

# Do it yourself... or not!



Spring time is here, which most homeowners feel is a great time to tackle home repairs. Perhaps you have a whole set of tools to do minor repairs around the home. However, just because you have them doesn't mean you should take on any task that comes along. As Kenny Rogers sings in "The Gambler": "Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away." You don't want to gamble with your property or your life, so knowing when the project is beyond your knowledge or skills is important. In many cases, you might not have the proper tools or are not sure what you're actually getting yourself into by taking on a task. Following are some tasks that are best left to the appropriate professionals.

## Repairing the roof

Insurance companies report that most injuries in our homes result from falling, so why would you want to get up on a roof that has a slope; slippery, worn, or damaged shingles, and take the risk of falling? Saving a little money by trying to do your roof yourself is not worth the risk of spending time in the hospital or emergency room and paying the subsequent medical bills. There are countless stories of licensed roofing contractors falling off of roofs, being injured, and not being able to work again. If you need further justification for not taking on this task, head to the home improvement store and try lifting a bundle of asphalt shingles. Now picture yourself with that bundle on your shoulder, climbing the ladder, and balancing on a high slope. If the whole roof needs to be replaced, the total scope of the job can be daunting: removing old layers, installing sheathing, and then installing new shingles. Roofing is hard and dangerous work best left to professionals.



## Reflashing the chimney

Many roof leaks occur where the chimney meets the roof and usually mean that the chimney needs to be reflushed. This job ranks right up there with repairing the roof since it requires working on the roof and special expertise about flashing since it must be bent to an exact shape and then attached to the bricks and laid into the roof shingles.

## Cleaning the fireplace and chimney

Fireplaces and chimneys should be cleaned annually to remove soot, ash, and creosote. If your nightly entertainment includes sitting in front of a fire watching a movie, your fireplace and chimney probably need a monthly cleaning. You already know how dangerous it is to climb up on the roof, and that happens to be the best way to reach the insides of the chimney, so leave it to the chimney sweep. Chimney sweeps have the tools to get the job done right, preventing damage to the fireplace or chimney that could create a fire hazard.

## Installing or repairing electrical wiring

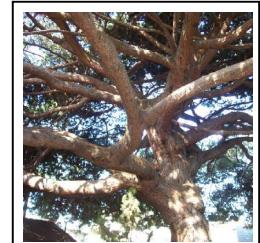
Although many states allow homeowners to do basically anything to their homes as long as the appropriate permits are acquired, it is against the law in some communities for anyone other than a licensed electrician to wire inside a home. Electricians know the various electrical codes, so let them do the electrical work inside your home. It's easier than you might think to be shocked or electrocuted, or to spark a fire, or to have everything look and work fine when you finish only to have a problem occur sometime in the future because the work wasn't done right.

## Removing asbestos-containing materials

Asbestos was used as insulation in homes up until 1979, but we now know that it causes several types of cancer when it is disturbed and becomes airborne, allowing you to breathe it into your lungs. Generally it doesn't belong in your home but can be left in place in some areas as long as it is not disturbed and as long as you know it's there. Many states consider asbestos a hazardous material, requiring a license to remove and dispose of properly. With the health risks involved, this task is best left to a trained professional who many times will show up in a space suit with some interesting tools and equipment, things that you probably don't have stashed away in your closet.

## Pruning large trees

Climbing up a tree with a chainsaw to prune branches is not a task to take lightly. In addition to not knowing anything about the condition of all the branches—are they strong enough to support you?—you probably don't know how to prune the tree without causing major damage to it, damage that could cause it to die. And while tree branches are beautiful when swaying in the wind, they are not so beautiful when they're laying on your neighbor's roof, car, or fence. Tree surgeons have appropriate tools, knowledge, and insurance to handle this; let them do it.



## Repairing driveway cracks

While it might be easy to seal small cracks with various compounds from the home improvement store, fixing the bigger cracks is a bigger task. Big cracks usually result from other problems, usually related to water and soil, which should be addressed before you waste time patching them each month. Have the cracks and soil evaluated to determine what might be causing the damage. Sometimes the driveway really should be ripped up and rebuilt rather than patched.

## Repointing brickwork

Scraping out old mortar and replacing it, called repointing, seems fairly straightforward. However, if the mortar mix is not correct, one can actually weaken the brickwork, possibly causing more damage or creating a hazard from loose bricks, cracked walls, or water leaks. Hire a brick mason for this since a poor homeowner job is very noticeable and expensive to fix.



## Adjusting the furnace

The heating system, either a furnace or a boiler, is a vital part of your home. As with the chimney and fireplace, it should be cleaned and inspected annually in order to keep it running efficiently. The best time to have this work done is in the fall, perhaps at the same time that clocks are set back for the fall time change. This task requires specialized tools and knowledge to do properly. A poor job can result in a fire hazard or filling your home with deadly carbon monoxide. Many public and private utility companies will fine-tune the mix of air and fuel at the same time, so if there anything is seriously wrong, they'll catch it before property damage or personal injury occurs.

## Repairing the foundation

If you find a crack in your foundation, or if your floors are sloped or sagging, call a foundation professional to identify and eliminate the cause. Many foundation problems are caused by water, so make sure your roof has gutters and downspouts and that the soil and concrete around your home slopes away from the foundation. Foundation planters full of flowering and tropical plants that require lots of water are another common cause of foundation damage. If you see water standing near the foundation after a rain or after your lawn irrigation system has been on, have a landscape professional design ways to prevent it.

## Repairing plumbing leaks

Some plumbing jobs are fairly easy, like connecting the new dishwasher to existing hookups, but that doesn't mean that it is easy to repair a leak in the water supply pipes or the sewer pipes. Proceeding without the appropriate tools and knowledge can result in a flood rather than just a leak, so hire a plumbing professional to repair leaks properly.



## Refinishing wood floors

Home improvement stores have been a boon to modern homeowners because they offer a great variety of things for homeowners, including renting various equipment such as floor sanders. However, not having experience in handling a floor sander can leave a permanent gouge in the floor, and when that gouge is in the most noticeable area, you'll wish you had taken the day off while the flooring professional was doing the work. Replaced floor boards or slats will always look slightly different from those around them.

If you have any questions, simply contact the InterNACHI inspector listed below for help.



International Association of Certified Home Inspectors [www.NACHI.org](http://www.NACHI.org)

Provided by your local InterNACHI inspector:

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