

HOW TO MAKE SOME QUICK FIXES TO YOUR HOME BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS:

1: Silence Squeaky Floors (and Stairs)

Your overnight guests don't need to know about your midnight refrigerator raids, so tighten up those creaking floorboards and stair treads before they wake up the whole house. Squeeeeeek-No-More screws, available at home centers and hardware stores, draw flooring tight to joists, or stair treads to stringers; then their heads snap off, leaving a ½-inch-wide hole in the finished surface, which can simply disappear in carpet or be easily filled with color-matching wood putty for wood floors.

2: Unclog a Powder-Room Sink

The surest solution is to remove the P-trap, flush out the clog, and reinstall the trap. You can also try clearing the clog above the P-trap. Simply unscrew the ball-and-socket connection that holds the assembly together in the back of the sink, slide out the rod, and remove the pop-up stopper. The offending glob—or at least enough of it to get the drain flowing again—is likely to come out on the end of the stopper. Clean it off, replace and hand-tighten the ball-and-socket nut.

3: Keep the Stainless Spotless

Do the fingerprints all over the stainless steel appliances make your kitchen look like a crime scene? The secret to cleaning stainless-steel surfaces is never to use stainless-steel cleaner, most of those products contain naphtha, which leaves an oily film that attracts dust and smears every time you touch it. Instead use a glass cleaner that contains no ammonia or alcohol, such as the ones made by Restore or Method.

4: Camouflage Scratches in Woodwork

You can hide a damaged finish on antique furniture or any fine woodwork by applying a coat of pigmented wax, such as Briwax, or a pigmented polishing fluid, also known as scratch cover, which will make fine scratches all but disappear. You can also use Scotts Liquid Gold.

5: Tighten a Loose Set Screw

Set screws are those tiny fasteners that hold everything from doorknobs on their spindles to wall-hung toilet-paper and towel hooks on their brackets. But, some set screws just won't stay set.

Try applying a drop of Loctite Threadlocker Blue to the threads and reinserting it. No glue will help if the threads are stripped, though. In that case, wrap some sewing thread clockwise around the screw's shank before putting it back.

6: Mask a Musty Smell

Scented candles or potpourri may help mask odors in small areas, but here's an all-encompassing solution for the whole house if you have forced-air heating: Put a couple of drops of vanilla extract on the furnace filter. The system's blower will then spread the sweet smell throughout the house. If the heat's not on, set the system on fan only.

7: Tighten Loose Chair Legs

A chair that suddenly collapses under one of your guest is no laughing matter (unless, of course, no one gets hurt). To prevent mishaps, take out any loose stretchers (the horizontal pieces that run between the legs) and scrape off the old glue with a knife. Apply a slow-setting epoxy, and lash everything together with a band clamp around the legs. Wipe up drips with vinegar. Take the clamps off the next day when the epoxy has cured.

8: Tighten a Drafty Window

Those leaky old windows are bound to make your guests uncomfortable or cause the candles to sputter. New weatherstripping—the best solution—requires removing both sash. For an easier fix that you can do with the window in place, add an extra sash lock.

This treatment is best on sash you can wiggle in and out when the lock is engaged. Remove both lock pieces, and plug the old screw holes with a sliver of wood and wood glue. Link the lock halves together and reinstall them on the sash about a third of the way in from the side of the window. (Don't forget to drill pilot holes for each of the screws first.) Now do the same with a matching sash lock about a third of the way in from the opposite edge. When both locks are closed, the sash should pull tightly together and keep the cold air outside, where it belongs.

9: Quiet a Bathroom Fan

That noisy vent fan—the one that effectively announces whenever someone is in the bathroom—may just be the rattle of a loose cover. For a simple fix, remove the cover and bend the spring-

loaded attachment brackets slightly so that they grip a little tighter against the ceiling. While you're at it, switch off the circuit breaker and vacuum the unit's insides to quiet the fan blades and take the strain off the motor.

10: Steady a Loose Toilet

Better take care of that rocking throne before big Uncle Jack comes to visit; the last thing you want is an out-of-commission toilet with a house full of company. First, check the closet bolts holding the bowl to the floor. If they're loose, hand-tighten them (be careful to not crack the porcelain of the toilet), then give them an additional quarter-turn with a wrench. If they're already tight, steady the toilet by slipping some plastic plumbers' shims into the gap where the bowl meets the floor. You'll find these useful wedges in plumbing-supply stores and the plumbing aisles at home centers.

11: Pop a Wallpaper Bubble

It's finally time to do something about those air bubbles under the wallpaper that your "handyman" brother-in-law so thoughtfully left behind. Make a tiny slice through each bubble with a sharp razor knife, then take an artist's syringe—a plastic, needle-tipped tool available from craft shops—and inject a small amount of white PVA glue (like Elmer's) behind the paper. Smooth the area with a wallpaper brush or a dry paint roller, and use a damp sponge to gently wipe away any glue that squeezes out. Your brother-in-law's handiwork will never have looked better.

12: Reattach Loose Laminate Countertop

You don't need the pros' special tools—laminant adhesive and a J-roller—to stick peeling Formica back in place. Use a heat gun, or even a hair dryer, to gently heat the laminate and soften the old glue underneath. Whack it with a rubber mallet or a hammer cushioned by a block of wood. Weigh it down for about an hour with a stack of heavy blocks while the laminate cools and re-adheres to the substrate.

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