



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD HOME

Winterizing Your Cape Cod Home: The Complete Checklist

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.

Cape Cod winters are genuine. Salt air, nor'easters, hard freezes, and months of unoccupied homes — the combination creates real risk for unprepared properties. Whether you're shutting down a seasonal cottage or buttoning up a year-round home before a winter trip, this checklist will protect your investment.

Plumbing: Your Highest Priority

A burst pipe on an unoccupied Cape home is one of the most expensive repairs a homeowner faces — and one of the most preventable.

If closing the home for the season: - Shut off the main water supply at the meter or main shutoff valve - Open all faucets (hot and cold) throughout the house to drain standing water - Flush all toilets and hold the handle to drain as much water as possible from the tank - **Blow out supply lines** — a licensed plumber with a compressor can do this for **\$200–\$400**; it's money well spent - Add **RV/marine antifreeze** (propylene glycol, not automotive ethylene glycol) to all P-traps under sinks, tubs, and showers, and to toilet bowls and tanks - Disconnect and drain the water heater if the home will be unheated

If keeping the home heated year-round: - Maintain a minimum temperature of **55°F** at all times — enough to prevent pipe freeze in insulated interiors - Know where your main shutoff is; make sure a neighbor or caretaker does too

Heating System

- **Check your heating oil level** before the shoulder season; schedule a fill. Prices fluctuate, and pre-buy/budget plans from local dealers can protect against spikes.
 - Replace the furnace or boiler filter
 - Schedule annual service for your heating system — Cape HVAC technicians book up fast in fall
 - If your home uses a heat pump, have it serviced; ensure the outdoor unit is clear of debris
 - Test the thermostat to confirm it's reading accurately
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Exterior and Roof

Cape Cod weather is hard on structures. Before winter:

- **Remove and store patio furniture, grills, planters, and outdoor decor** — Cape wind speeds regularly exceed 50+ mph in nor'easters; nothing is safe unsecured
 - **Inspect the roof** for loose shingles, damaged flashing, or open seams — call a roofer in September before their fall schedule fills
 - **Clear gutters and downspouts** of leaves and debris; ensure water flows away from the foundation
 - **Check siding and trim** for gaps, cracks, or failing paint — salt air accelerates wood decay at joints and corners
 - **Cover or remove window AC units** if they're the through-wall or window-mounted type
 - **Inspect deck boards and railings** for rot — freeze/thaw cycles make existing rot much worse
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Sealing and Insulation

Older Cape-style homes — especially the classic cape cod half-cape and full-cape designs — are known for air leakage around doors, windows, attic hatches, and where framing meets foundation.

- Apply weatherstripping to exterior doors if you feel drafts
 - Add rope caulk or foam tape around window frames (removable in spring)
 - Seal the attic hatch — often the largest single air leak in a Cape home
 - Consider a professional **blower door test** and air sealing if your heating bills are high
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Security and Monitoring

- **Notify your local police department** — most Cape towns offer a vacation watch program where officers will check your property periodically
 - Install **smart water leak detectors** at the water heater, under sinks, and near the washing machine; pair with a monitored smart home system if the home will be empty for months
 - Set **light timers** inside the home (not just outside) to simulate occupancy
 - Arrange for a **trusted neighbor, caretaker, or property manager** to check the home after any significant storm
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Moisture and Pests

Moisture: Cape Cod's marine climate means humidity lingers even in winter. Run a **dehumidifier in the basement** to prevent mold — aim for 50% or below. Check that the crawl space or basement has adequate vapor barrier.

Pests: Mice are the primary concern. A mouse can squeeze through a gap the size of a dime. Before closing up: - Walk the exterior and stuff steel wool into any gaps at the foundation, pipe penetrations, and where utilities enter - Set snap traps inside along walls — better to catch them before leaving than return to an infestation - Consider a local pest control service for an annual exclusion treatment

Frequently Asked Questions

What temperature should I keep my Cape Cod home at in winter? If the home is occupied or pipes are in conditioned space, 55°F is the accepted minimum to prevent pipe freeze in insulated interior walls. Homes with pipes in unheated crawl spaces, garages, or exterior walls may need higher. When in doubt, winterize (drain) rather than rely on marginal heating.

Should I hire a plumber to winterize or DIY? For most homes, hiring a plumber to blow out the lines (\$200–\$400) is worth it — they'll catch things you'd miss and provide documentation. Experienced homeowners comfortable with plumbing can DIY, but a missed trap or water heater drain can be a very expensive mistake.

How do I find a reliable caretaker for a seasonal Cape home? Ask neighbors, your real estate agent, or local property management companies. Many year-round residents supplement their income by caretaking seasonal homes — it's a well-established arrangement on the Cape. Expect to pay \$50–\$150 per check-in depending on services.



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