

**12 Tips to Ice Out Ice This Winter**

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Don’t believe ice is just one of those minor annoyances you must endure. Ice can wreak major havoc on your house, your lawn and your car. Sure, you can (and should!) have ample [home and auto insurance](https://www.thehartford.com/aarp/homeowners-insurance) to cover the costs – but you still have to assess and repair the damage caused by ice. You can save time, money and headaches by taking some simple steps to ensure you safeguard your property from ice damage.

**1. Prevent Ice Dams on Your Roof­**

When water freezes, melts, and then refreezes on the edge of your roof it can create an ice dam. Why is this important? Ice dams can cause water to leak into your home and damage ceilings, walls, insulation and other areas, noted the [Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety](https://disastersafety.org/about/) (IIBHS). The reason this happens is water runs down a warm roof – which has a temperature of 32 degrees F or higher – and hits the freezing cold roof edge. The water then refreezes and expands, causing damage. A warm attic is the usual culprit.

**What you can do now.**

Add insulation to the attic. That not only keeps you warmer inside your home, but keeps the roof colder. Also, make sure you insulate recessed lighting fixtures so they don’t heat up your attic.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

Remove the snow from your roof with a roof rake, especially if 6 inches or more accumulates. Do not use a regular rake, because you can damage the shingles and gutters. [The Ice Dam Guys](https://www.icedamremovalguys.com/learning-center/ice-dam-glossary/#roof-rake), based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, note roof rakes are flat-headed rakes with long handles and/or extensions.

**Caution:** Gutters & Guards Inc. also advise homeowners to [exercise ladder safety](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/ladder-injury-prevention-safety/) and not to climb a ladder to reach your roof. It’s too easy to fall, especially in icy or wet weather. If you can’t reach, hire a professional to clear your roof.

**2. Assess the Potential for Roof Collapse**

The good news: your roof can support a lot of weight. Most roofs in good condition –those that aren’t old or damaged – can support about 20-lbs. per square foot of snow, reported IIBHS. Homes in New England and other extreme weather areas are often built to withstand much more. But what does that 20 lbs. per square foot mean? Think of it this way – 10 to 12 inches of snow equals about 1 inch of water. That translates into about 5 lbs. per square feet of roof space. So unless you have more than 4 feet of snow on your roof – again, assuming the roof is not old or damaged – you are unlikely to have a cave-in.

**What you can do now.**

[Determine that your roof is in good condition](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/roof-maintenance/). One of the easiest ways is to check your attic and look for daylight through the boards, dark streaks or stains, sagging or leaks or water damage, [noted American Dream Restoration in Front Royal, Virginia.](https://americandreamrestoration.com/how-to-tell-if-you-need-a-new-roof/) If you find problems, call a roofing professional and get the necessary repairs done.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

If there is significant accumulation, remove the snow from your roof following the guidelines noted above in the section on ice dams.

**Side note**: Never use snow or ice melting crystals on your roof. It can cause damage to your roofing materials.

**3. Keep Gutters Clear**

Gutter cleaning is one of those chores that seem trivial and mundane – until your gutters back up and flood your house or saturate the ground near your home and damage its foundation. Winter means your gutters will work hard, depositing rain and melted snow away from your home.

**What you can do now.**

Clear your gutter of debris (if you do this yourself, make sure you properly brace the ladder, and that you wear gloves for the chore); ensure the gutter is firmly attached to the roof; take a careful look at the gutter’s seams and corners; and check downspouts (the drain that goes from the roof to the ground). Ensure you direct water at least 10 feet away from the foundation. When you clean the gutters, be sure to check for any house damage, too. Also, keep tree limbs trimmed so they don’t fall and break or clog your gutter.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

Again, clear your gutters and make sure you remove any tree limbs that could fall. Even if you regularly keep trees trimmed, take another look before a storm.

**4. Protect Your Trees and Shrubs**

Even evergreens can suffer limb and root damage during icy winter storms, noted [The Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois](http://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-and-plant-advice/horticulture-care/winter-injury-trees-and-shrubs). Of course you’ll try to choose trees and shrubs that mesh well with the climate in which you live. But take some extra care to make sure your trees and bushes survive harsh weather.

**What you can do now.**

Avoid fertilizing and pruning trees and bushes during late summer or early fall, recommends The Morton Arboretum. Doing so encourages growth at a time when trees and shrubs should be preserving energy and preparing for winter dormancy. But do keep watering trees and shrubs until the ground freezes.

In late fall, you can apply anti-desiccant to trees, especially evergreens. It locks water into trees and bushes for up to four months through the winter (and up to two months in the summer), [according to the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis](http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/help-for-the-home-gardener/advice-tips-resources/pests-and-problems/pesticides/anti-desiccant.aspx).

**What you can do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

Apply mulch to the ground around trees and bushes to insulate the roots. Invest in burlap screens to shield evergreens from wind and salt, recommended the Missouri Botanical Garden.

**5. Treat Your Patio Furniture**

Ideally, you’ll bring your patio furniture inside before storms. But most homeowners don’t have the space to store large swings, chaise lounges, tables and other outdoor furniture pieces. The good news is that outdoor furniture can withstand some harsh elements. Plus you can invest in protective covers or tarps for more protection.

**What you can do now.**

Coat your metal furniture with automotive wax to provide extra protection. Other than moving plastic furniture out of areas where it might blow away, it needs very little care prior to winter. The same is true of synthetic wicker.

**What you can do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

Bring your cushions indoors to help ensure mold doesn’t develop on them. Also, if your outdoor furniture has mosaic tiles, store it out of the cold weather as ice and freezing temperatures can cause tiles to dislodge.

**6. Prep Your Driveway**

Of course you should clear snow and ice off of your driveway and sidewalks, but just because your parents used rock salt with abandon doesn’t mean you should. Doing so can ruin your driveway and walkways whether they’re made of concrete, asphalt, brick, stone or other materials.

**What you can do now.**

Clean your driveway. Many of us don’t give our driveways or walkways any thought but it’s a good idea to clean them every quarter or so. How you clean it depends on the material from which it’s made, of course, but power washing is a standard method. Sealing your driveway every two to five years – depending on weather, wear and tear, and the materials your driveway is made of – will help extend the life of your driveway. It’s vital to use the appropriate sealing material for your driveway type, and not over- or under-seal.

**What you can do if a storm is imminent or just passed.**

Keep snow shovels, snow blowers and plow blades at least half an inch off the surface of drive and pathways. And don’t use rock salt. Yes, it can melt the ice but it can also damage the driveway and walkway surfaces due to the inevitable melting and refreezing that occurs. Desperate to melt the ice? Calcium chloride can work and should cause less damage when used according to the instructions.

**7. Clean Your Deck**

Most homeowners don’t give much thought to their decks when the weather starts to turn cold. That’s a mistake. Food and other stains aren’t just unsightly, but can seep into and damage decks. Cleaning is the first step in any deck maintenance.

**What you can do now.**

Look for loose boards and other damage to your deck so you can correct it before inclement weather arrives. Waterproof your wood deck. You can test the effectiveness of your deck’s existing stain to determine if it requires a new staining. It’s easy. Just sprinkle water on the deck. If the water beads on the deck, it doesn’t need sealing. If the water soaks in right away, the deck is not waterproofed and needs to be sealed.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Remove planters and storage containers so water doesn’t accumulate and cause damage. Clear snow from the deck using a broom or shovel, but use a light touch so you don’t damage the deck. Also, shovel along the planks, not against or across them to minimize potential damage to the wood.

**8. Prepare Pipes**

Every winter news stories abound describing how homeowners returned to their house only to find that pipes had frozen, broken and flooded their home – destroying furniture, carpeting and mementos. Pipes in bathrooms and laundry rooms located near garages or exterior facing walls are especially vulnerable to such freezing, [writes Bob Vila](https://www.bobvila.com/articles/winterizing-pipes/). That’s why it important to close crawl spaces and add extra insulation, especially in those areas.

**What you can do now.**

Consider buying space heaters to keep such rooms warm if frigid temperatures hit. Also, never turn the heat off when you leave your home. Set the thermostat at 55 degrees, at the lowest, to keep pipes warm enough to operate properly.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Besides using a space heater in rooms where pipes are vulnerable, open the vanity doors so that air circulates and keeps pipes warm.

**9. Disconnect Your Hose and Drain Your Outside Faucets**

Don’t believe those that tell you it’s fine to leave your garden hose attached and outside faucets on during winter. Cold weather causes water to expand. When that happens in a pipe, which is full of water, the pipe usually breaks.

**What to do now.**

Drain and remove garden hoses and sprinkler systems. If your home has a separate shut-off for external faucets, turn them off and drain the water from those faucets.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Ensure you know where the main waterline shut-off is for your house so, if a pipe breaks, you can immediately turn off the water supply.

**10. De-ice Your Car Windows**

On icy mornings there’s always some misguided person who chips away at the ice on their car windows with metal instruments or throws hot water on their windshield. Both methods can damage or even shatter car windows. Still, you must [clean your car windows before hitting the road](https://extramile.thehartford.com/auto/winter-driving-and-maintenance-tips/).

**What you can do now.**

Ensure you have a piece of cardboard to place on your windshield before a storm hits. Lift the windshield wipers and place them on top of the cardboard to secure them to the windshield. Then when you’re ready to drive, just lift the cardboard up and drop the ice on the ground.

**Tip**: Do not raise your windshield wipers straight up. If ice or heavy snow falls on the wipers and forces them onto your windshield, they can crack the glass.

Keep reading for more tips specific to windshield wipers.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Mix two parts of 70 percent isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol with one part tap water and place in a spray bottle. Spray it on the icy windshield and the ice will start melting. Let it set one minute and then scrape the ice off.

**11. Protect Car Paint**

Don’t ever use a snow scraper on the body of your car! That can scrape and scratch the paint.

**What you can do now.**

Have your car thoroughly washed, waxed and sealed before snow and ice arrive. That protects your car from the elements and snow removal brushes and scrapers.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Warm up your car before trying to remove ice. Make sure you have the doors unlocked and that the tailpipe is not obstructed.

**12. Protect Your Windshield Wipers**

Windshield wipers may seem like a minor consideration when an ice storm hits, but if they break or malfunction when you’re driving, causing poor visibility, you risk causing a serious accident. Never keep your wipers raised. As noted, if snow or ice hits a raised wiper it can end up breaking either or both the wiper and windshield.

**What you can do now.**

Inspect your wiper blades to make sure the rubber is not split, chipped or peeling. Replace damaged blades if needed.

**What to do if a storm is imminent or recently passed.**

Put socks over the wipers. That will keep the blades ice-free.

Ice due to winter weather conditions has the potential to ruin your home, car and other valuables. With a bit of planning and preparation, you can prevent most damage freezing temperatures can bring.