

VOL.
28

NO.
4



This Old House

HOME RENO
ADVICE FROM
THE EXPERTS

WINTER
2023

BUILD A DINING BENCH / VIDEO DOORBELLS / BOLD PAINT COLORS / UTILITY VACUUMS

Digging Deep

The most efficient heating system there is starts with excavating your backyard. With geothermal drilling and piping underway at the Lexington project house, Ross Trethewey gets into the details

PLUS:
Learn all about
the project house's
accessibility
features,
page 60



Upkeep

Maintenance tasks to pay attention to this season **BY TONY CARRICK**



EASY FAUCET FACELIFT

You don't need to call a plumber to replace tired-looking sink, tub, and shower fixtures. For a fraction of the price of a new fixture, you can purchase a trim kit and replace the visible parts in about an hour. To remove the old trim, start by looking for the tiny holes under the faucet handle and tub spout that hide the set screws holding them in place. No set screws? Try turning them counterclockwise and screwing them off the valve. If there are escutcheons behind the handles, look for set screws or try unscrewing them off of the valve stem. When shopping for a replacement, be sure to bring the old sink or tub faucet, showerhead, and handles to the plumbing supply store to ensure that any new kit is compatible with the existing valves.



HOLIDAY LIGHTING, DONE RIGHT

Plan to deck your home with outdoor lighting? Stay safe and prevent damage to your shingles and siding by following these guidelines: **1)** Inspect each light strand and discard any with bare wires, damaged sockets, or loose connections. **2)** Check the UL label attached to the end of the strand to make sure that lights are certified for outdoor use. **3)** Follow the 4-to-1 safety rule when scaling a ladder: move the base of the ladder a foot away from the house for every 4 feet of height. **4)** Resist the temptation to use nails, staples, or hooks. Those tiny holes may seem harmless, but they can allow water to intrude; stick with plastic clips, like Northlight Universal Christmas Light Clips (\$11.59, homedepot.com), which attach to gutters and roof shingles.

Check and prep the oven

Two weeks before a festive meal is too early for defrosting the turkey but it's the right time to prepare your oven in case you need a service call. Start with a thorough cleaning. The self-cleaning setting is convenient, but raising the internal temperature to 1000* F can damage electrical components; cleaning by hand is a safer bet. Then check the temperature setting with an oven thermometer. If it's off by more than 15 degrees, recalibrate it following the manual instructions.

TOH PRO TIP



TOM SILVA
General Contractor

“Don't forget to lock your windows in winter. It seals the gap between the meeting rails, stopping cold air from migrating through.”

SNEAKY AIR-LEAK SOURCES

Caulking and weather-stripping around doors, windows, plumbing pipes, chimneys—you probably know the basics of air sealing. Going the extra mile by tackling these overlooked, often uninsulated spots can further reduce drafts and lower your heating bills:

- > **Rim joist** In an unfinished basement, a rim joist is like an open window. To stop cold air from seeping in, loosely fit pieces of 2-inch-thick rigid foam between ceiling joists; seal around edges with latex caulk or expanding foam. Most building codes require a covering of 1/2-inch drywall for fire protection..
- > **Ductwork** As much as 30 percent of the air moving through ducts is lost to leaks, holes, and bad connections. Stop your losses by sealing exposed ductwork in attics, crawlspaces, and garages with a thick brush-on sealing mastic that can fill gaps up to 1/8 inch wide.
- > **Attic hatch** Stop warm air from escaping up and out by sealing the attic entry. To create an airtight seal, attach adhesive-backed foam weatherstripping between the hatch door and frame, or install an attic stair cover box—find a nice DIY version at energy.gov.



TOH PRO TIP



Lee Gilliam
Landscaper

“Sand may seem like a quick and easy fix for slick walkways, but it loses effectiveness once it’s ground into the ice and it ruins hardwood floors when tracked indoors. Use ice melt with potassium or magnesium chloride instead; both are plant- and pet-friendly.”

Banish bathroom mold

Ridding your bath of mold can seem like a never-ending battle. Try these strategies to win the war: **Skip chlorine bleach:** It evaporates too quickly to kill mold spores at their roots and can damage metal, tile, and porcelain. For non-porous tubs, sinks, tile, and semigloss paint, use a borax-based, all-purpose cleaner. **Scrub stained grout:** Use an EPA-certified cleanser containing sodium hydroxide, which will etch away a thin layer of grout and kill embedded mold spores. Once clean, use a grout sealer and plan on resealing every two to three years. **Boost ventilation:** Deprive mold of the humidity it needs to grow with an exhaust fan that moves at least 1 CFM of air per square foot of floor space—one with a humidity sensor will kick on automatically when moisture levels are high.

CLEAR A SNOWY ROOF

Although local building codes have framing guidelines designed to accommodate average snowfall, clearing off deep drifts after a blizzard avoids the possibility of overloading the roof and reduces the formation of ice dams. A wheeled roof rake, like this one (Snow Joe, \$71, homedepot.com) can remove snow without damaging shingles. Just follow these safety tips:

- > Stand a safe distance away from the eaves. Mini-avalanches can and do happen.
- > Keep your feet on the ground. Don’t even think about using a ladder.
- > Start with the first 1-2 feet of snow on the lower edge of the roof.

Work your way up in 5-foot increments, adding extension poles as needed.



Roll this rake up the roof and the snow rides down the polyester slide.