

5 Tricks to Keep Your Pipes From Exploding This Winter

New homeowners may have heard that winterization is important, but in the hubbub of your first year living in a home you own (finally!), it can be easy to overlook the need to prepare for the cold weather ahead. After all, it's just not something renters deal with; prepping pipes for winter is often the landlord's job.

Ideally, you should winterize your pipes in the fall, before winter seriously sets in. But if you've forgotten and all of a sudden you're in the middle of a deep freeze, there's still time to prevent disaster.

Here are some easy techniques to save your pipes from bursting:

#1 Turn On Your Faucets: If the temperatures have dropped into freezing and intend to stay there, turning on your faucets — both indoors and out — can keep water moving through your system and slow down the freezing process. There's no need to waste gallons of water: Aim for about five drips per minute.

#2 Open Cabinet Doors: During cold weather, open any cabinet doors covering plumbing in the kitchen and bathroom. This allows the home's warm air to better circulate, which can help prevent the exposed piping from freezing. While this won't help much with pipes hidden in walls, ceilings, or under the home, it can keep water moving and limit the dangerous effects of freezing weather.

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#3 Wrap Your Pipes: If your pipes are already on their merry way towards freezing, wrapping them with warm towels might do the trick. You can cover them with the towels first and then pour boiling water on top, or use already-wet towels — if your hands can stand the heat (use gloves for this). This should help loosen the ice inside and get your system running again.

#4 Pull Out Your Hairdryer: A hairdryer (or heat gun) can be a godsend when your pipes are freezing. If hot rags aren't doing the trick, try blowing hot air directly on the pipes. Important note: You don't want to use a blow torch or anything that produces direct flames, which can damage your pipes and turn a frozen pipe into an even worse disaster. You're trying to melt the ice — not your pipes.

#5 Shut Off The Water if Pipes Are Frozen: Have your pipes already frozen? Turn off the water immediately. (Hopefully you know where the master shut-off is, but if not, now's the time to find it!)

Make sure to close off any external water sources, like garden hose hookups. This will prevent more water from filling the system, adding more ice to the pile, and eventually bursting your pipes — the worst-case scenario. This also will help when the water thaws; the last thing you want after finally fixing your frozen pipes is for water to flood the system — and thus, your home.

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