

# How To Close Up Your Summer Home

By Jerry Fox

Can someone please tell me where the summer went?

Just yesterday, you were making plans to dash off to the cottage for the Memorial Day weekend. Now, you can see Labor Day fading fast in the rear-view mirror.

Before the last nice days of summer are behind us, take an afternoon or two to make sure your summer place is ready to be closed up for the winter. A little time spent this fall can save you some serious headaches in the spring.

Let's start outside the house and work our way in.

First, clean out the gutters and downspouts. This will reduce the chances of roof damage or flooding around the foundation. Even better, if you have the time and a few extra bucks, consider installing gutter covers. Many roofing and siding contractors will do this type of work or, if the roof isn't too intimidating, you can purchase guards yourself. If you do it yourself, it's a good idea to use the buddy system whenever doing ladder work to help avoid tumbles. Having a partner help with the gutters can also mean you make a few less trips up and down the ladder as the person on the ground can hand things up.

While you have the ladder out, take a quick walk around and consider pruning any large tree branches that are over or threatening the home. You might be nipping winter storm damage in the bud, if you'll pardon the analogy.

Before leaving for the winter, make sure any exterior hoses are disconnected from the house and drained and that exterior spigots are covered.

Check the foundation for any cracks or openings where animals could enter the building. Be sure those are plugged up.

Of course, you'll also want to be sure any outside patio furniture, tools or toys are locked up in a shed, a garage or inside the house.

As you move inside, be sure to make a note to call about newspaper and/or mail delivery and garbage pick-up, to either have that service forwarded or canceled for the season.

In the kitchen, it will be time for one last buffet meal, as you clean out the refrigerator and your cabinets. You don't want food in the fridge to go bad if or when the power is shut off. And you don't want to leave a snack in the pantry for any rodents that might get into the house. Leave the refrigerator door open and unplug all the appliances.

After turning off the main water control valve, flush all toilets and turn on all the faucets to remove the water from your lines. You may have to flush the toilets more than once to remove all the water. Drain the hot water heater. After all the water is drained, turned the faucets back off. This is particularly important if there will be no heat in the house during the winter months. In especially cold climates, recreational vehicle antifreeze can be poured down toilets to further help prevent freezing pipes.

Contact the utility companies and notify them of the dates you want to discontinue service. If you use propane, you'll need to turn that off at the main valve.

In some communities, the county sheriff's department will keep the information about when your home is closed and no activity is expected on file, just so they can keep an eye on things when you're gone. Check with your local department by calling the non-emergency number. Also, if you have a trusted neighbor or two who might be in the area year-round or at least more often than you are, you might want to consider leaving your winter contact phone number with them.

No small, valuable items should be left out in plain sight that would tempt a thief. Make sure all the windows and doors are locked and curtains closed.

Enjoy your winter. See you next summer.