

CHECKLIST · AUTUMN

The homeowner's autumn checklist: 9 points before the frost

Damp on its own does little on an autumn day. Damp that freezes does a little damage every single night of the winter, in exactly the same place.

Water expands by about nine per cent when it freezes. That is the whole mechanism behind almost everything that fails on a house over winter: water sitting in a crack, a joint, a drainage hole or under a decking board becomes a wedge that pushes the material apart from the inside.

One frosty night does close to nothing. The point is that there will not be one. On the Vestfold coast the temperature spends much of the winter hovering around zero, and every time it crosses that line downwards, the wedge is driven in once more.

So nothing on this list is cosmetic. Every point is about the same thing: getting the water out, or stopping it collecting in the first place. Nine points, roughly in the order it is practical to do them — top down.

The nine points

☐ 1. The roof: moss is a sponge, not a stain

Moss looks like an appearance problem and is not one. A cushion of moss holds water long after the rest of the roof has dried, and it holds it against the tile rather than letting it run off. That contact is what matters: a damp surface freezing and thawing all winter.

On concrete tiles the water draws into the pores of the surface, freezes, and blows small flakes off. The flakes make the tile more absorbent still, which means more water next year. The process accelerates itself, and it always starts where the moss is thickest — the north side and under overhanging branches.

★ DO THIS

Do not climb up to check. A wet, mossy roof is the most slippery surface on the property.

☐ 2. The façade: the green-black film on the north wall

Algae settle where a wall dries slowly: the north side, under short roof overhangs, and behind shrubs planted closer than half a metre. The film is alive and it draws moisture into itself.

On painted cladding the consequence is that the paint film stays damp all winter instead of drying between showers. It lets go of the substrate earlier than it should — and the next expense is not a wash, it is repainting.

★ DO THIS

Cut back anything growing closer to the wall than half a metre. Air that can pass is the cheapest maintenance there is.

☐ 3. Windows — the outside of the frame, not the glass

The glass is what shows and what matters least. What decides whether the window lasts another ten years is the frame: the horizontal surface at the bottom, the joint where frame meets wall, and the sealant around it.

Wash the frames with soapy water and a soft brush, dry them, and look for two things while you do: cracks in the paint where the frame meets the wall, and sealant that has let go on one side. Both let water into somewhere it cannot get out of.

★ DO THIS

Do this on a dry day in October, not in November. Sealant and paint repairs need a few degrees above zero to cure.

☐ 4. The drainage holes: five minutes that save a frame

At the bottom of balcony door and window frames are small holes that let out the water that inevitably gets in. They are the size of a pencil tip and almost always blocked with dust, sand and insects.

Blocked, the water stands in the frame. In autumn nothing visible happens. In winter it freezes, expands, and forces apart exactly the joint that is meant to keep the window tight.

Clear them with a toothpick or a straightened paper clip, then pour a little water in from a bottle. If it runs out on the outside, the hole is open.

★ DO THIS

This is the best time-to-consequence ratio on the list: five minutes a floor, against a repair costing thousands.

☐ 5. The deck: the leaves between the boards, not on them

Leaves lying on top blow away by themselves. What stays is what has dropped into the gaps between the boards, and it breaks down into a damp mass that holds water against the timber all winter.

The consequence is rot that starts at the board edges and shows up as soft boards in three or four years. On pressure-treated timber it is slower, but it happens.

★ DO THIS

Stand deck furniture on edge or on blocks, not flat on the boards. Furniture feet make their own damp pockets.

☐ 6. Gutters — and the job we do not do for you

A full gutter overflows at the point where it is full. The water that should have been led away runs down the wall instead, into the junction between cladding and foundation.

The downpipe fails first, because leaves form a plug at the top of the pipe. Blocked, the whole gutter stands full of water that freezes — and ice in a gutter is heavy enough to pull the brackets out of the wall.

We do not do gutters. It is a ladder job at height, it should be done with fall protection by somebody who does it often, and a mobile car care and cleaning company pretending otherwise would be doing you no favours.

✦ DO THIS

Check the downpipe from below instead: pour a bucket of water into the gutter, and if nothing comes out at the bottom, the pipe is blocked.

☐ 7. The last cut of the lawn

The last cut should be shorter than the others, but not very short — around four centimetres is a good compromise. Long grass lies down under snow and forms a damp mat where fungal disease thrives. Very short grass freezes at the growing point.

Take it when growth has actually stopped, not by the calendar.

✦ DO THIS

Run the mower over the leaves rather than raking them all. Finely cut leaf matter feeds the lawn; whole leaves smother it.

☐ 8. Garden furniture and cushions

Cushions and textiles come in, and they come in dry. A cushion stored damp in October comes out mouldy in April, and mould in foam does not come out again.

Timber furniture tolerates standing outside but not standing in water. Put it on edge or on blocks, and leave it where air can move — a tight cover with no ventilation holds moisture in rather than out.

✦ DO THIS

Wash the furniture before it is put away, not when it comes out. A winter with the dirt left on is a different job entirely.

□ 9. Drains and outdoor gullies

An outdoor drain — on a deck, a driveway, a basement stairwell or a roof terrace — is the one item on this list where a blockage can cause water damage the same night rather than in three years.

If it stands full of leaves and freezes, the water has nowhere to go. In a basement stairwell that means it rises until it finds the door.

Lift the grate, take out what is there, and pour a bucket of water through to check it runs. Do it again once leaf fall is over.

✦ DO THIS

If you have a basement stairwell with a drain, check it twice: once in October, and once after the last leaves have come down.

The order that saves you a second round

- ✦ Look at the roof first, from the ground. That decides whether the rest of the autumn is your own work or a booking.
- ✦ Cut back anything touching wall, roof or gutter. Everything else gets easier afterwards.
- ✦ Clear gutters and downpipes before washing anything below them.
- ✦ Frames and drainage holes, floor by floor, top down.
- ✦ The deck: gaps first, then wash, then the furniture indoors.
- ✦ Drains and gullies last — they catch everything you have loosened.

What can safely wait until spring

A checklist is only trustworthy if it also says what is not urgent. Window glass, decking stain, washing the south wall and re-levelling gravel all keep until May, and doing them now mostly means doing them twice.

When it is worth handing over

The line is height and equipment. Anything that can be done standing on the ground is your own work, and you save nothing by paying for it.

Roof and façade cleaning are the other category: they need the right pressure, the right product and knowing what the surface tolerates. Too much pressure on concrete tiles removes the outer layer and does exactly the damage the moss would have taken five years to do.

With us, roof cleaning and façade washing are around kr 9 000 each, with a fixed price in writing after a site visit.

Prices are ours and are a starting point before a site visit. Roof and façade work is priced on area, access and condition.



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