



FREE HOMEOWNER FIELD GUIDE

Winter Preparation: Are You Ready?

A practical, room-by-room check you can start today. Spot what needs attention before the first hard freeze.

The first 15 minutes

You do not need to finish everything today. Start with the items that prevent the biggest surprises, then use the action plan at the back of this guide.

- ☐ Find and label your main water shutoff. Make sure every adult in the home knows where it is.
- ☐ Check that smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are present and working; follow the manufacturer instructions and local requirements.
- ☐ Locate the thermostat and review its settings before you leave home for a cold stretch.
- ☐ Check your local forecast and utility alerts; prioritize exposed pipes if freezing weather is expected.

Know your stop line

Smell gas? Leave immediately and call your gas utility or emergency services from outside. Suspect a live electrical hazard? Stay clear and call a licensed professional.

NEXT: Walk through the home zone by zone. Your weather, building type and local codes determine which tasks apply.

The cold-weather perimeter

- ☐ Clear leaves from ground-level drainage paths. For roof or ladder work, hire a qualified pro.
- ☐ Look for loose weatherstripping at accessible doors and windows; close gaps that let drafts in without blocking required ventilation.
- ☐ Disconnect and drain garden hoses. If your home has an outdoor faucet shutoff, follow the manufacturer or plumber instructions to winterize it.
- ☐ Keep outdoor heating vents, exhausts and air intakes free of snow and debris. Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, or near openings.
- ☐ Check steps and paths for drainage and slipping hazards; keep a plan for ice removal.

Pause before climbing

Do not get on a roof or use a ladder in icy, windy or uncertain conditions. Call a qualified professional for gutters, roof repairs and high exterior work.

Heat, water and air

- ☐ Replace or clean the HVAC filter per your equipment instructions; confirm supply and return vents are unobstructed.
- ☐ Run the heat before the first severe cold, listen for unusual sounds, and schedule service if it does not heat normally.
- ☐ Look under sinks and around accessible pipes for drips, condensation or damp cabinet floors.
- ☐ Check unheated spaces for exposed water lines; ask a plumber about appropriate insulation or winterization.
- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms as directed. Never use an oven, outdoor heater or grill to warm your home.

If a pipe freezes

Do not use an open flame or electrical equipment near standing water. If you see a leak, shut off water if safe and call a licensed plumber.

When the power goes out

A simple plan makes a difficult day less chaotic. Set these items aside now, while the lights are on.

- ☐ Put a working flashlight and spare batteries where everyone can find them.
- ☐ Charge a power bank; save utility outage and emergency contact numbers offline.
- ☐ Keep medicines, essential supplies, water, and weather-appropriate layers accessible.
- ☐ Know where you can go if indoor temperatures become unsafe. Check on neighbors when it is safe to do so.
- ☐ Follow utility guidance for spoiled food and restoration. Keep refrigerators and freezers closed as much as practical.

Carbon monoxide is invisible

Use generators only outdoors, well away from doors, windows and vents, following the manufacturer guidance. If a CO alarm sounds, get outside and call emergency services.

DIY, caution, or pro?

DO IT YOURSELF

Ground-level visual checks, testing alarms per instructions, replacing an accessible HVAC filter, organizing supplies, and disconnecting a hose when safe.

TAKE CAUTION

Winterizing faucets and pipes depends on your plumbing layout. Check instructions for your equipment; if unsure, ask a plumber before turning valves or applying heat.

CALL A PRO

Heating system repairs, gas connections, electrical panels, roof or high gutter work, active leaks, frozen pipes, and structural damage need qualified help.

This guide is general information, not a site-specific inspection or a replacement for local codes or professional judgment. When there is immediate danger, leave the area and contact emergency services.

My winter home action plan

Use one line per task. Put urgent safety and water issues first. You can print this page or write notes in a PDF viewer.

01 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

02 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

03 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

04 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

05 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

06 TASK / LOCATION:

WHO / NEXT STEP:

BY:

Your winter-ready reference

Before the forecast changes: locate the shutoff, test alarms, check heat, look for leaks, and set out outage supplies. A short check now can make the next decision clearer.

If you find a problem

Write down what you observed, where it is, and when it started. Take photos only if safe. This makes the conversation with a qualified pro more productive.

Need a second opinion?

Visit xianehomes.org for homeowner guidance and to request local help by entering your ZIP code. Availability depends on your area.

Related reading: Winter-Ready Home is a separate, more detailed ebook in the Xiane Homes library. This free guide stands on its own; no purchase is needed to use it.

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