

According to farmersalmanac.com we are in for one cold and wet winter. Some of the predictions include “lingering showers of rain or wet snow” at the end of November and for December “wet snow showers,” “unseasonable cold,” “heavy doses of snow,” “bitter cold,” and “frequent snow showers.”

While Farmer’s Almanac certainly is not a 100% accurate predictor of the weather, its forecast is a good reminder that now is the time to prepare our homes before the set-in of the winter cold. This time of year we become so occupied with raking leaves and cleaning gutters that we sometimes overlook some of the important steps to preparing our homes for winter.

To ensure that your plumbing makes it through the winter fully intact, start by winterizing outdoor fixtures. If you have forgotten or put off winterizing the irrigation system, do it now, before a frozen pipe results in a costly repair. Also, do not forget those garden hoses that are tucked behind shrubs or on the side of the house you seldom visit. Disconnect them from the hose bibs, drain them and store them out of the weather.

Prepare all the outside hose bibs and faucets for winter by draining them. They can be drained by turning them off at the shut-off valve, which is usually located in the basement or crawl space on the inside wall, opposite the outside bib. Once the shut-off valve is turned off, open the hose bib to allow the water to drain. After all the water has drained, turn the hose bib back to the off position. If there is no shut-off valve for the outside faucets and hose bibs, they can be winterized by wrapping them in a molded foam insulating cover. These covers are available at most plumbing and hardware stores.

Water using fixtures inside your home also need some attention before the coldest days and nights of winter are upon us. Use insulating foam to wrap all pipes in unheated areas of the home such as attics, crawl spaces and basements. This will help prevent pipes from freezing as well as provide water and heating cost savings. Frequently in kitchens and baths the plumbing runs along the outside wall where it is more prone to freezing. Keep cabinet doors open at night to allow warm air from the house to keep the pipes heated.

Should your pipes freeze you will need to know where the water shut-off is located. Time is of the essence when a pipe freezes, so the quicker you can shut-off the water, the less likely it is that your pipes will burst. Take the time now to identify the shut-off.

If you are leaving your home for an extended time over the winter do not turn the thermostat down too low. Keep the temperature in the house at 65 degrees to keep the pipes that are close to the outside walls from freezing and bursting. Have someone periodically stop by your home and check for any leaks; some homeowner’s policies actually require this anytime you are away. To prevent any possibility of leaks while away from your home, you can turn-off the water at the

main valve and drain your system. If you decide to do so, be certain the water heater is turned off first.

While many of us dread the thought of a long, cold and wet winter, a little planning and effort can save us the dread we would feel if faced with any unfortunate plumbing catastrophes. Instead we can relax and wait to see if the Farmer's Almanac's prediction of a "good ol' fashioned white Christmas" comes true.