

**Don't
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Gypsum
Plaster**

**Don't
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Modern
Acrylic
Paints**

BREATHEABILITY



Introduction

Modern living has brought some great comforts to our homes like central heating, double glazing, power showers, en-suite facilities, electric kettles, four and six burner cookers and hobs, automatic washing machines & condensing tumble driers etc – and not forgetting us selfish humans of course who breathe out moisture all day and night – these period properties were not constructed with all of this in mind, so we have to look after these lovely old ladies!

Different construction methods and materials were used ‘back then’ and, also allowing for their age, they can suffer badly from modern materials and modern living if not cared for properly – often resulting in costly repairs later.

Every property, no matter what age, moves - differential expansion and contraction due to temperature and humidity changes is absolutely normal – so regular maintenance and preservation measures are an essential part of owning any property.

Caring for an older property requires a little extra thought, but it doesn't have to be hard work – in fact once you get to know and understand your home more intimately, the more you'll love it!

On the following pages we highlight some simple things you can do throughout the year, season by season, to help your property survive, and indeed thrive - and help to save you from unwanted surprises and potentially costly repairs.

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Spring

- Clear gutters and gullies of leaves and other debris, and check the condition of rainwater downpipes, hoppers and drain covers.
- Use binoculars to check the roof for excessive moss growth and loose or missing tiles, and the condition of your chimney stack.
- Access your loft to check internally for signs of daylight and water ingress.
- Assess the state of your exterior paintwork. If you spot blistering or peeling, arrange for the exterior to be decorated when the weather is consistently warmer and drier.
- Check external walls for cracks in the brickwork or render and assess the condition of the pointing.
- Clear leaves, soil and debris from the bases of walls and check that all air bricks are clear to prevent damp occurring.
- Clean the windows and check the state of the glass, the putty and frames.
- Pull furniture away from walls to air the space and check the walls for damp and mould patches.
- Carefully remove any secondary glazing – don't forget your timber window frames have been trapped over the winter months, so let them breathe again.
- Open all of your windows and give your home a good airing. We tend to block up draughts in winter to keep the house warm, but this also makes the air stale and raises the moisture content, in which mould is more likely to form.
- Take down curtains and blinds and give them a good dusting and/or wash them – it's also a good idea to hang them outside for a few days to air them.
- Start thinking now about stocking up on wood for your wood-burner – prices are usually lower during spring and summer, plus you'll have the best months ahead to ensure it is well seasoned ready for next winter!

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Summer

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- Carry out any exterior decorating when the weather is dry - repair and paint damaged windows, fascia's, soffits etc.
- Check timbers and timber cladding for signs of decay.
- Repointing and other work involving mortar is best done in dry weather, so arrange to do these jobs now.
- Tackle any jobs on the roof now. Urgent repairs should be done as soon as they are spotted (whatever the time of year), but if your roofer advises further work, get it done in good weather before autumn and winter set in.
- Large trees and shrubs near to the house should be well pruned to limit their water consumption and prevent potential damage to foundations.
- Brush down gates and railings and repaint if necessary.
- Trim ivy and other climbing plants. Some ivy growths may look beautiful, but ideally plants should not grow on your house as they can damage stone work, mortar, and even penetrate into the roof space, so the best practice is to trim them regularly, and prevent them from covering windows or blocking gutters.
- Service your boiler and bleed radiators towards the end of summer, in preparation for the forthcoming cooler weather.
- Fresh air and sunlight help to inhibit mould spores, so throw your curtains and windows open whenever you are in the house.
- Check seals around baths and sinks to avoid leaks.
- Monitor for signs of pests and vermin in the loft. Hire a professional to remove wasps' nests, and check for signs of wood boring beetles – beetle attack only occurs when the timbers have softened due to high moisture levels, so another good indicator of poor ventilation, or possible leaking roof – NEVER have any form of chemical treatment used fix the cause, not the result.
- If you have an open fire or wood burner, think about getting the chimney swept. This has to be done after the start of August once nesting birds have flown.

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Autumn

- Clear gutters again towards the end of autumn after trees have dropped their leaves.
- Insulate external pipes and taps. Before the first frost, turn off outside taps at the isolating valve.
- Check external walls for signs of damage and patch up any faults to prevent water ingress over winter. These can be properly remedied in warmer weather.
- Sweep leaves and debris from paths and wall junctions to prevent damp to lower walls, or accidents caused by slippery surfaces.
- Cut ivy and other creepers right back to ensure they are clear of gutters.
- Check for blockages in drains by lifting the inspection covers.
- Clean and re-fit secondary glazing and check draught proofing around doors, but be sure to leave adequate ventilation elsewhere through airbricks – under-floor and roof space ventilation is essential to ensure no rot / infestations occur.
- Insulate taps in cold areas inside too, such as those in cupboards on external walls, in unheated rooms and outbuildings.
- Hang heavy curtains over external doors to prevent draughts.
- Check insulation levels in your loft floor. Aim for an insulation depth of 270 - 300mm. (approx. 11 -12 inches) – you want to keep your living areas warm, but not your roof space.

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Winter



- Keep an eye out for cracks widening under the pressure of ice. If you spot a new crack or changes to an existing one, take remedial action.
- Check fences and trees for signs of storm damage regularly — you don't want to risk things falling in bad weather and causing damage to your property.
- After high winds, check your roof for slipped tiles. Standing across the street or down the garden with binoculars should give you a good view, but should you have greater cause for concern, ask a roofer to conduct a thorough inspection.
- The icicles that we see hanging from gutters can look beautiful, but they are also a sign of “ice-damming” (a “hot roof” indicating poor loft insulation) - An ice dam is a ridge of ice that forms at the edge of a roof and prevents melting snow (water) from draining off the roof. The water that backs up behind the ‘dam’ can leak into a home and cause damage to walls, ceilings, insulation, and other areas
- Try to prevent water from pooling. Ice can cause cracking.
- Even though it is cold and you may be tempted to keep the heat in, ventilating your home by opening the windows every so often will balance humidity and help to prevent damp and condensation.
- Condensation on walls and windows can cause damp and rot window frames - wipe down window frames if you spot condensation.
- Use extractor fans and open windows to remove moisture-laden air in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Place moisture traps in cupboards and wardrobes to prevent damp and mould growth.
- Check pipes for leaks on a regular basis and especially after cold snaps.

TOP TIP – Once your rooms are warm, think about putting an ordinary, cheap, oscillating desk fan on low in each room – this helps to reduce the risk of mould forming by circulating warm dry air behind furniture, wardrobes and bedsteads etc!

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