Spring Maintenance – Outside Water System Check

[Intro Music]

(Host) Spring into action! My next topic will focus on the homes outside water system. I'll begin by describing why the water systems should be inspected, then what to look for and do. Hello and welcome to EBC Home Hints, the podcast dedicated to making your home a safer place, one episode at a time. I'm your host, Paul Rochette, and today we're diving into the world of doing a visual inspection of your outside watering system.

(Host) Brief history of the water basic spigot. The earliest valve, called a gate valve, was found back as far as 5000 B.C… The conventional spigot has been around since 1700 B.C. With actual square style shutoff. Then when indoor plumbing came around, the first modern spigot was developed in 1845. This spawned a multitude of designs we see today.

Then in 1838, the frost-free spigot hit the scene. Varying in length, they connect to house plumbing inside the home. The valve stem is a longer version of the conventional spigot. The end of the valve is inside the home. This design was made to help homeowners in cold climates prevent freezing and leaks in the home.

What does an outdoor watering system mean? Basically, everything that allows a homeowner to access water outside. There are a few areas apply to a watering system. The first are the outdoor water spigots, now referred to as a hose bib that typically exists on the homes siding. Then you perhaps have hoses, or other piping attached to the hose bibs for plants and gardens. I will not be discussing the underground sprinklers for the yard, or independent irrigation systems.

(Host) During the spring, you will want to evaluate and prepare the hose bib for the upcoming summer. Depending on where you live, warmer climates, this becomes more of a yearly checkup. It is still important to perform these checks as heat can dry gaskets and seals inside the hose bibs. In colder climates, the weather can be extreme, and it can take a toll on anything outdoors.

How to identify hose bibs. When looking for your hose bibs, most will be plumbed when the home was built and will extend out of the home. Occasionally, you will see one extending up in the yard. No matter what the design differences, the identifications are the same.

The most prevalent hose bibs are considered a conventional hose bib. They have a handle to turn the water on and off and an attachment for a hose. These are attached to the plumbing pipe protruding from the exterior. The on and off valve assembly all resides outside the home. Newer versions of this have what is called an anti-siphon, or an air gap valve built in. Basically, lines a circular dial above where the hose connects. The purpose is to prevent water from moving back into the home. An example is you have a hose attached to the hose-bib, the other end of the is open. Water remaining in the line, even rainwater, or dirty water, if the hose is lying on the ground, will flow back into your home contaminating clean drinking water. The anti-siphon prevents this, unless you have a hose bib without one.

Now let's identify the hose bib that was designed for colder climates. This is called the frost-free hose bib. Some anti-siphon hose bibs may have an anti-siphon valve, others might not. This does not mean they don't need one, but usually a builder follows local building codes and can save money. The easiest way to identify the frost-free unit is the on and off valve will always be in front of the hose bib. Next, a cast metal sleeve will be part of the hose bib. This is to attach it to the structure. Not always fool proof, but can easily be checked in the crawl space, or basement. The hose bib will enter the home, then attach to the homes plumbing.

(Host) What should be done every spring? All hose bibs should be tested. Depending on your building codes, you may have a shutoff for each hose bib. Inside the home, look for a valve that attaches to the plumbing that exits the home. If you have this, turn this back on and monitor it for a minute for leaks. Weather you have on and off valves inside, look for water staining on the wood, or drywall. Check to see if it is still moist. Call a plumber if you suspect a leak. Outside, look for corrosion around the hose bibs. This can be from slow leaks, or water with high iron causing the hose bib to corrode. Next, turn water on and place your thumb over the exit point. If you can hold water back with very little pressure, you may have a leak inside. Unless you have very low water pressure. Now remove your thumb allowing it to run for about 10-30 seconds on every hose bib. Every hose bib, or valve has a life span. If it's going to fail, it can fail when testing it. Does the hose bib keep dripping after turning it on and off? Let's say the hose bib drips ten times a minute. After just one day, you can lose up to a gallon of water. One hundred and twenty drips per minute waste more than eleven gallons a day. Regardless of whether you are being on city, or well water, that is a lot. Besides the erosion damage that can be caused close to the foundation. You can either replace the valves and gaskets or simply replace it. If you're testing a frost-free hose bib, go into the home and look for any new leaks. Remember, the frost free is connected to the interior plumbing ahead of the line shut off. Look at that connection for leaks.

(Host) Preventative measures can be taken to protect all hose bibs. Certainly, it is not fool proof but increases the odds. Nothing can prevent a hose bib seal, or gasket failure. That is why it's important to protect, prevent and test yearly. During the winter, they always cover outside hose bibs with a winter cover. Even frost-free should be covered. This design is made to not freeze. Unfortunately, other factors can cause it to freeze and damage. All frost-free hose bibs are to be installed on a downward angle. This allows excess water to drain after the valve has closed. Let's do an example. The frost free is installed on the level. Even a small amount of remaining water can freeze and damage the hose bib, causing a spring leak. This can even extend inside the home. So always cover all hose bibs, in case of faulty installation.

Consider having inside water shutoffs installed on all hose bibs, in areas that freeze. In the winter, you turn the water off inside the home, preventing any hose bib from potentially causing a huge leak. Specifically in cold climates, never leave a garden hose, or watering plumbing attached to a hose bib after Summer. If your hose bib does not have an anti-siphon built in, you can purchase an inexpensive attachment.

For people that attach plumbing pipes to the hose bib, for gardens, or other items needing water. Normally, people use PVC piping. Make sure they are not attached to the hose bibs before freezing weather. Insulation around the pipe can help. Always think about protecting the inside of the home from leaks. Disconnecting plumbing like this for cold climates is something that should be done. Make sure your outside plumbing for watering is blown out before cold periods. Unless you're below the frost line, any water in the line will freeze. As an example, Ohio's frost line is roughly four feet deep. Protect any exposed plumbing made of PVC by painting it. Ultraviolet rays will damage and discolor these products. I hope all of this has helped you perform spring maintenance on these items.

[Closing Music]

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