

Check Your Property for Potential Problems

<http://money.aol.com/consreports/realestate/spring-checklist-for-your-home>

Your home is your most valuable asset. To help you protect it, Consumer Reports identifies these potential issues to be on the lookout for and explains how to fix them or avoid them altogether.

Hazardous Decks

Look for water stains where the deck ties to the house. Ongoing water leakage can lead to wood decay, weakening the deck structure and the house. If you have any doubt, call a pro to investigate.

Rid your deck of moss and mold. Pressure washers are effective. Remember, if you see wood damage, like raised fibers, increase the distance between the spray nozzle and the decking.

Dirty Air Conditioners

Disconnect electric power to the outdoor condenser on your air conditioner and clear it of debris with a vent brush, power blower, hose, or the brush attachment on your vacuum cleaner. If the cooling fins are exposed, be careful not to bend them. (If your yard has lots of trees and plants, wrap fiberglass mesh around the condenser coil to capture pollen and leaves.) Vacuum the grille and register inside the home. Change your furnace filter.

Foundation Fissures

Hairline cracks in foundation walls might be the result of concrete curing or minor settling and aren't automatically cause for alarm. Mark them with tape and check them again in a few months. If they've worsened, call a structural engineer. If they're stable, fill them with an epoxy-injection system. Also: Fill in holes in siding with expandable foam, check that the ground around the

foundation slopes away from the house look for pellet-shaped droppings or shed wings from termites and clear the area of leaves, where rodents can nest.

Faulty Garage-Door Openers

To check that the door is balanced, release it into the manual mode and lift it by hand. It should lift easily and stay open about 3 feet off the ground. If it doesn't, hire a garage-door technician. Next, set the reversing force on the opener as low as possible. Place a 2x4 board on the ground under the door, wide side down. The door should pop up when it hits the 2x4. If it doesn't, call a garage-door pro.

Clogged Gutters

Clear gutters of debris and check them for corrosion, joint separation, and loose fasteners. Flush out downspouts and unclog leader pipes. Leaders should extend at least 5 feet to direct water away from the foundation.

CR recommends A Type 1A ladder for added safety. Never go beyond the labeled highest step. If you prefer a multiuse ladder, consider the 13-foot Gorilla AL-13 for \$100.

A Leaky Roof

Leaks typically occur around an inadequately flashed chimney, skylight, or other opening. They're easiest to spot in the attic; inspect the rafters for water stains. Patching leaks is best left to a professional. While the contractor is on the roof, have him clean leaves from roof valleys.

Inspect the roof for cracked, curled, or missing shingles. Asphalt shingles typically last 20 years. CR recommends thick laminated shingles

Weakened Trees

Inspect trees for broken branches. If you can reach it from the ground, take it down using the three-cut technique, which prevents creating an open wound on the trunk:

- Make the first cut 1 to 2 feet from the branch collar, sawing a quarter way through the bottom of the branch.
- Make the second cut 3 inches farther out from the first, sawing all the way through the branch.
- Make the final cut just beyond the branch collar, sawing from the top down.

Cracked Pavement

Nip cracks in the bud in the driveway and paths before weeds take up residence. Home centers sell patching materials and fillers designed for asphalt and concrete surfaces. These DIY fixes might not do the trick on surfaces that have ruptured from the effects of frost heaving. For those, you'll need to hire a professional to pour or pave a new surface over stabilized soil.