

# Your Guide to:

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# Log Home Maintenance






# Index



1. What and how to and Inspect your log home
2. Washing the exterior
3. Removing stains, mold, and mildew
4. Check the chinks in your home's armor
5. Stain and protect
6. Examine your landscaping
7. Be diligent about pest control
8. Seasonal Maintenance Checklist





While all homes need some sort of upkeep, a log home maintenance program goes beyond what you might encounter on traditionally built homes. Regular maintenance on a log home dramatically extends its lifespan, and annual inspections simplify the process and will help prevent premature aging and structural damage. Detecting and addressing minor problems early keeps the wood strong and resilient.

To protect your log home from various threats and keep it strong and beautiful year-round, here are a few tips to practice:

### 1. Inspect your log home once a year

A log home needs a visual inspection at least once a year. The sun's UV rays break down the wood cells, weakening the fibers and causing cracks and weathering. You'll want to check for signs of drying wood, aging, and any pests trying to take up residence.

Watch out for these:

- ☐ Landscaping that's too tall or too close to the home
- ☐ Faded, discolored, or damaged finish to your logs
- ☐ Stains or darker spots that may indicate mold or a fungus
- ☐ Green moss or algae
- ☐ Damaged wood from hanging outdoor fixtures, such as a hook for a garden hose
- ☐ Mud tubes from termites
- ☐ Sawdust, pinholes, or frass from carpenter ants
- ☐ Gaps between the logs that allow water, air, bugs, mice, or bats to infiltrate
- ☐ Upward-facing cracks — called checks — in your logs (although part of the natural drying process, upward-facing checks *that aren't sealed* can trap water and cause rot)



Depending on where you live, you may be more likely to face specific log home maintenance issues than others. Wood decays faster in the Southeast and on the Northwestern coast than elsewhere because of high rainfall and warm, humid weather. However, all log homes eventually show signs of the elements and age.

## 2. Wash the exterior of your log home with a gentle soap

Regular cleaning of your log home exterior can prevent the need for future repairs. Plus, if your stain needs refreshing or a topcoat (more on that below), it's better to start with a surface that's clean of dirt, pollen, spider webs, bird droppings, mold, or other grime.

You can try CPR, a bleach-free, low-pH wood cleaner. We also suggest a weak dilution of Dawn dishwashing soap with water. Start at the bottom of an area where you can work for 20 to 30 minutes at a time and gently apply the suds with a long-handled soft-bristle brush or broom, letting the soap do the work. Use a brush used for washing a truck or camper.



Then rinse from the top down with a low-pressure garden hose or a pressure washer with a low-pressure nozzle. We recommend a washer with 1,250 to 2,000 PSI with a 25-degree fan-tip nozzle. Keep the wand and nozzle a minimum of 8-12" from the log wall to keep logs from potential "furring" .

## 3. Remove stains, mold, and mildew

Log cabins are prone to mold and mildew growth, especially without good air circulation around the exterior. One way to remove stains and restore the wood to its natural color is with a biodegradable percarbonate-based cleaner after you wash your logs.

An alternative for removing mold or mildew is this [mixture from the NAHB](#):

- 1 cup trisodium phosphate or detergent without ammonia
- 1 quart of household bleach
- 3 quarts of warm water

Wear goggles and rubber gloves and apply the solution to the affected area with a hand-pump garden sprayer. Allow it to set for five to 10 minutes, then pressure rinse thoroughly with clean water. Chlorine left on wood will damage any coatings applied over it.



#### 4. Check the chinks in your home's armor

Chinking or sealing your log home prevents air, insects, and moisture from squeezing between any gaps in your home's logs. Chinking is a textured mortar-like material that can be used in gaps up to five inches wide and; when in a contrasting color, it becomes a design feature. Older homes used clay lime and sand to seal between the logs.

Back in the early days older homes used clay, lime and sand to seal between the logs. Modern chinking is typically a synthetic, elastomeric material like acrylic or polyurethane. These materials are designed to be flexible and allow for the expansion and contraction of the logs as they adjust to temperature and humidity changes. Modern chinking is designed to adhere well to the logs and create a tight seal, preventing air and moisture from entering. Chinking materials may also include additives for improved adhesion, flexibility, and weather resistance, making it a solid choice for long term protection for moisture, bugs, and potential water damage. For any gap greater than 1 inch in diameter, fill the space first with a backer rod, then apply the chinking over the rod. This ensures that the chinking sticks to the top and bottom of the logs. Chinking should be no more than half an inch deep so that it doesn't drip. "More [is](#) not better."

In addition to chinking between the logs, you'll want to seal any upward-facing checks in the logs that could collect water with log home caulking that is specifically designed for this purpose.

DO NOT use standard caulking products from home improvement, it is not the same type of product. You can apply chinking, which comes in a range of colors, around door and window openings. This will increase your homes defenses against air, bugs, and moisture.



## 5. Stain and protect the outside of your log home.

A log homes will need wood stain and topcoat, but how often depends on where you live and the wear and tear from natural elements. Don't just automatically apply a topcoat each year as a preventive measure. "It could get so thick, it starts to peel."

### How to test whether your cabin needs a new topcoat

Instead, check the condition of your stain, preferably after rainfall or after you've washed the home's exterior. Does any water bead or sheet away? If so, the stain or topcoat is in good shape. If the water darkens the wood, the topcoat is likely gone. Once the house is dry, check if it needs stain or topcoat by using masking tape. Apply a piece to one of the logs, make sure it's stuck firm, and then pull it off. If you notice about 40% to 50% of the tape is covered with finish, then you need to re-stain.

### Options to strip our logs

If the topcoat needs to be removed, we recommend [hiring a professional](#) for such a job. It costs money to hire a professional but these pros will prep your exterior to avoid any damage to your windows, gutters, and other areas.

## 6. Examine your landscaping and drainage at least once a year

Water and moisture is probably the [most destructive natural hazard](#) to wood. While coating the wood provides protection, you'll also want to prevent any pockets of moisture from clogged drains, downspouts, and overgrown landscaping. It is beneficial to keep plants and shrubs at least 18 inches away from log walls to ensure good air circulation.

We suggest installing a gravel path about 24 to 36 inches wide around your log home to provide a breezeway. Water and moisture management is extremely important in log cabins. We suggest to not use any materials, such as mulch or river rock, which can splash water against your house.





## 7. Be diligent about pest control

With any wood-based home, catching pests in time can stop excessive decay. Long-horned beetles, carpenter bees, and termites love log homes, but borers, spiders, squirrels, chipmunks, and even woodpeckers also can leave their mark.

Seal and fix cracks and openings to keep pests at bay. If you treat your log home with borate — a natural chemical compound of oxygen and boron — you likely don't need to inspect the wood as often for signs of pests.

*A log home's lifespan will be dramatically extended by routine maintenance.*

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### Seasonal Maintenance Checklist

#### Spring & Summer

- ☐ Power wash exterior and check for damage
- ☐ Inspect chinking, reapply if needed
- ☐ Maintain landscaping to keep moisture away from logs

#### Fall & Winter

- ☐ Clear gutters & downspouts before freezing temperatures
- ☐ Inspect and clean the fireplace and chimney
- ☐ Check for drafts around windows and doors





### Preventative Measures & Long-term Care

*Detecting and addressing minor problems early keeps the wood strong and resilient.*

- ⇒ Schedule professional inspection every few years
- ⇒ Keep vegetation trimmed back from the cabin to allow airflow
- ⇒ Monitor humidity levels inside the home to prevent log shrinkage
- ⇒ We recommend re-staining your log home **every 5 to 7 years** — however, we've seen homeowners reach the 10 year mark when consistently doing the proper annual maintenance.
- ⇒ Traditionally-built full log homes can last anywhere from 20 to 100 years – longer if they are well maintained.

**For All Your Log Home Maintenance Needs**

**Contact Carolina Log & Timber**

**Today to Request an Estimate**

## ABOUT US

Carolina Log & Timber is a dedicated contractor specializing in building, restoring, repairing, and modifying log homes.

With a passion for craftsmanship and a deep appreciation for the natural beauty of timber, our team is committed to delivering exceptional services tailored to the unique needs of each client.

We believe that a log home is more than just a structure; it is a sanctuary that reflects your personality and life-style.

Projects include homes in North Carolina, South Carolina, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Florida.

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