

Water Heater\nMaintenance Tips

FREE DIY GUIDE

Introduction

Regular maintenance can extend the life of your water heater, improve its efficiency, and prevent costly breakdowns. This guide covers essential maintenance tasks that most homeowners can perform safely.

Safety First

BEFORE performing any maintenance:\n- Turn off the power supply (circuit breaker for electric, gas valve for gas units)\n- Allow the water to cool for several hours\n- Never work on a hot water heater

Task 1: Check the Temperature Setting

The ideal water heater temperature is 120 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature is hot enough for household needs while preventing scalding and reducing energy costs.

Step 1:

Locate the thermostat on your water heater.

Step 2:

Check the current setting.

Step 3:

If it is above 120°F, adjust it down.

Step 4:

Wait a few hours and test the hot water temperature at a faucet.

Step 5:

Adjust as needed.

Task 2: Test the Temperature and Pressure Relief Valve

The T&P valve is a critical safety device that releases pressure if it builds up too high. Test it annually.

Step 1:

Place a bucket under the discharge pipe.

Step 2:

Lift the valve lever slightly and let it snap back.

Step 3:

You should hear a gurgling sound and see water flow into the bucket.

Step 4:

If no water flows or the valve continues to leak after testing, it needs replacement.

WARNING:

If the valve does not operate or continues leaking, call a plumber immediately. A faulty T&P valve is a serious safety hazard.

Task 3: Drain and Flush the Tank

Sediment buildup reduces efficiency and can damage the tank. Flush your water heater at least once a year.

Step 1:

Turn off the power and cold water supply.

Step 2:

Connect a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom of the tank.

Step 3:

Run the hose to a floor drain or outside.

Step 4:

Open the drain valve and let the water flow out.

Step 5:

Once the tank is empty, turn the cold water supply back on briefly to stir up remaining sediment.

Step 6:

Let the water run until it appears clear.

Step 7:

Close the drain valve and remove the hose.

Step 8:

Refill the tank by turning on the cold water supply.

Step 9:

Once full, turn the power back on.

Task 4: Inspect the Anode Rod

The anode rod protects the tank from corrosion. It should be inspected every 2-3 years and replaced if heavily corroded.

Step 1:

Locate the anode rod (usually on top of the tank).

Step 2:

Use a socket wrench to loosen and remove it.

Step 3:

Inspect the rod. If more than 6 inches of core wire is exposed or it is coated with calcium, replace it.

Step 4:

Install a new anode rod if needed.

Step 5:

Apply plumber's tape to the threads before reinstalling.

Tankless Water Heater Maintenance

Tankless water heaters require different maintenance:\n\n- Descale annually by flushing with vinegar or a descaling solution\n- Clean the inlet filter screen every few months\n- Check for error codes on the display panel\n- Have a professional inspect the burner and heat exchanger annually

When to Call a Professional

Schedule professional service if:

- Your water heater is more than 10 years old
- You notice rust-colored water
- There are leaks around the base of the tank
- The unit makes loud rumbling or popping noises
- You are uncomfortable performing any maintenance tasks
- The pilot light will not stay lit (gas heaters)
- You need to replace the anode rod or T&P valve

Professional plumbers can perform comprehensive inspections, make complex repairs, and advise you on whether repair or replacement is the most cost-effective option.