

KESTLER HEATING & COOLING

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Seasonal Checklist

The Michigan Homeowner's Furnace & AC Maintenance Checklist

What you can safely do yourself, and what a real tune-up covers

A plain-language guide from the crew at Kestler Heating & Cooling
Real people, flat pricing, and the truth about your equipment.

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Good heating and cooling equipment does not ask for much, but the little it asks for, it asks for on a schedule. In Michigan that schedule is not gentle. A furnace runs hard from October through April, then an air conditioner takes over through a humid summer, and the same blower does the work for both. Skip the upkeep and you do not usually get a dramatic failure. You get a slow drift toward higher bills, uneven rooms, and a breakdown that always seems to land on the coldest or hottest day of the year.

This checklist splits the work into two honest piles. The first pile is what you, the homeowner, can safely do yourself with no tools and no risk. The second pile is what belongs to a licensed technician during a seasonal tune-up, because it involves gas, electrical connections, refrigerant, or judgment that takes training. We are not going to pretend the homeowner list replaces a tune-up. It does not. But a homeowner who does their part makes the equipment last longer and gives the tech less to clean up.

The rule of thumb: if a task touches air, filters, or clutter, it is yours. If it touches gas, flame, wiring, or refrigerant, it is ours.

THE SAFETY LINE: WHAT TO LEAVE TO A LICENSED TECH

Before the lists, one plain word about safety. Modern HVAC equipment is safe when it is respected and dangerous when it is not. The tasks below are not homeowner tasks, ever, no matter what a video shows you:

- **Anything involving the gas line, the burners, or the flame.** A furnace mixes gas and fire in a controlled way. Adjusting it is licensed work for a reason.
- **Opening electrical panels or the furnace control board.** Line-voltage wiring can injure you and can destroy an expensive board in a second.
- **Anything to do with refrigerant.** By federal law, only certified technicians handle it. If your AC is low, it is leaking, and adding refrigerant without finding the leak is throwing money at a symptom.
- **The heat exchanger.** A cracked heat exchanger can leak carbon monoxide. Inspecting it properly takes tools and training, and it is one of the most important things a tune-up checks.

If you ever smell gas, hear a repeated clicking with no ignition, or your carbon monoxide alarm sounds, do not troubleshoot. Leave the house and call the gas utility, then call us.

EVERY MONTH, ALL YEAR: THE HOMEOWNER BASICS

These are the small habits that prevent most of the service calls we run. None of them require a tool.

- **Check the air filter.** Hold it up to a light. If light barely passes through, change it. A one-inch filter often needs changing every one to three months, sooner if you have pets or run the system hard.
- **Keep supply and return vents clear.** Furniture, rugs, and boxes over a vent choke airflow and make the whole system work harder for less comfort.
- **Give the outdoor unit room to breathe.** Keep grass clippings, leaves, and shrubs at least a couple of feet back from the condenser in summer.
- **Listen and smell.** New rattles, grinding, or a burning smell that does not fade after the first fall startup are worth a call, not a wait.
- **Test your thermostat.** If rooms never quite hit the number on the wall, note it. It is useful information for a tech.
- **Confirm your carbon monoxide detectors work.** Every level of the home, batteries fresh. This is the cheapest safety you will ever buy.

FALL: GET THE FURNACE READY (HOMEOWNER TASKS)

DO THESE BEFORE THE FIRST HARD COLD SNAP

- Replace the furnace filter with a fresh one so the season starts clean.
- Run the furnace once on a cool day, before you truly need it, so a problem shows up on your schedule and not at midnight in January.
- Clear the area around the furnace. It is not a storage closet. Boxes and laundry near the unit are a fire and airflow problem.
- Make sure nothing is blocking the return-air grilles that feed the furnace.
- Find and clear the outside intake and exhaust pipes on a high-efficiency furnace. Leaves, nests, and snow drifts can block them and shut the furnace down.
- Check that basement and crawlspace vents that feed combustion air are open and clear.

FALL: WHAT A FURNACE TUNE-UP COVERS (OUR TASKS)

Here is the honest part most companies will not print. A seasonal furnace tune-up is not a homeowner job pretending to be professional. It is a specific list of checks that need training and tools:

- Inspect the heat exchanger for cracks or corrosion, the carbon monoxide safety item.
- Test the burners and flame, and clean them so ignition is clean and complete.
- Check gas pressure and the gas valve operation against the manufacturer's spec.

- Test the ignition system, flame sensor, and all the safety switches that shut the furnace down when something is wrong.
- Inspect and tighten electrical connections, and read the amp draw on the blower motor for early signs of wear.
- Check the flue and venting for leaks or blockage.
- Clear the condensate drain on a high-efficiency furnace so it does not back up and trip the unit off.
- Confirm the thermostat calls for heat correctly and the system cycles the way it should.

SPRING: GET THE AC READY (HOMEOWNER TASKS)

DO THESE BEFORE THE FIRST STRETCH OF HUMID DAYS

- Replace the filter again. The same blower runs your cooling, and a dirty filter can freeze an evaporator coil.
- Gently clear leaves, seeds, and winter debris from around and on top of the outdoor condenser.
- Rinse the outdoor unit's fins with a garden hose on a light setting, spraying straight through from the inside if you can reach, never with a pressure washer.
- Make sure the condenser sits level and clear, with two feet of open space on all sides.
- Check that the condensate drain line, often a white PVC pipe near the indoor unit, is not clogged and drips freely.
- Run the AC on a mild day, before the first heat wave, so any weak start shows up early.

SPRING: WHAT AN AC TUNE-UP COVERS (OUR TASKS)

The cooling tune-up mirrors the heating one, aimed at the parts that fail in July:

- Measure the refrigerant charge and check for leaks, because low refrigerant means a leak, not a top-off.
- Clean the condenser and evaporator coils so the system can actually shed heat.
- Test the compressor and fan motor amp draw and the run capacitor, a cheap part whose failure strands you in a heat wave.
- Check and clear the condensate drain and pan so a summer of humidity does not overflow onto your floor.
- Inspect electrical connections, the contactor, and the safety controls.
- Verify the temperature split across the coil so we know the system is cooling to spec, not just running.

IN-SEASON QUICK CHECKS

DEEP WINTER

- After heavy snow, check that the high-efficiency furnace's outside pipes are still clear.
- If a room suddenly runs cold, check the filter first. A clogged filter is the most common cause of weak heat.

PEAK SUMMER

- If the AC runs but the house will not cool, check the filter, then look at the outdoor unit for ice or debris.
- Ice on the refrigerant line or the coil means shut the system off and call. Running a frozen system can damage the compressor.

A SIMPLE YEAR-ROUND SCHEDULE

Season	You handle	We handle (tune-up)
Fall	Fresh filter, clear the furnace area and intake pipes, test-run early	Full heating inspection: heat exchanger, burners, gas, safeties, venting
Winter	Watch filters, keep exhaust pipes clear of snow	Emergency service only, as needed
Spring	Fresh filter, clear and rinse the condenser, test-run early	Full cooling inspection: refrigerant, coils, capacitor, drain, controls
Summer	Keep the condenser clear, watch for ice, change filters	Emergency service only, as needed

Two visits a year, spring and fall, plus the small homeowner habits in between. That is the whole maintenance plan, and it is exactly what our Comfort Club puts on autopilot so you never have to remember the dates. Whether you do it with us or on your own, doing it is what matters.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FILTER

If you only do one thing on this whole list, make it the filter, because a neglected filter causes more comfort complaints and more avoidable breakdowns than any other single item. It is worth understanding a little more than "change it sometimes."

How often, really

The honest answer is that it depends on your filter and your house. A thin one-inch filter often needs changing every one to three months. A thick media filter, the four or five-inch kind that sits in its own cabinet, can go six months to a year. Pets, allergies, and running the system hard all shorten the interval. The reliable habit is to look at it monthly and change it when light barely passes through,

rather than trusting a date on a calendar.

A note on the MERV number

Filters carry a MERV rating that measures how fine they filter. Higher is not automatically better. A very high-MERV filter can choke airflow on a system that was not designed for it, which strains the blower and can actually hurt comfort. A mid-range filter that you change on time beats a premium filter you leave in too long. If you are unsure what your system is built for, ask your tech at the next tune-up.

Get the size right

A filter that is the wrong size, or wedged in loosely, lets air slip around it unfiltered and carries dust straight to the coil and blower. The size is printed on the frame of the old one. Match it exactly, and make sure it seats snugly with the airflow arrow pointing toward the furnace.

HUMIDITY, AND WHY SUMMERS FEEL WORSE THAN THE NUMBER

In a Michigan summer, comfort is only half about temperature. The other half is moisture. Air conditioning does two jobs at once: it lowers the temperature and it pulls humidity out of the air. When a house feels clammy even though the thermostat reads a reasonable number, the problem is usually moisture, not heat. A system that is maintained and correctly sized runs long enough to wring that humidity out. A neglected or oversized one cools the air and leaves it damp. If your house feels sticky at a temperature that should be comfortable, that is worth mentioning on a service call.

WHAT A TUNE-UP IS REALLY BUYING YOU

It is fair to ask what you actually get for a seasonal tune-up, because "maintenance" is a vague word. Here is the plain version. You are buying three things:

- **Fewer surprise breakdowns.** Most failures give warning signs a trained eye catches: a weak capacitor, a corroding connection, a drain starting to clog. Catching them in spring is a scheduled visit. Missing them is a breakdown in a heat wave.
- **Lower running costs.** A clean coil, a correct refrigerant charge, and clean burners let the system do its work without fighting itself, which shows up quietly on your bills.
- **A longer life for expensive equipment.** The single biggest driver of early failure is neglect. Steady upkeep is the cheapest way to get the full life out of a furnace or air conditioner.

It is not magic and it is not a scare. It is the same reason you change the oil in a car you want to keep. The equipment that heats and cools your home through Michigan extremes is worth the same small, regular attention.

This guide is general educational information for homeowners in the Lansing, Michigan area. It is not a substitute for an in-person inspection by a licensed technician, and it does not diagnose your specific equipment. Anything involving gas, electrical

connections, or refrigerant should be left to a licensed professional. Kestler Heating & Cooling is a demonstration website created by Href Creative and does not represent a real contractor.