



CAN I FIX THIS MYSELF?

THE HOMEOWNER DECISION GUIDE

Not every home repair needs a contractor - and not every repair should be a DIY project. Use this guide to make a quick first decision, try a few safe homeowner-level checks, and recognize the warning signs that mean it is time to stop.

DIY FRIENDLY	Good homeowner project. Low-risk maintenance or adjustment for someone comfortable with basic tools.
PROCEED WITH CAUTION	Use judgment. A simple cause may be DIY-friendly, but the wrong repair can create damage or safety concerns.
CALL A PROFESSIONAL	Professional evaluation recommended. Safety systems, structure, gas, concealed water damage, roofing, or repeated failures.

One rule applies to everything: If the conditions are different from what you expected, you are unsure what you are looking at, or continuing would require you to defeat a safety device, open energized electrical equipment, disturb gas piping, climb onto a roof, or alter structural components - stop.

1 RUNNING TOILET

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Check the flapper, chain, float, and water level. Make sure the tank components move freely.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the toilet leaks at the base, rocks, repeatedly clogs, or the shutoff valve will not work.

2 DRIPPING FAUCET

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Confirm which side is dripping and make sure the handle closes normally. Check for a loose aerator if the leak is at the spout tip.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the faucet body, supply valve, or piping is leaking, or access requires opening walls.

3 SLOW BATHROOM SINK

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Remove and clean the accessible stopper. Clear visible hair/debris and use a sink plunger if appropriate.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if several drains are slow, sewage odor is persistent, or water backs up elsewhere.

4 CRACKED TUB/SHOWER CAULK

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Remove loose old caulk, clean and dry the joint, then apply bathroom-rated silicone according to the label.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if tile is loose, the wall feels soft, or moisture/mold keeps returning.

5 SMALL DRYWALL NAIL HOLE

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Use lightweight spackle, let it dry, sand lightly, prime if needed, and touch up paint.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the damage is wet, recurring, unusually large, or associated with cracking/movement.

6 SQUEAKY INTERIOR DOOR

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Tighten hinge screws and lubricate the hinge pin with an appropriate lubricant.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the frame is pulling away, the door suddenly binds, or there is structural movement.

7 LOOSE CABINET HINGE

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Tighten screws gently and use the hinge adjustment screws to align the door.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the cabinet material is badly split or the hinge is pulling out of damaged material.

8 DRAFTY EXTERIOR DOOR

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Inspect weatherstripping and the door sweep. Replace worn removable weatherstripping with the correct profile.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the frame is rotten, significantly out of square, or water is entering around the opening.

9 DIRTY HVAC FILTER

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Read the filter size, note the airflow arrow, turn the system off at the thermostat, and install the correct replacement.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the filter is wet, collapsed, or becomes abnormally dirty very quickly.

10 GFCI OUTLET TRIPPED

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Unplug connected devices and press RESET firmly. Test the outlet and reconnect devices one at a time.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if it will not reset, repeatedly trips, feels warm, smells burned, or is visibly damaged.

1
1

LOOSE DOORKNOB

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Tighten accessible mounting screws and verify the latch aligns with the strike plate.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if the lockset is damaged, the door cannot secure, or the frame/strike area is split.

1
2

MINOR PAINT TOUCH-UP

DIY FRIENDLY

TRY THIS FIRST	Clean the surface, feather small defects, use matching paint/finish, and apply thin coats.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if peeling is caused by active moisture or the underlying surface is deteriorating.

1
3

SINGLE CLOGGED TOILET

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

TRY THIS FIRST	Stop flushing. Use a toilet plunger with a good seal and steady strokes.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if plunging does not clear it, the toilet overflows repeatedly, or other fixtures back up.

1
4

LEAKING SINK P-TRAP

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

TRY THIS FIRST	Place a bucket underneath and check whether accessible slip-joint nuts are loose. Hand-tighten carefully.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if piping is cracked/corroded, the leak persists, or glued/concealed piping is involved.

1
5

LOOSE DECK BOARD

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

TRY THIS FIRST	Identify whether the board itself is sound and whether a fastener has simply loosened.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if wood is soft/rotten, framing is damaged, or the board is part of a stair or guard system.

1
6**LOOSE HANDRAIL****PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

TRY THIS FIRST	Check whether an accessible fastener has loosened and whether the mounting surface is solid.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if anchors pull out, framing is damaged, or the rail protects a stair/drop.

1
7**EXTERIOR CAULK FAILURE****PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

TRY THIS FIRST	Remove loose sealant and replace only where the joint is intended to be sealed.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if you are unsure about flashing/drainage details or the gap is associated with rot or water intrusion.

1
8**GARBAGE DISPOSAL JAM****PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

TRY THIS FIRST	Turn the disposal off. Follow the manufacturer's procedure for using its reset or approved unjamming method.
STOP HERE IF...	Never put your hand inside. Stop for leaks, electrical issues, persistent humming, or repeated trips.

1
9**DISHWASHER NOT DRAINING****PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

TRY THIS FIRST	Check the filter and accessible drain area according to the appliance manual; verify the sink/disposal drains normally.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop if there is leakage, electrical trouble, repeated backup, or appliance disassembly is required.

2
0**HVAC NOT COOLING WELL****PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

TRY THIS FIRST	Check thermostat settings, filter condition, open vents, and obvious outdoor-unit debris.
STOP HERE IF...	Stop for icing, water leaks, burning smells, unusual noises, breaker trips, or continued poor performance.

2
1**BREAKER REPEATEDLY TRIPS****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST**

You can unplug devices and reset the breaker once.

STOP HERE IF...

Do not keep resetting it. Repeated trips, heat, buzzing, or burning odors require electrical diagnosis.

2
2**OUTLET IS WARM OR SCORCHED****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST**

Stop using the outlet and unplug devices only if it is safe.

STOP HERE IF...

Do not remove the receptacle or investigate energized wiring. Contact a qualified electrician.

2
3**WATER STAIN ON CEILING****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST**

Document the stain and check for an obvious safe-to-access source above, such as an overflowing fixture.

STOP HERE IF...

Professional evaluation is appropriate when the source is unknown, active, recurring, or near electrical fixtures.

2
4**WATER HEATER TANK LEAKING****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST**

If safe, shut off the cold-water supply and control electric power as appropriate; leave gas controls alone if gas odor is present.

STOP HERE IF...

A leaking tank, relief-valve discharge, or major corrosion should be professionally evaluated.

2
5**ROOF LEAK****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST**

From inside, protect belongings and catch water only where safe. Photograph the location.

STOP HERE IF...

Do not climb onto a wet or damaged roof. Roofing leaks generally need professional evaluation.

**2
6****FOUNDATION OR STRUCTURAL CRACK****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST** Photograph and measure the visible condition so changes can be tracked.**STOP HERE IF...** Large, widening, displaced, horizontal, or recurring cracks - or cracks with sticking doors/floors - warrant qualified evaluation.**2
7****PERSISTENT MOLD OR MUSTY ODOR****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST** Reduce obvious humidity sources and document where/when the condition occurs.**STOP HERE IF...** Persistent growth or odor can indicate hidden moisture. Identify and correct the moisture source rather than simply covering it.**2
8****GAS ODOR****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST** Leave the building immediately and move to a safe location.**STOP HERE IF...** Do not operate switches or search for the leak. Contact the gas utility or emergency services from outside.**2
9****SAGGING OR BULGING CEILING****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST** Keep people and pets away from the area.**STOP HERE IF...** Do not puncture or work beneath a compromised ceiling. Water, structural damage, or failed drywall can create collapse and electrical hazards.**3
0****MAJOR SEWER BACKUP****CALL A PROFESSIONAL****TRY THIS FIRST** Stop using water throughout the home and keep people/pets away from contaminated areas.**STOP HERE IF...** Multiple backed-up fixtures, sewage, or recurring main-line symptoms require professional drain/plumbing service.

QUICK DECISION CHECK

Is there an immediate safety hazard?	Gas odor, fire/smoke, sparking, structural instability, sewage, or water near electricity = leave/control access and call for appropriate help.
Is the problem recurring?	A repair that keeps returning usually means the symptom was addressed but the cause was not.
Is the source concealed?	Problems inside walls, ceilings, floors, roofs, panels, or equipment often require diagnosis before repair.
Could a mistake cause major damage?	Think about flooding, shock/fire, gas, structural failure, broken glass, or falls.
Does the job require a permit, license, or specialized test equipment?	If yes - or if you do not know - check local requirements and use an appropriately qualified professional.

HOME READY PRO TIP

The smartest DIY decision is sometimes deciding not to DIY. A five-minute homeowner check can still be valuable because it helps you describe the problem accurately when you call someone.

Service With Purpose
Your Home. Your Plans. Our Purpose.

General homeowner education only. This guide cannot account for every home's construction, condition, local code requirements, manufacturer instructions, or the user's skill level. When safety or uncertainty is involved, use an appropriately qualified professional.