

Executive Errands®

*Presents...*



## Prepping Your Home for Summer

By Leslie Spoor

## OLD WIVES' TALES: FACT OR FICTION



*Executive Errands® presents:*

### **Old Wives' Tales, Fact or Fiction – Prepping your home for summer!**

**N**o matter where you live, seasonal preventative maintenance is necessary to protect your home. In a desert climate, where temperatures can soar to 120 degrees Fahrenheit and with a preponderance of absentee homeowners, prepping a home for summer is particularly important.

When someone new moves into the desert, particularly if they are from a more temperate climate, it can be challenging for them to know what to expect or how to prep their home for a prolonged absence. New homeowners often seek counsel from well-meaning neighbors and friends but there are so many old wives' tales; how does one differentiate fact from fiction?

Our goal with this booklet is to examine typical recommendations for summer prep and determine if they are old wives' tales or valid undertakings.

Where applicable, we offer our own insight and recommendations based on our experience caring for homes since 2006 here in the Coachella Valley.

*(In no priority sequence):*

**1** **Have your Heating and Air Conditioner (HVAC) serviced — FACT —** There are several reasons to have your HVAC serviced, the primary reason, of course, is to help prolong the serviceable life of your unit(s). However not only should you service your unit(s), you should do them twice per year — once each in the spring and in the fall. Here are the reasons why:

- a. The AC portion is serviced in the spring to check Freon levels, connections, motors and capacitors to make sure they are all working properly and efficiently. Condensate lines are cleared and filters changed.

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- b.** The heater portion of your HVAC system should be checked in the fall to make sure it will operate safely — heaters can generate carbon monoxide if not operating properly. Con-densate lines are again cleared and filters changed.
- c.** The desert air is full of microscopic particles of sand and grit which can clog filters and condensate lines
- d.** Clogged condensate lines may cause flooding in a home
- e.** Clogged filters cause the HVAC system to work harder and may even cause the condenser to ice up which may cause the motor to seize
- f.** Struggling HVAC systems are inefficient and consume more energy
- g.** Debris and sand in the condenser can also impact the efficiency of the system

**2** *Turn off your thermostat or set it to its highest setting — FICTION* — High heat can adversely affect your home from the roof to the foundation. We have encountered every one of these heat-related issues when checking absentee homes where the thermostat was set too high or turned off:

- a.** Shattered windows and slider glass
- b.** Melted decorative candles
- c.** Melted toilet wax ring (the ring that seals your toilets to the floor if this seal is compromised you may well get flooding)
- d.** Exploding soda cans
- e.** Exploding liquid laundry detergent bottles
- f.** Cracked toilet tanks

The ideal temperature to set your thermostat during summer absences is 85 degrees Fahrenheit. This keeps the AC moving a bit, which helps all the woods in your home as well as art, carpeting and other valuables. Even at 85, you can experience exploding liquids containers but the likelihood is reduced. In addition, allowing the AC to run even at a higher setting makes it look like you are at home, which deters vandals.

By the way, if someone tells you to put out buckets of water, please know that buckets of water are the biggest old wives' tale of all. Think about it, if you turn off your air conditioner, the water will evaporate pretty quickly because it will be so hot in your home.

If you use the AC, then the buckets won't evaporate very much at all. Since the whole point (allegedly) of using buckets of water is to put moisture into the air, you can see that this is an ineffectual effort. Just say 'no' to buckets of water!

**3** *Clean your windows before leaving — FACT* — and, depending on how the summer goes, you may need to do them again over the summer. We recommend cleaning your windows at least quarterly to keep the sand and hard water off your glass. Believe it or not, we have seen windows etched from the sun beating down on glass that had dirt, sand and hard water spots. Why take the chance? Cleaning windows is far less costly than replacing them.

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**4** *Turn off your refrigerator, open the door and put baking soda inside - FICTION* - One of the worst things you can do for appliances is to turn them off. Why? Because gaskets can dry out and crack, connections are often damaged by higher temperatures and even electronic circuit boards can suffer.

It doesn't matter how well you clean the refrigerator either; there will still be tiny particles of food in the cracks and crevices and these particles attract hungry rodents and bugs that have snuck inside your home to get out of the heat and in search of food and water.

Instead of turning off the refrigerator, leave it on, but turn off the ice maker, dump out all the ice and wipe out the bin. If you're leaving for the entire summer, consider discarding all perishables or at least those with expiration dates in the next six months and do go ahead and leave a fresh open box of baking soda inside to combat the staleness and any potential odors.

And while you're in the kitchen, check the pantry. Unopened, unwanted dry and canned goods are welcome donations at the local food bank and anything else you decide to keep should be well wrapped. Ideally put all pantry items (except canned goods) into plastic sealable containers. More than once we've had to deal with rodents who chewed through plastic zipper bags.

**5** *Adjust all timers — FACT — Your home is full of timers* - irrigation, pool and landscape lighting all need to be adjusted for the hot weather and longer days of summer.

When setting irrigation timers, be sure you or your landscaper is aware of local and State drought restrictions (which can change often).

If you plan to use your pool often over the summer, the timer will need to be adjusted to run for a longer period of time but if your home will be empty, it can stay as scheduled.

And be sure your landscaper, pool technician and/or your personal concierge checks the timer settings frequently as power outages do throw them off schedule.

**6** *Since it rarely rains here, the roof lasts longer than in other climates - FICTION* - The sun is harsh and affects both tile and shingle roofing materials. Gaps can open up around vents, which not only make the roof prone to leaking, but rodents, bees, and reptiles love these access points. And it is common knowledge that all pests can get into a home through the tiniest of openings.

Excess debris that collects between tiles can act as a dam, causing water to backup and find a way into your home. We've seen water drip down between walls with barely any noticeable effect — that is until the sheetrock becomes saturated and begins to peel away from the wall or mold appears.

Broken or loose tiles can affect the serviceable life of your roof and/or lead to leaks.

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Flat roofs especially should be checked. We recommend having yearly or every other year inspections. This simple preventative maintenance is very inexpensive and far less costly than cleaning up after a leak.

**7** *Water management is crucial — FACT* — It is imperative to keep your drain traps and plumbing lines wet, especially over the summer. Water management is important because:

- a. If the traps dry out, the smell of sewage may permeate your home
- b. Gaskets, O-rings and plastic parts can dry out, crack or break altogether, which typically leads to leaks
- c. Failure to flush toilets often results in damage to the flush and/or fill valves which can cause toilets to 'run' or stop tank filling altogether
- d. Hard water deposits and sediments clog shower and faucet cartridges which leads to leaking shower heads and faucets
- e. Hard water deposits and sediments clog faucet aerators which can lead to erratic or restricted water flow

The hard water of the desert can cause build ups that damage not only shower and faucet cartridges but also your dishwasher and washing machines. In fact, we have seen dishwashers leave white hard water residue that cannot be removed from dishes or glassware.

Likewise clothes washed in hard water will become dull and lackluster over time. To help deter hard water build up in dishwashers and washing machines, one way is to use some sort of water softener/conditioner. We like liquid Lemi-Shine for the dishwasher and 20 Mule Team Borax for the washing machine, but any product of this type will help.

Our recommended water management frequency is weekly for showers, faucets, disposals and toilets. Monthly for dishwashers and washing machines.

By the way, clients ask all the time 'should we turn the water off or leave it on? That is purely up to the client. We can't advocate one way or the other and the water management can be properly managed either way.

**8** *Once a month home checks should be enough - FICTION* - Leaving your home for any period of time puts it at risk but the more often it is checked, the better able one is to mitigate problems. Most home checks are done weekly. Obviously, things break and problems arise no matter when you last checked a home, but by visiting a home weekly, that means in a worst case scenario, it is only 6 days' worth of problem to address.

One thing many homeowners don't know is that their homeowner's insurance might offer a discount for having regular checks of their home.

Another important aspect to having home checks is that not just anyone can do

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them. All too often, homeowners are led to believe that running the water and flushing the toilet is all that needs to be done. That couldn't be further from the truth.

In addition to checking the home security, water management and other inside checks; homes also need the landscape assessed, the pool condition checked and various other exterior factors should be considered.

We understand it can be difficult for a homeowner to see value in having their home checked regularly, especially if they haven't encountered any problems over time. Unfortunately, it takes only one major-ish problem to appreciate the cost one can save by having an early detection.

Here are just some of the issues we've identified during weekly home checks (not an all-inclusive list):

- Fire sprinkler malfunctions (and subsequent flooding)
- Toilet leaks (too many to count) or running toilets (excessive water bills)
- Slab leaks
- Ice maker and faucet and hose bibb leaks
- HVAC malfunction causing temps over 125 degrees inside the home
- Leak in shower behind the wall
- Dripping shower heads and faucets due to bad cartridges
- Dripping misting systems (and broken misting systems)
- Pool equipment leaks, seized motors
- Termite infestations
- Rodent infestations
- Broken hot water heaters (more mold/often leaks)
- Clogged HVAC condensate lines (leaks)
- Appliance failures of all kinds, but especially built in refrigerators
- Power failures that resulted in rotting food
- Exploding soda cans in pantries, exploding laundry detergent in laundries
- Pest infestations
- Cars leaking fluids
- Gas leaks
- Flat tires
- Burst batteries (in the car!)
- Irrigation leaks and problems from bad pressure regulators to broken valves to bad drip emitters and regular sprinkler heads
- Water intrusion around windows and doors after heavy rains
- Whole house floods
- Door locks that fail — house locks, gate locks, garage doors
- Alarm system failures
- Utility shut offs due to client non-payment oversights
- Leak from neighboring drainage problems

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- Broken solar systems (usually bad inverters)
- Roof tiles broken, missing, leaking roof
- Wind damage (severe)
- Electronics failures (TV's, computers, telephones, fax machines, sound systems)

The homes that have more frequent home checks have fewer problems. It's a fact. When you do go to hire someone to monitor your home, be sure they are properly licensed and insured and have good key management policies.

You should consider avoiding people or companies who have little regard for your keys. It is constantly amazing to us how many people just hand over their client keys and lockbox codes to vendors or leave the keys under door mats, or worse, out in the open in their automobiles.

Insist on having a reputable, insured, professional service for your home. Your home is one of the largest, if not the largest, investment you'll make. Protect it and its value.

**9** *Pool heaters should be serviced regularly — FACT —* Pool heaters can develop build up and obstruct the burners, especially if you use your pool heater a lot. Air supply and exhaust vents can be blocked by leaves and debris. Sooting indicates improper combustion which can lead to problems or hazards. Faulty pool heaters may release deadly carbon monoxide.

Heaters should be kept as clean and dry as possible. Having the unit serviced by a licensed technician should help prolong the life of your heater as well as help you avoid dangerous or costly issues.

**10** *Pest control service isn't really necessary — FICTION —* This is the desert. We have palm beetles, fire ants, tarantulas, scorpions, spiders, black ants and crickets as well as a host of other creepy crawlies. We also have rodents, lizards and occasionally, snakes.

Regular monthly pest spraying can keep most bugs at bay. Some of our pests are seasonal. Typically crickets are worst in August but we have seen cricket season start as early as June and continue through to September. And since black widow spiders eat crickets, if you have one, you have the other.

Termites have been known to pop up now and again, but typically we see them in areas where there has been a great amount of earth movement – either from construction nearby or due to landscape remodels. Much of the common area has been transformed from grass to desert scape due to drought conditions and the digging up of the grass and dirt has been known to wake up termites.

Despite the scary list, as long as you have a pest control service, you likely won't see many of those pests around your home, except maybe the ants or crickets.

If you have fire ants, all one needs do is call Riverside County Vector Control at 760-



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342-8287 and they will come out to treat them free of charge. The process for fire ants is as follows:

- a. Call Vector Control and report the fire ant condition
- b. Once the technician calls to schedule, contact your landscaper to have them turn off the irrigation — it must be off for 24 hours prior to treatment and two days post treatment
- c. You will need to be home to sign the authorization form (the technician will advise you about this when he calls to schedule)
- d. Do not wear flip flops or sandals while outside until the fire ant treatment is completed

We've mentioned a great deal about rodents in this booklet — that's because there are so many fruit trees in the desert, they are always chasing food. If you have no fruit trees you may not have any rodents around, but if you do or if you see evidence of them, then you can always have the pest control people install bait stations. Or, depending on where your home is located, you may opt to put out sticky pads in the garage or where the rodents have been noted.

Bees and wasps are less common from a problem perspective but can still show up. These require special request for assistance from your pest control technician, but they can and do remove them.

We do have harmless fruit bats and you may even see them just at dusk, when they look like spastic butterflies in the sky. In all the years we have been caring for homes, only once have bats been an issue and that was a waste problem only.

## Other Hints and Tips

**T**hose were our top 10 basic prep for summer activities. There are a few more tips we'd like to share with you, our faithful reader:

► **Protecting rubber in the heat** — all rubber products suffer in the heat. Tires, windshield wiper blades, your car's belts and hoses. It all can dry out and crack. We have found that a simple application of tire foam can help protect your car's belts and hoses as well as the tires. Spraying tire foam on your belts and hoses removes much of the dirt and the conditioners in the tire foam will help keep the belts and hoses supple and less prone to cracking.

For tires, you can use the tire foam, but also put cardboard underneath each tire to help lessen the flattening that can happen when a car or golf cart sits without moving all summer.

For bicycles, store them upside down or hanging on the wall so the weight of the bicycle is not on the tires. The tires may go flat over the summer and keeping



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the weight off the flat tires helps keep them from cracking. Tire foam also helps keep bicycle tires conditioned.

For windshield wiper blades, make it a point to change them out in October or November or before the first predicted winter rain. Just do it. They won't last so there is no point in waiting until they smear your windshield instead of clearing it.

- **Preserving battery life** — the desert is hot and dry. The lack of humidity here, coupled with the extreme heat of summer can sap batteries in a heartbeat. In fact, it is not unusual for the life span of some batteries (cars, golf carts, smoke detectors) to drop down to only a year or two.

There are extra hearty car batteries designed for the heat we experience and they are a pretty good investment as they typically last longer than usual. Plan to change smoke detector batteries on some regular frequency; usually fall is a good time since the batteries just weathered through the hot summer.

Golf cart batteries must have their water levels checked and be charged frequently to preserve their life. The worst thing that can happen to golf cart batteries is for their cells to dry up. If you don't know how to check the water in your golf cart, or how to fill it, contact any local golf cart sales office and they will show you.

- **Local emergency contact** — it is always a good idea, especially when you live so far away from a second home, to have a local company or person who can be called upon in an emergency. This is true even if you are gone just for a weekend vacation. It is even better if the emergency contact can be the first call for your security alarm. If you rent out your home, most of the cities here in the Coachella Valley require you have a local 24/7 contact anyway, but even if you don't rent your home, there is peace of mind knowing someone responsible is close by and can be there quickly.

- **Patio furniture, barbecues and cushions** — whenever possible move or cover your patio furniture, barbecues, outdoor TV's and especially take in your cushions and umbrellas. The heat will destroy them or severely limit their lifespan. Wind can pick up even wooden furniture and toss it into the pool or through a window. Yes, the wind can gust that strong!

- **Summer Projects** — summer is a great time to have projects done because work interruptions, noise and mess are less invasive. Pool and landscaper remodels especially. But it is also a great time for maintenance activities like tile cleaning and paint or other repairs/remodeling. The desert can be frustrating when it comes to selecting good quality vendors. All too often our resort atmosphere translates into a lackadaisical attitude regarding call backs or showing up as scheduled.

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When choosing someone to quote your projects, be sure to do your due diligence. Insist on properly licensed and insured subcontractors. They might cost a little more but they are far more likely to provide quality customer service.

As you can see, there is quite a lot to consider when planning your summer absence. At first it can be a bit overwhelming but once you get into a routine and have a few years under your belt, it all comes quite naturally.

If you'd rather not deal with any of it, we are always here to do any or all of these tasks. Many of our clients delegate all of these efforts to us because they know we are experienced, conscientious and genuinely care about protecting the condition of their home.

Enjoy peace of mind knowing licensed and insured professionals are caring for your home whether you are here or away. Since 2006, Executive Errands® is the trusted Lifestyle Management choice from Palm Springs to Indio. With our proprietary software you can monitor activity at your home from anywhere in the world.

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**Ms. Leslie Spoor** is CEO of Executive Errands®, a locally owned and operated Lifestyle Management company. Founded in 2006, Executive Errands® is dedicated to freeing up the lives of our fulltime and seasonal homeowners. Services include personal assistance, home preventative maintenance, absentee home checks, errands, remodeling and luxury services - all intended to enhance the Desert experience and to help protect your home investment.

Executive Errands® has a CA General B contractor license #944447, is fully licensed and insured. Their in-house concierge and their network of insured subcontract service providers offer rapid response to service requests and provide high quality customer service.

For more information about Executive Errands®, to sign up for absentee home care or to get a free electronic copy of their Homeowner Reference brochure, please contact Leslie at 760.898.9604. For client testimonials:

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