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# 6 Easy Steps to Maintaining Your Cabin

Get your log cabin in tip-top shape with our easy home-maintenance “honey-do” checklist.



Cindy Theide photo

Vacations are all about slowing down, putting “real life” behind you and spending your time doing whatever your heart desires. And we can’t think of a better way to get away from it all than wiling away the hours in a charming log cabin. The thing is, before you can start enjoying yourself, you might need to perform a bit of routine maintenance. But with the current economy and purse strings getting tighter, you may ask yourself, “Can I skip the whole maintenance thing to save myself a little money?” The short answer is, no, says Randy Adamson with Seattle, Washington-based Perma-Chink Systems. According to Randy, now more than ever, it’s important to maintain the investment you made in your home. It doesn’t have to be a daunting or particularly expensive chore, as long as you keep up with the tasks on a regular schedule. Follow our easy 6-step to-do list, and you’ll be back to enjoying a little R&R in no time.

## 1. Check for water damage.

In the fall and spring, the gutters should be checked for debris from surrounding trees. According to Rod Rodriguez, president of log home restoration company See Dirt Run! Inc., clogged gutters can lead to blocked downspouts which overflow onto your logs, creating a situation that can lead to rot. (See next tip for info on cleaning your gutters). “Once or twice a year you should walk around the house and check to

see if the logs or the log ends remain wet after a rain when the adjacent logs are dry. This is a sign that rot may be present,” says Rod. To do this, he suggests taking a hammer and gently thumping on the wood, listening for changes in tone. If it sounds like a ripe melon or drum, you’ll need to contact a professional to examine the logs.

Also, look around the base of your cabin and where decks or porches are attached to the logs—anywhere moisture sits. If you aren’t sure whether your logs are repelling water as they should, simply mist them with a garden hose and see if the water beads or runs off. If a log turns a darker color, it may be absorbing water, which means it’s time to touch up or reapply the sealant. Dormers and gables (the most exposed areas of log homes) may need more frequent sealant application than the rest of the house.

## 2. Inspect your roof and gutters.

Look for loose tiles and shingles or any other signs the roof isn’t watertight. For metal roofs, look at the ends for any screws that may have backed out and for any loose metal. Clean and paint any rusted metal and replace any loose tiles right away. While you’re at it, if your roof has a “snow break” (a metal lip designed to break up snow and ice) make sure it’s intact to avoid repairs next year.

If you’ve got rain gutters, you should clean them every





Cindy Theide photo

chance you get. A plastic two-liter soda bottle cut into a large scoop is the perfect size for cleaning out most gutters. Just be careful on that ladder; ladder stabilizers can be bought at most hardware stores for about \$30. And if you need to place the ladder in front of a door, make sure it's locked so no one accidentally opens it.

### 3. Trim plant life close to the house.

While you have the ladder out, remember to prune back tree limbs and shrubs so that they're not scratching the logs. When this happens, the finish installed on the logs begins to erode, exposing the wood and requiring the finish to be fixed. The finish protects your logs from the sun's UV rays, moisture and problems associated with surface pollutants like pollen, mildew and algae.

### 4. Look for spots vulnerable to insects.

Several log home producers use species that are naturally insect resistant, but any log that's properly treated with protective stains and finishes will be guarded against wood-boring bugs. Still, it's smart to check for infiltration, no matter what log species you choose. If you have a wood-burning stove or hearth, make sure your woodpile is located away from the house and up off of the ground so it remains dry and so no insects living in or feasting on the unprotected firewood have access to your log walls. Also, inspect your home inside and out for holes surrounded by wood powder or "frass." While carpenter bees dig larger openings, there are wood-digesting insects that create smaller holes, even as tiny as the tip of a ballpoint pen. Spray these areas with household bug spray and fill them with quality exterior caulk to prevent future entry.



Sasico Sealants photo

Check your roof for loose tiles and shingles or any other signs the roof isn't watertight.

### 5. Clean your logs.

There's one task you can tackle that will make all other maintenance chores easier: wash your house. Yes, it sounds daunting, but think of it this way—you wash your car regularly to keep its finish in tact (and these days, some SUVs are as big as a house)—so why not your logs?

The cleaning solution you'll use will depend on the brand of sealer that's on your logs, but according to Vince Palmere, manager of product development for Perma-Chink Systems, you never want to use bleach, which can harm your home's finish. There are a few simple tools you'll need to do this; one is a long telescoping extension pole, which can be purchased at any hardware store. The best ones have a twist lock and extend two stories. You'll also need a soft bristled brush, like the ones used to wash cars or trucks. The brush also should be threaded with a female end to fit the extension pole, and should screw on with ease. Your garden hose will work fine with an adjustable brass nozzle that gives you a direct stream that will reach two stories up. If it doesn't reach, use duct tape or a 2-inch hose clamp to attach the hose to the extension pole to reach higher up. "Never use a pressure washer," says Vince. "The force of the water will ruffle the wood grain."

Mix the cleaning solution in a five gallon bucket. Apply the cleaner from the bottom working upward, and then thoroughly rinse from the top down. Begin with a small

## Check your Chinking

If your log home has chinking (not all log home styles require it), you'll want to make sure it stays in tact. After all, it's the primary agent that prevents water and air from leaking into your log home. "Most chinking issues occur during the first two years of your home's lifespan, due primarily to settling," says Vince Palmere, manager of product development for Perma-Chink Systems Inc. headquartered in Seattle, Washington. Look for small tears and bubbles in the material. If you notice some separation, repairing the chinking isn't hard to do yourself (but you may want to practice a little beforehand). Take tube of the same brand and type of chinking that was originally applied so there are no compatibility issues and a caulking gun; then place a thin bead along the tear and work it in with a wet, short-bristled paint brush until it matches the texture of the original bead. When done right, the repair won't be noticeable at all. "After that," says Vince, "maintenance should just be a matter of keeping it clean."



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## The Write Stuff

Keep a journal of what you've done to maintain your home and what you've discovered as you've inspected it. This is a valuable resource should you need to consult with a professional about repairs and will be helpful to prospective homebuyers, should you decide to sell one day.



area; leave the cleaner on the logs for a little while, but avoid letting it dry. Next, gently brush the area and rinse. You can apply the cleaner directly with the brush, or it can be applied with a sprayer and then gently brushed.

An annual cleaning will go a long way to keeping your sealant in tact and your home looking its best for years to come.

### 6. Consult the pros (if needed).

Any moderately handy homeowner can handle most maintenance, but some jobs are best left to the experts. For example, landscapers can help you determine if vegetation is too close to your home. And if you find significant damage to a log or any other part of your home's basic structure, you should check your warranty and contact your log home provider. ▲▲

## Get with the Program

Not into DIY log home maintenance? Look into a wood-maintenance program for your cabin. There are several companies that will keep your logs in tip-top shape for you. Weatherall's SuStain program, for example, will inspect, clean and apply stain or sealant as needed to your home's exterior on a predetermined schedule. Visit [www.sustainwoodmaintenance.com](http://www.sustainwoodmaintenance.com) for details.