



ARE YOUR APPLIANCES READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS?

The holiday season is here, which means your home appliances will soon be working overtime.

Whether you're entertaining a steady stream of family, friends and neighbors or welcoming out-of-town guests, cooking, cleaning and celebrating are on the agenda. Before the festivities begin, take a few minutes to get your essential appliances ready for the season.

Time spent on proper maintenance of kitchen equipment is especially important, as is a little attention to your furnace, washer and dryer. Keeping your appliances in good working order helps ensure your home is ready for all of your holiday guests and activities.

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Appliance Maintenance Tips

Appliance product manuals provide some of the best and most specific instructions for routine cleaning and maintenance of the model you own. If you are missing a manual, you may be able to find it online by searching by the brand and model number.

[Related: Lifespan of Modern Home Appliances](#)

Pre-holiday appliance maintenance checks should be conducted on the following items:

Refrigerator



One of the most important and often-forgotten parts of kitchen appliance maintenance is cleaning the condenser in your refrigerator. Dust and lint collect there, and over time the buildup of debris prevents the refrigerator from releasing heat. This leads to the appliance using more energy than necessary, and it can even cause the condenser to burn out.

Most refrigerator condensers are located in the front of the appliance, just inside or below the kick plate on the bottom of the unit. The plate should easily pop off for cleaning underneath, though some plates are also held on with screws. The condenser itself resembles a small radiator, and you can use either a soft-tipped vacuum or a condenser brush (sold at most hardware stores) to remove the dust and build-up of debris.

If your refrigerator has a water dispenser, replace the water filter regularly as well. Bacteria can thrive in those damp conditions, potentially polluting any part of the appliance where water flows, including the spigot and ice maker.

In most refrigerators, the filter must be turned counter-clockwise in order to remove it. After replacing the old filter with a new one, run about a gallon of water through the dispenser to force out any air bubbles that may be trapped inside.

[Related: Don't Call A Professional Just Yet: A Guide To Refrigerator Maintenance](#)

Stove



If you own a gas stove, check periodically to make sure the pilot lights are working on all burners and that stains or food particles are not blocking any of the gas jets.

Clean up stovetop spills when they happen, and keep an eye on loose food particles that can slip under burners or become wedged between grates.

Stubborn stains on burner grates can be removed by spraying the grates with oven cleaner, placing them in sealed plastic bags overnight and then washing them with soap and water.

Oven

Self-cleaning ovens are handy, but using that function right before you need to cook an important meal can be tricky. The self-cleaning process can super-heat the interior by up to 800 degrees, literally burning residue away. Depending on the style and age of your oven, however, it could take it as long as six hours to complete a cleaning cycle.

The heat and odor generated by this method may also drive you from the kitchen during cleaning time. The smartest option is to plan ahead and complete this part of your kitchen appliance maintenance before the holidays get too hectic and your oven is in heavy rotation. Some experts also suggest that steam and low-heat methods may be better options even if your oven offers one of these self-cleaning settings.

[Related: How to Solve Common Oven Problems](#)

Your oven's temperature setting may need adjustment as well. Just place an oven thermometer inside, and turn the oven on for 15 minutes to check whether the thermometer temperature matches the oven's external settings. If they do not match, you can attempt to recalibrate the oven using the instructions provided in the owner's manual, or simply contact an appliance professional to correct the issue.



Dishwasher



Products formulated specifically for dishwasher maintenance can be found at your local market or hardware store. They work best when used during a complete dishwasher cycle at the hottest water temperature setting. This type of maintenance helps dissolve the soap and calcium buildup that block the flow of water into the appliance during cleaning cycles and out of it during rinsing and draining.

An alternative method for addressing soap and calcium deposits is to run a full cycle with nothing in the dishwasher except a cup of vinegar on the top rack. White vinegar and a sponge can also be used to wipe down the dishwasher drain rim and gasket, removing any built-up gunk.

If the appliance has drainage issues, simply follow the directions in your product manual for disassembling and cleaning the filter.

[Related: Signs It's Time to Replace Your Dishwasher](#)

Washer & Dryer

A variety of washing machine cleaning products are available. They're designed to be run through a normal wash cycle. If you have a front-loading unit, it's also good practice keep the door ajar after use to let the tub dry and prevent the buildup of mildew.

Clean the lint filter in your dryer after every load to keep the air flowing freely. If that's not enough to ensure that your clothes dry properly, the unit's ductwork and vent may need professional cleaning. A clogged dryer vent can also be a fire hazard, so don't put off this maintenance if the problem persists.



Furnace



Replace your air filter monthly for optimal furnace performance. Also, be careful not to choke your furnace by closing off too many vents in an attempt to save on your utility bills. Closing off vents that cover more than 15 percent of your home's square footage could actually have a negative effect on your furnace, preventing proper air flow through the system.

If certain rooms are not getting warm enough in the winter (or cool enough in the summer), it's possible the ductwork has become damaged. Schedule an annual home energy audit to check your HVAC system thoroughly for leaks and other problems. Doing so will create the most energy savings in the long run.

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