



DO NOT DEFER

Do sweat the big stuff!

Address necessary maintenance and repairs on the outside of your house before you start any interior renovation.

BY MARY ELLEN POLSON

We've all seen houses where the kitchen has been redone, painting and paper are in progress, or the floor has been refinished . . . yet the roof is missing slates or shingles, rotting clapboards sit near the foundation, and overgrown shrubbery hugs the perimeter of the house. Leaks happen, and unless you want do-overs inside, realize that some things simply can't wait. The short list includes roof and flashing, gutters and drainage, siding, exterior paint, vegetation encroaching on roof or siding, and also antiquated electrical systems.



Stains or moss on wood shingles are a sign of trapped moisture. Solutions include better ventilation underneath, or a replacement roof laid over battens that permit air circulation.

THE PRO TIP

Damp, mossy, or darkened wood shingles should be replaced before they cause deterioration to underlayment or other wood components.

Keep the Water Out The most significant threat to the longevity of any house is preventing the incursion of water inside. Consider the house in its immediate environment: It's connected to the ground and exposed to heat and cold, humidity and dry air, and rain, sun, snow, and wind. It's protected by an envelope that starts at the roof with shingles, flashing, and gutters, and continues down vertically with siding, windows, and downspouts. The house continues to shed water in its immediate surroundings through surface drainage, and beneath the house with systems that control the entry of water. Signs of water infiltration can be as obvious as water damage to the ceiling (check the roof), or as subtle as a consistently damp basement. *Let's start at the top.*

the roof

A new roof may cost up to 10% of the value of a house, but delaying repair or replacement even by a year or two can put the entire structure at risk. Obvious signs that a roof needs work include missing shingles, slates, or tiles, damaged or missing flashing, and of course, signs of water penetration inside the house. Don't overlook secondary roofs over additions, porches, and entries—they're often the most vulnerable. Another indicator that the roof is nearing the end of its useful life is age, which varies by roofing material.

Asphalt & Fiberglass Most asphalt roofs have a lifespan of 20 to 40 years. Fiberglass shingles last significantly longer, up to 50 years. Warning signs that the roof needs significant repair or replacement include:

- missing or loose shingles
- curling, cracked, dry or blistered shingles
- exposed or loose nail heads
- dark patches (moisture penetration, moss, falling granules)
- water damage inside the house or attic
- missing or damaged flashing
- a sagging roof line

Even in the absence of warning signs, if heating and cooling bills have gotten noticeably higher, the roof may lack sufficient ventilation have invisible damage. The best solution for a failing asphalt or fiberglass roof is to replace it. Take off every roof layer before reroofing, leaving the existing deck clean and free of nails before the new roof goes on.

Wood Shingles or Shakes

Whether hand-split or machine-cut, wood shingle roofs can last up to 60 years—but 15 to 30 is more common for modern, premium wood shingles. Longevity depends on the quality of the shingles and proper installation. (See "Roof Prep: Secrets to

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↓ **Where the roof meets** another surface, flash with 16-gauge copper or better. Never patch or repair with roofing compound. Tar gets brittle and soon fails, and may be corrosive to metals and wood.

Longevity," OHJ June 2017.) Warning signs include:

- *eroded, cracked, cupped or split shingles*
- *presence of lichen or moss (an indication of trapped moisture)*
- *pervasive moisture or damage in the attic*

If only small areas show signs of damage, individual shingles can be removed and a new shingle inserted; a narrow strip of copper or aluminum called a "babbie" or "baby," cupped or bent up at the bottom, holds the new shingle in place and covers any nail that may have been necessary. Where more than 20 percent of the shingles are damaged, reroof using traditional methods, taking care not to damage sound shingles in nearby areas.

Metal Whether standing-seam or corrugated, a steel, copper, terne, aluminum, or Galvalume roof can last 50 years or even a century, provided it's kept painted or sealed and free of rust. (An exception to this rule is Corten steel—short for corrosion resistance and tensile strength—wherein the rusting process seals and protects the base layer of steel beneath the weathered surface.)

Warning signs that an old metal roof needs attention include peeling paint or rust. While you can make spot repairs, an experienced professional is better equipped to do repairs on a slick metal roof than the average homeowner.

The process:

➔ **REMOVE PEELING PAINT** using a non-methylene chloride-based stripper. The paint can also be lightly mist- [text cont. on p. 49]



Clogged gutters hold moisture against the house and may lead to serious water damage.

ON THE SUBJECT OF **Gutters**

One of the simplest ways to prevent water from getting into the house is to keep the gutters clean. Clogged gutters make excellent breeding grounds for mosquitoes, but that's the least of the problems they can cause. Over time, a plugged gutter or misaligned downspout extension can allow water to damage roofing, porch columns, balustrades, and flooring, exterior and interior walls, and floors. Serious water incursions can eventually undermine the foundation.

- **Clean gutters** once a year in mild climates, and at least twice yearly in cold ones.
- **Remove dirt, leaves, and other debris** in fall before cold weather makes access difficult, and in spring after the snow and ice have melted.
- **Check for leaks, failing joints, and missing or loose support brackets.** Replace badly rusted or corroded gutter runs and lost brackets.
- **Make sure the gutters are installed on a slight slope** that encourages the water to flow toward the downspouts, which should be placed at corners and at least every 50' of run. The downspouts should direct water away from the house, preferably with extensions.
- If water is infiltrating the area adjacent to or below the extension, you may need to do some minor excavation to **direct the flow of water away from the house.**



SOUND WIRING Electricity is a 20th-century innovation, and many old houses predate it. The result is often a hodgepodge of wiring types, from knob-and-tube and fuses to modern, code-ready 300-amp service. Before making any major renovations to the house, **update your electrical service to make sure it meets 21st-century codes.** Any type of wiring installed before 1980 should be considered suspect, especially knob-and-tube and aluminum wiring. Both present known fire hazards.



A team from Renaissance Roofing makes repairs to a historic slate roof. Generous copper flashing in all the right places should protect it for years to come.



PUT A SKIN ON IT

A house sheathed in wood needs coats of paint or stain to protect it from rain, sun, and wind. **Prepping the house for paint is easily 75 percent of the work**, inevitably requiring cleaning, minor to major repairs to clapboards, shingles, and trim, plus scraping and caulking—all before the first coat of primer goes on. **Buy the best paint you can afford** and be sure primer, trim, and wall paints all come from same manufacturer.

LEFT Professional painters like those from Kevin Palmer Painting in Simsbury, Connecticut, still use brushes for painting historic homes, especially for trim work.

CUT IT BACK A yard filled with mature trees and flowering shrubbery is one of the joys of living in an old house. **But a tree growing too close to the foundation, and branches hanging over the roof, may lead to water or foundation damage.** The same goes for shrubbery or vines so close to the house that moisture is trapped against the roof or siding. ■ **First, assess the landscape** to identify and tag any specimens you want to save, even if they need heavy pruning. **Remove trees and saplings standing too close to the house** with a chainsaw, brush cutter, or bush hog (all may be rented at local hardware or builder stores). For saplings or small stumps, use a brush grubber, a set of metal jaws with spikes. Pull the sapling free using chains attached to a truck or tractor. ■ **Cut back overgrown shrubs starting from the top**, removing suckers and small branches to give the shrub a tree-like shape. You (or your arborist) might try severely pruning old shrubs (azaleas, hydrangeas) in fall or early spring. Regrowth may take several years, but the resulting shrub usually will take a healthy, natural form. ■ Climbing vines like wisteria and trumpet vine may be especially pernicious, sending runner shoots over the ground (and toward the house) despite repeated cutting. Remove vines that attach with adhesive suckers or root-like anchors, especially on wood surfaces. **Pulling a live vine off a wall can damage the brick or siding.** Instead, **cut the plant at the roots** and allow it to dry for a few weeks. Then carefully pull the vine away in sections.

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