First-Year Homeowner Checklist

KeepDwell - learn the house before it teaches you expensively. Print it, fridge it, tick it off.

First Week in the House

- [ ] Find and label the main water shutoff - and test that it actually turns
- [ ] Find the electrical panel; note the main breaker; check for Federal Pacific or Zinsco labels
- [ ] Locate the gas shutoff (if gas) and the water heater shutoff; set water heater to 120F
- [ ] Test every smoke and CO alarm; replace batteries; note manufacture dates (replace at 10 years)
- [ ] Change the locks; learn the garage code; find attic and crawlspace access
- [ ] Photograph everything: rooms, panel schedule, appliance model plates, meter readings
- [ ] Septic? Find out when it was last pumped - get the record from the seller or county
- [ ] Well? Order a water test if none was done at purchase

First Month

- [ ] Map the electrical panel properly - two people, two phones, one lamp, every circuit labelled
- [ ] Replace the furnace/AC filter and write the size on the calendar
- [ ] Clean the gutters (or verify they were cleaned); downspouts discharge 4-6 ft from the foundation
- [ ] Walk the grading: soil should fall away from the house - 6 inches over the first 10 feet
- [ ] Basement audit: cove joint, cracks, efflorescence; test the sump pump with a bucket of water
- [ ] Test all GFCI outlets (TEST then RESET), including the hidden one in the garage
- [ ] Set up the house log: dates, contractors, model numbers, receipts

Every Month (15 minutes)

- [ ] Look at the water heater, under every sink, around the toilets - leaks start small
- [ ] Run water in unused drains so traps don't dry out and let sewer gas in
- [ ] Check the furnace/AC filter in heavy-use months; replace when it greys
- [ ] Glance at the basement or crawlspace after any big storm
- [ ] In wet seasons, test the sump pump: a bucket of water should start, empty and stop it

Spring Round

- [ ] Clean the gutters after the seed and pollen drop; flush every downspout
- [ ] Service the AC before the heat: filter, clear the outdoor unit, run it on a mild day
- [ ] Test well water - the annual four: coliform, nitrate, pH, TDS
- [ ] Walk the roof from the ground with binoculars: shingles, flashing, moss
- [ ] Check grading after frost heave; top up soil settled against the foundation
- [ ] Open the attic once: daylight where it shouldn't be, stains, animal evidence

Summer Round

- [ ] Watch the gutters in one real storm - overflow you can see is a diagnosis
- [ ] Check the basement during the wettest week; note any cove-joint water and its timing

- [ ] Trim branches back from the roof (6-10 ft clearance) - arborist for anything large
- [ ] Test outdoor faucets and irrigation for leaks
- [ ] Keep the AC / heat pump outdoor coil clean and clear by 2 feet

Autumn Round (the important one)

- [ ] Clean the gutters after the leaves fall, before the first freeze
- [ ] Furnace check-up: filter, listen through a full start-up, test CO alarms again
- [ ] Shut off and drain exterior faucets; disconnect hoses before the first freeze
- [ ] Seal gaps where pipes and wires enter - mice move in for winter through those
- [ ] Descale the tankless water heater if your water is hard and it's been a year
- [ ] Check the roof before winter: vent boots, flashing, valleys

Winter Round

- [ ] Watch the eaves after snow: a solid ice ridge means ice dams are forming
- [ ] Pipes on outside walls in hard freezes: cabinet doors open, a tap dripping on cold nights
- [ ] Heat pump: learn what normal defrost looks like so a real icing fault stands out
- [ ] Mid-winter basement check on a thaw day - meltwater finds the same paths rain does

Once a Year, Every Year

- [ ] Septic: inspect annually; pump on your tank/household interval - typically every 3-5 years
- [ ] Well water: the annual four test, every spring
- [ ] Water heater: flush a tank unit; check the T&P valve; budget for replacement from year 8-10
- [ ] Alarms: replace batteries; check expiry dates
- [ ] The money review: one hour with the house log - costs, ageing systems, next project

Budget rule of thumb: plan on about 1% of your home's value per year for maintenance. Full guides for every task on this list: keepdwell.com (Maintenance Calendar). Emergency right now? See the Emergency Guide first - stop the flow, then make the call.