort may be covered by your First American home warranty. Check your contract for your specific coverage.

- Refrigerator
- Oven/Range/Cooktop
- Instant Hot Water Dispenser
- Garbage Disposal
- Electrical
- Dishwasher
- Built-in Microwave
- Trash Compactor
- Wine Refrigerators
- Ceiling Fans
- HVAC
- Ductwork
- Water Heater
- Well Pump
- Septic Tank System
- And more...



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## Spa/Pool Equipment

Hire a professional annually before summer to clean pool, change filters, and inspect the pool's pump equipment for potential problems.

Clean leaves and debris daily from the pool storm drain and filter to prevent blockages.

Skim debris from pool water surface daily.

### TIP

*Keep a pool's water level about halfway up the skimmer opening at all times.*

*Before closing up the pool for winter, be sure to remove any standing water from the pool's plumbing lines.*

## Trash Compactor

Check manufacturer's guidelines for when you should replace the air filter in trash compactors that feature one.

### TIP

*To keep bacteria from food and garbage from building up, unplug the compactor and clean the inside every six months with a vinegar solution, then thoroughly wipe dry.*

## Water Heater

Once per year, hire a professional to flush the water heater tank to remove sediment and check the pressure relief valve to make sure it's in proper working order. Sediments can cause the water heater to work harder and take longer to heat water.

### TIP

*Set the temperature between 115 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce energy costs and protect the tank from overheating.*

*The anode rod protects the water heater from corrosion and should be replaced every few years, or according to manufacturer's guidelines.*

*If there is no hot water and the water heater uses gas, check the pilot light. If it is out, contact the gas company to relight it.*

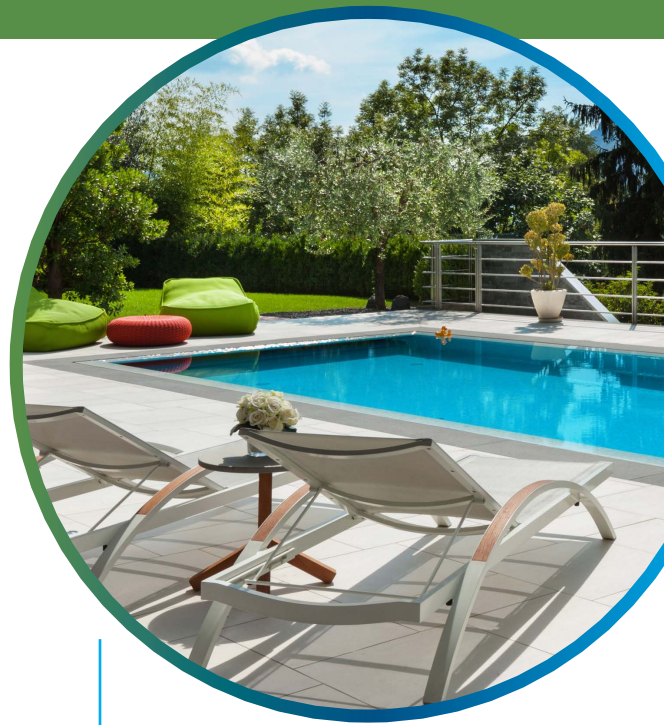
*If the water heater uses electricity, check that the circuit breaker is flipped to the on position. Reset circuit breaker if needed.*

## Well Pump

Have the well pump cleaned and inspected once per year in spring or before cold weather arrives and be sure to have the inspector test the water quality as well.

### TIP

*Consider having a professional install a backup generator for the well pump in the event of power outages.*



## Did You Know...

Salt water pools have higher upfront costs for installation, but can require less maintenance in the long term.

One reason that a salt water pool requires less overall maintenance than a chlorine pool is because its chemical levels are easier to balance. And although a salt water pool still contains chlorine, it requires a different type that is derived from salt and needs fewer chemicals. This may be the main reason for a salt water pool's appeal – swimming in one is gentler on the eyes and skin than its chlorinated counterpart.

Maintenance can be less expensive overall, but keep in mind that salt water generators usually need to run more than a typical filter for a chlorine pool so energy bills may be higher.



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# Shutoff Valves and Switches

## Do you know the locations for all your home's shutoff valves?

Stay safe. Know the locations so you can act quickly when needed.

### Gas



Your home's gas shutoff valve is typically located near your gas meter. You will need a large crescent wrench to turn off the gas. Once the gas is off, do not try to turn it back on yourself. Call your utility company or another qualified professional. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, leave the area immediately and call your utility company.

### Electricity



Locate your home's main circuit panel or electrical service box. Open the panel and see if all of the breakers are lined up. If they are, the power loss is not because of a tripped circuit. If you see a circuit breaker out of alignment, turn it off, then back on (aligned with the rest of the breakers).

### Water, Exterior



The main water shutoff valve for your house looks like a large, metal valve with a sturdy handle. An outside water shutoff valve is usually located below the hose bibb in the front of your house, or in the enclosure that houses an outside water heater.

### Water, Interior



In most homes, each plumbing fixture has a shutoff valve. Learn where shutoff valves are located for the kitchen sink, dishwasher, bathroom sinks, toilets, and washing machine.

### Water, Irrigation



Although irrigation systems are not covered by your home warranty, it is important to know how to turn off the water to your irrigation system. The main shutoff valve for most irrigation systems can be found between your home's main water supply shutoff and the irrigation controller, which is typically installed in your basement or garage. If the main shutoff is outside, it will be near a faucet bibb. You may need adjustable pliers.



## Did You Know...

Performing routine inspections of your irrigation system can save you time and money.

A clogged sprinkler head or a torn line can damage your landscape and affect your water bill. Periodic visual inspection can identify broken heads, broken lines, or water pressure issues. Sometimes repair is as easy as cleaning or replacing components such as sprinkler heads or hose bibbs.



# Homeowner Manual

## Keep track of your home's important records.

A homeowner manual lets you keep track of all improvements, updates, and upgrades you make to your home. Start by collecting and organizing important materials in a binder or expandable folder, including this Maintenance Guide. Add pockets or sleeves to easily organize receipts, manuals, floor plans, warranties, and so on. Here are suggestions for what else to include:

- Home system and appliance instructions, maintenance records, and if you have one, a copy of your First American home warranty contract. You can also include service call information, repairs, and contact information.
- Maintenance receipts and contact information for carpet cleaning, HVAC service, garage door opener repair, chimney cleaning, gutter repair, roof inspection/repair, solar panel cleaning, and more.
- Roof repair records including company contact information, type of roofing material, color and manufacturer data, and warranty, if applicable.
- Service provider contacts with whom you've had good experiences, such as painters, gardeners, and pest control pros. Include business cards if available.
- Seasonal maintenance records, such as gutter cleaning/repair, painting, repairing decks and walkways, HVAC filter replacements, sprinkler systems, and window cleaning, including slides and screens.
- Interior improvements and additions such as overhead lighting, fans, smart thermostats, storage systems, and dimmer switches, as well as low-flow toilets and shower heads. Include any refinishing/replacing of floors or cabinets.
- Exterior improvements such as landscaping and sprinkler systems, exterior lighting, solar panels, window upgrades, pool resurfacing, fencing, decking, tree removal, and so on.
- Maps of exterior locations for shutoffs for the main water, gas, and electrical, as well as the interior electrical panel. If your home is on a well or septic system, map the well, septic tanks, and leach field/lines. If applicable, include location of solar panel control/displays and sprinkler junction box.
- Programming instructions for security systems and codes and sprinkler system manuals.
- Neighborhood information such as Homeowners' Association (HOA) guidelines and fees and how to contact your HOA, if applicable.
- Pouch for keeping track of items such as labeled keys for a gas fireplace, mailbox, or storage shed.
- Records on the color formula or labels from cans of leftover interior and exterior paints.



## Did You Know...

There are safe ways to store and dispose of old paint.

To store paint you may use again, the first step is to remove any excess paint trapped in the rim of the can, then securely seal the can. Once cleaned, turn the can upside down to maintain the seal over the long term. Store on a low shelf inside a storage cabinet in the garage.

To dispose of non-latex paint you will not use again, check your local garbage or recycle company website to see if they schedule haul-away days for paints and other toxic chemicals. Also check community paint recycling options in your area.



# Maintenance and Repair Log

Use this worksheet to track the age of your home's equipment, when to schedule each home system or appliance checkup, and any dates of service or repair.

*Consider placing this worksheet in the front binder area of your Homeowner Manual for easy access and regular updates.*

Appliance or Home System	Age/Date Purchased	Maintenance Schedule and Repair Log
Attic and Exhaust Fans		
Ceiling Fans		
Central Air Conditioning		
Central Vacuum System		
Clothes Dryer		
Clothes Washer		
Dishwasher		
Ductwork		
Electrical		
Garage Door Openers		
Garbage Disposal		
Heating		
Kitchen Refrigerator		
Plumbing		
Plumbing Stoppages		
Range – Electric		
Range – Gas		
Septic Tank Pumping/System		
Sewage Ejector Pump		
Spa/Pool Equipment		
Trash Compactor		
Water Heater		
Well Pump		

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