

## SOLUTIONS

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# Leaks, squeals and fills

## Easy home repairs you can do yourself

If your floors squeak or your toilet leaks, there's no need to panic. These are all "bite-size" do-it-yourself problems that, with a few tips, you can easily handle on your own. Here's a list of our favorite do-it-yourself fixes for common home-repair headaches:

### Problem:

**Squeaky Floor** – While sometimes useful as a "low-tech alarm system" that your teenager has arrived home past curfew, squeaky floors are mostly very annoying. However, you don't have to put up with them. First, realize that floors squeak because the floor boards are loose. What you hear is the noise made by the friction of those boards rubbing together or the nails that are used to attach them being pulled in and out of the floor joists or sub-floor. The solution is the same: the floors need to be re-secured to the structure of your home.

### Solution:

There are a couple of ways to do this. If the squeak is under carpet, remove the carpet and re-attach the sub-floor to the floor joists with case-hardened screws. A short-term fix without removing the carpet is to locate the floor joist with a stud finder then re-nail right through the carpet using a hot-dipped (the edges are rough and bumpy) galvanized finish nail. Then pull the carpet up through the head of the nail. Squeak-ender ([www.squeakender.com](http://www.squeakender.com)) has two products that can also help — a clamp that can secure loose boards from a basement below and a headless screw that can be driven through carpet and then broken off to keep the repair out of sight.

### Problem:

**Caulking Tubs** – Worn out caulk is not only unsightly but can lead to leaks and expensive structural damage behind tile walls.

### Solution:

To replace it, first remove the old caulk being careful not to damage the tub. To make this part of the job easier, DAP ([www.dap.com](http://www.dap.com)) makes a product called "CAULK-BE-GONE" that softens old caulk for easier removal. Once the old caulk is completely off, fill the tub with water to weigh it down. Then, caulk around the tub using a bath-kitchen caulk that has a mildicide to keep it from turning black with mildew from the moisture. Wait until the caulk dries and then remove the water. This will help compress the caulk in place making it less likely to pull away when you climb in to take a bath. >>



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### Problem:

**Running Toilets** – While toilets themselves never wear out, that's not true of their moving parts. In fact, one leaky toilet can waste 78,000 gallons of water in one year — enough to fill a backyard swimming pool.

### Solution:

To check your toilet for a leak, open the tank and pour a little food coloring inside. Check the bowl 20 minutes later — if the dye shows up, you probably need a new flush valve, a part that costs just a couple of dollars and is easy to install yourself. If your toilet seems to run all the time or never fill up, the fill valve may need replacing, another easy do-it-yourself repair. If these fixes seem daunting, visit [www.fluidmaster.com](http://www.fluidmaster.com). The site offers a wealth of information to help you understand how your toilet works, diagnosing problems, identifying the parts you need, diagrams and troubleshooting questions and answers.

### Problem:

**Dark Days** – When shorter days make dark places around your porch, walks or driveways, adding a light sensor to outside fixtures is a good idea. But while rewiring your lights is a job best left for professionals, “screw-in” light controls can be installed by anyone that can handle a light bulb replacement.

### Solution:

Today's screw-in controls include digital programmable technology that can be set to turn porch or spotlights on at dusk, and then off a few hours later. For more information, go to [www.amertac.com](http://www.amertac.com).



### Problem:

**Cracks in the Walls or Ceiling** – While drywall cracks are understandably a concern for most folks, they are frequently not indicative of a structural problem. Instead they are a function of age and movement as the home settles over the years. However, a smear of fresh spackle over the crack won't do the trick.

### Solution:

For the best fix, apply self-sticking fiberglass drywall tape to cover the crack, and then follow-up with two or three layers of spackle. By bridging the gap with the tape first, the repair will stand up to the future expansion and contraction of the building that will follow. >>

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### Problem:

**Draft-proofing** – Collectively, every tiny gap in the outside wall of your home, including areas around windows, doors, light switches, outlets, ducts, ends up being one big hole in your home that can rob your wallet of energy dollars. Fortunately, managing these leaks doesn't have to include expensive upgrades like window replacement.

### Solution:

Caulking works well both outside and inside. By caulking the joint between molding and the wall and the molding and the window with a white acrylic latex product, you'll seal out streams of cold air. Around electrical outlets, use foam gaskets that are available at any home-improvement center or a latex foam sealant. It is easy to apply and expands to fill cavities around outlets, pipes, wires or windows and doors. Another helpful product for windows and doors is simply to replace the weather-stripping. It comes in rolls of black, white or tan adhesive-backed foam and can quickly and inexpensively eliminate air infiltration around your doors and windows.

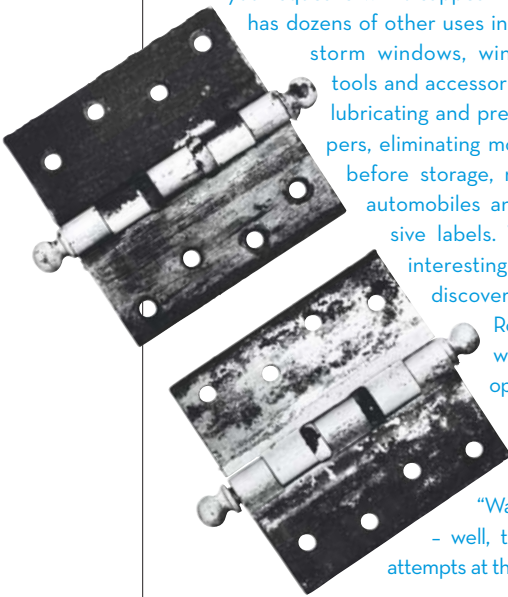


### Problem:

**Squeaky hinges on doors, and just about everything else** – When the weather turns cold, wet and damp, corrosion sets in causing doors to squeak, lock to rust and lots of other annoying problems.

### Solution:

The quick fix is WD40, a favorite of ours for years ([www.wd40.com](http://www.wd40.com)). A quick spray of this magical liquid and your squeaks will disappear in seconds. The product has dozens of other uses including helping to install storm windows, winterizing boats, coating tools and accessories to guard against rust, lubricating and preventing rust on coat zippers, eliminating moisture from fishing gear before storage, removing road tar from automobiles and even removing adhesive labels. WD-40 also has a very interesting history. It was originally discovered by engineers at the Rocket Chemical Company who were working to develop a line of rust-prevention solvents and degreasers for the aerospace industry. "WD" stands for "Water Displacement" and 40 – well, they got it right after 40 attempts at the formula!



## FRESH FILTERS

Replace the filter in your forced-air heating system to help keep your air clean – especially since you're extremely unlikely to open the windows in January! Most systems have either replaceable filters or electronic air cleaners.



Replaceable filters are usually mounted in or near the bottom of your furnace. These filters need to be replaced once a month. When installing a new filter, pay attention to the arrow stamped on the side of the filter which indicates "Air Flow." Since air flows from the return duct back to the furnace, this arrow will most likely be pointing toward the furnace when properly installed. Electronic air cleaners are much more efficient than disposable filters and need cleaning far less frequently.

**Two new products on the market make replacing filters easy. 3M's new "Filtrete" air cleaning filter is a washable, fiberglass, pleated filter. The filter can be removed, rinsed and replaced in just seconds and the pleated design is far more efficient than disposable filters. For the maximum in clean air technology, Aprilaire's Electronic Air Cleaner Model 5000 offers the ultimate in efficiency. 🏠**