



GUTTER CLEANING & SIMPLE REPAIRS

STEPS, EQUIPMENT AND SAFETY

GUTTER CLEANING AND SIMPLE REPAIRS

Your gutters are designed to channel rainwater runoff from a very large area that you don't want collecting water (your roof) into a trough and direct it away from your house. Gutters keep all this water away from your windows and walls as well as your home's foundation and landscaping by directing it away from your house through your downspouts and their extensions. The downside of gutters is that if they are not cleaned properly and regularly, water will gather in them and can lead to numerous other expensive problems related to water damage.

Depending on conditions—tree coverage, amount of rain, roof area, roof pitch—you may only need to clean your gutters a few times per year. Only take on this task if you can work safely from a ladder designed to work in an exterior environment or if you can work safely from your roof.

THE BASICS/GENERAL SAFETY

In general, be careful when working near power lines. This doesn't just mean power lines near your gutters. You'll likely be walking with an extension ladder and if at some point it's upright, you'll have to take care to check where the power lines are when it's in this position.

Cleaning gutters means working on a ladder. If you're not comfortable with that, call a handyman or professional for help. Use a stepladder wherever possible on solid level ground. Don't climb above the second to last step. For two story homes, you'll need an extension ladder with a ladder stabilizing product (also called a stand-off) for additional safety. When working from a ladder, always use a spotter, at least during the critical ascent or descent from it. Never grab onto the gutter or downspout for support. They aren't meant to hold your weight. Also, do not lean the ladder directly onto a gutter or downspout, they can easily bend or break.



If you're comfortable working from the rooftop and your roof has a very low pitch, it can be easier to clean your gutters from the roof rather than a ladder. We don't recommend this if the roof in question is over one story since you're working right at the roof edge. If you do work from your roof, take extreme safety precautions. First, if you're getting to the roof by climbing a ladder, learn the correct way to position it and learn how to get both off and back on. Next, check out the roof before you climb onto it. If it has moss or algae growing on it, it's going to be slippery. If the roof has organic debris on it such as leaves or pine needles, it's easy to slip on the debris itself and a thin layer of it can hide the conditions of the roof below. When it comes time to getting the task at hand done, realize you'll be working right at the roof edge and you don't want your weight forward. Working sideways down the roofline helps. Plan to be on your knees and protect them accordingly. Wear non-slip shoes and don't plan to get this job done in wet, icy or windy conditions.

Whenever possible, plan ahead. If you check the weather forecast in advance, you'll find gutter cleaning after a few dry days will mean less wet debris in the gutter itself. Wait until after all the debris has worked its way down your roofline or plan on cleaning the debris off of your roof at the same time (not necessarily a DIY project, we should add). If debris remains on the roof, it's only going to make its way down to the gutter, requiring the task to be done again.

USING A BLOWER



If it has been dry, removing gutter stuff may only take a good blast from your blower. If you are going to clean your gutters this way, make sure that you realize your wielding a heavy machine on your back or in your hands. If it's a gas backpack blower, it's going to shift your center of gravity. If it's electric, you'll have the added issue of dealing with the extension cord.

Plan ahead; think of how awkward this will be if you try to use it from a ladder. It will require the use of your hands to control the nozzle all while keeping yourself stabilized on the ladder itself. This approach may be best only if you can access and walk your roof.

Here's another thing to consider when using a blower. This method tosses debris everywhere. Make sure you're also cleaning off your roof above your gutter so that you're not forced to do the job again when that debris makes its way down again.

Many people will hate hearing this, but be sure to protect your eyes with glasses and even use a dust mask. Think about it, there is a lot of material in your gutter you don't want to get into your eyes or breathe in through your mouth or nose.

Lastly, consider the ground clean up afterwards. It might take more time than cleaning your gutters the old fashioned way.

CLEANING EQUIPMENT

There are different options for different approaches.

<u>All</u>	<u>Bucket</u>	<u>Drop</u>
Latex Gloves	2 Buckets	A tarp
Work Gloves/Waterproof Gloves	2 Wire Hooks for Buckets	
Trowel/Paint Scraper	Rope	
Garden Hose with Nozzle		
Somewhere for the debris: lawn bags or a composing bin		
Safety Glasses (optional: can of bee spray)		

One of your buckets will be for the debris, one for tools. Don't plan on putting the bucket on the roof, it can fall off. You may also want to attach a rope to the debris bucket so that you can lower it to the ground and have the person spotting you empty it. You can also attach the hose nozzle to the bucket and hoist it up this way so that you're not climbing the ladder with it in your hands. It's not a good idea to carry your tools in your pocket, plan on using the bucket. The Trowel or paint scraper will be most handy if it closely matches the width of the bottom of the gutter. You'll thank us for the suggestion of the bee spray, they like to nest under the roof edge and sometimes you won't notice the nest from the ground.

Do you consider yourself a scoop and drop person? Take care of the person helping you below; you don't want them to get covered with anything that comes out of the gutter. Consider dropping the sludge onto a tarp and dragging the tarp around with you. Dropping isn't that precise; you can wind up with black, wet gunk getting on your house, adding a lot of extra work to the project.

Before you stick your hand in your gutter, realize that a gutter often contains sharp pieces of metal that you may not notice that can easily cut your hands. A sturdy pair of waterproof work gloves comes in handy to protect yourself from cuts and scrapes. If you don't have a pair, use latex gloves first, then put on a pair of regular work gloves.

Watch out for the paint on the exterior of your gutters, you can wind up scraping it.

To clean the trough, set up your ladder properly at the downspout end of the gutter and move outward from there. Clean out big debris like twigs first, then clean out smaller debris. If there is a downspout strainer, clean that out, too.

A trowel can come in handy to dig out debris and if a residue has caked to the bottom of the gutter, a tool like a putty knife to scrape the bottom of the gutter may be more helpful. If the debris is wet and decaying, don't forget waterproof or latex gloves to protect your hands. If the debris is dry and heavily caked on, a light spray of water might loosen it. If you find a mold-mildew-algae-like residue on the gutter interior, you'll want to scrub it out to keep more of it from forming. A toilet brush works particularly well here and keeps you far enough away from the residue your scrubbing. No one wants to get sick from gutter cleaning.

When it comes to stretching- don't. Follow ladder safety precautions and keep both feet planted firmly on the ladder. Take the extra time to move the ladder, too many severe accidents happen as a result of ladder falls.

Once most of the debris has been removed, you can use a hose to spray the gutter clean. Make sure you start at the end opposite the downspout, spraying down toward it.



What should you do with all the gunk? It makes great compost!

USE THE TRIP TO INSPECT YOUR ROOFLINE

While you're at your roofline, you've got a perfect opportunity to check your roof, shingles and fascia for issues. As you go down the gutter run, use a screwdriver to press into your fascia board by your gutter. Does it feel spongy or does it give? This is a sign of wood rot. Is the paint on it flaking? That is another tell-tale sign of water getting on your fascia and the board may need to be replaced.



Check your roof shingles, but don't do this on a very cold day. Try to do this where the sun shines on your roof as well; the shingle is more likely to be pliable. Take the corner of a shingle in your hand and bend it. Does it flex or did it feel like it would crack and/or break? Does it look puffed or bloated? All are signs of an aging shingle. Now check for wear. Does the shingle have craters or pits in it? Are there any places without shingle grit? Look into the gutter for signs of shingle grit. Some is normal, but you don't want too much of this build up. Only very new and very old roofs should lose lots of shingle grit.

Do the shingles show signs of curling, cracking or have several ripped? Minor shingle repairs can be done, but if many show wear like this, you'll want to watch your roof carefully.

Do the shingles hang down into the gutter? If they drop in too far, they could be wicking water up through them, particularly if they are sitting in gutter debris for extended periods. With the shingle lifted, use your screwdriver to press against the subroof. Does it appear spongy or does it look wavy? If you have fascia gutters and the rafter tails are exposed, use your screwdriver to press into the ends. Are they solid? Anything that feels spongy should be watched closely and repair work should be considered in the near future.

DOWNSPOUTS

If the gutters you've just cleaned don't drain, there is probably a clog in the downspout. For gutters that drain into underground drains, you'll want to remove the bottom part of the downspout to catch the debris stuck there before it goes into the underground system. You may have to loosen a strap or two that keeps the downspout attached to the home. Are you able to tap on the downspout? You'll likely be able to locate the clog this way. An unclogged downspout will sound hollow when tapped; the clogged downspout will sound solid and dull when tapped. With your hose nozzle open to full capacity, feed the hose up the downspout and let the pressure from the water do the work. Try tapping on the downspout while you're feeding it with water to help loosen the clog. If it doesn't cure the clog, you may need to use a plumber's snake or auger. Be gentle!

Downspouts are not as hardy as your house drains. Once the clog is clear (you can drop a pebble in from the top and hear it ping down to the bottom), reattach your downspout and flush the gutter through one last time.



SIMPLE GUTTER REPAIRS

For simple gutter repairs you'll need a tube of gutter sealant, a drill with bits, a hammer, touch-up paint or spray paint, and additional hardware like endcaps, spikes, ferrules and/or gutter hangers.

Once you've cleaned your gutters, you'll want to check them for any pools of standing water. Standing water is a sign that the gutter is not sloped correctly in that location. Standard installation practice is to drop the gutter $\frac{1}{4}$ inch for every 10 feet it runs in the direction of the downspout. If yours doesn't, you'll need to take out the hanger and adjust the gutter with a level. You may also need to add additional hangers for more support. If your gutter is hung with spikes and ferrules (you'll see the round head of the spike near the top of the gutter), take the time to tap in any loose spikes. Keep in mind that once they get

loose, it's hard to keep them in and you might be better off installing a hidden hanger next to the older spike. Depending on where you live, hangers should be installed from a minimum of every 2 feet or more conservatively, every 18 inches. Keep in mind that gutters filled with debris or which carry the weight of ice in the winter have a greater chance to sag and pull away from a home.

To address gutter leaks, you'll have to wait until the gutter is dry. Leaks along seams are the most common. Make sure the gutter pieces (the gutter run itself, the outside or inside corner piece or the miter strips) are tight against each other. Scrape out any existing sealant with a box cutter or putty scraper. Then run a bead of gutter sealant on all the joints, leaving nothing of the joint itself visible. Make sure not to use silicone, but a sealant made specifically for gutters that won't deteriorate in UV light.

For leaks at the end caps, remove existing sealant and seal inside the gutter where the cap meets the trough. Again, do this along the entire end cap joint (back, bottom, front) with your sealant.

Dirty gutters with stripes can be cleaned with specific products made for this purpose, but many of them will strip the finish of the paint. Consider using a drip edge to prevent this. Blemishes in the paint can be cleaned up with touch up paint.

PRESERVE YOUR WORK

Now that your gutters are cleaned of debris, you might think it's better to keep that debris out in the first place by adding a gutter guard. Installing a guard on your gutters is an easy



way to keep debris out and help from any problems that might occur from clogged gutters or downspouts.

If you use a Big Box Store gutter screening product you'll keep some debris out. Every spring and fall, pop out your screens and clean the inside of your gutters thoroughly to remove grit and other small debris that may be creating a coating on the bottom

of your gutter. If left too long in the bottom of your gutter, this organic material will cause the interior of your gutter to pit or the seals to fail.

You may also want to consider a professionally installed gutter guard. For more information on that, visit our website, mastershield.com.

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