

Home

H O W T O C L E A N Y O U R G U T T E R S

Clogged, overflowing gutters are worse than no gutters at all. They can lead to wet basements, rot and leaks at your roof's edge, and damaged siding – all of which can mean big repair bills.

Fortunately, gutter cleaning usually is a job you can do yourself, and most homes require only twice-yearly cleanings (typically, in fall and spring). You'll want to check them even if your gutters have leaf deflectors.

For homeowners new to gutter maintenance, these six tips can help:

1. **Buy a good-quality ladder** with a standoff bracket, thick rubber gloves, gutter scooper, and a debris-collection bucket to hang from the ladder.
2. **Don't lean your ladder against gutters** or downspouts (they can break or bend easily). Keep your body inside ladder rails with one hand always on the ladder. Never hold a gutter or downspout for support and, to avoid slipping, don't clean gutters in the rain.
3. **Scoop out loose leaves** and other debris. Avoid temptation to use a leaf blower. They're unwieldy and can throw you off balance atop the ladder.
4. **Stuff a cloth in the top of downspouts** to prevent debris from washing down, then use the hose to wet and loosen caked-on dirt, decayed leaves, and shingle sand stuck in the bottom of the gutter. Remove the cloth you stuffed in the downspout and watch to make sure the water drains.
5. **If the downspout is plugged**, stick the hose down and try to break the clog with gentle water pressure. Don't just blast away. You'll get a face full of muck, and downspouts can't take the same kind of pressure as other pipes.
6. **If that doesn't work, try a plumber's snake.** If it's still stuck, the problem's likely in the elbow. Disconnect it by removing the retaining screws and clean it. If your downspout flows into an underground pipe, you may want to disconnect it before cleaning, anyway, so you don't inadvertently clog the pipe or dry well to which it drains.

If you're not comfortable with climbing ladders or have health concerns, call a professional. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Gutters." Many window washers offer gutter cleaning, too.

