

# Why You Should Hire A Chimney Sweep Now Instead Of Waiting Until Autumn

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Illustration by Kyle McQueen

It makes good sense and cents to have flues and venting systems attended to in the spring of the year. Some considerations:

- Your chimney should be swept before moisture mixing with soot and creosote form sulfuric and hydrochloric acids that eat into the chimney structure. Chlorine from household cleaning compounds may be in combustion air rising up the chimney. Sulfur is in soot deposits from a coal fire.
- Damp creosote in the flue has a sour, sickly smell. Warm weather, rain, high humidity tend to increase the strength of the odor. It's always there in your chimney, but you don't usually notice it during the heating season. In winter the draft helps carry the smell away and the flue also stays drier. But in summer, downdrafts (flow reversals of the air in the flue) can send the odor into the house. Cleaning out the creosote or soot may help eliminate this smell. Many sweeps also use a special deodorizer.
- Unwelcome visitors should be evicted from the chimney and smoke shelf. Birds, squirrels, raccoons or snakes may be taking shelter there. Birds using your chimney as a motel can block the flue with their nests and leave it a stinking mess. Raccoons can be dangerous and often carry parasites deadly to humans. (Your sweep may recommend that you call a licensed professional animal removal service.)
- Next, a chimney cap should be installed to keep out birds, animals, leaves, rain and snow.
- Your sweep may need to schedule a second visit if he or she finds that



Spare your sweep the rigors of working on a hot tin roof or servicing your flues on a bitterly cold winter's day.

your heating system needs additional service.

- Chimneys should be inspected yearly. Deteriorating mortar and missing or broken bricks and missing, broken or cracked flue tiles should be replaced. A harmless looking hairline crack in a tile flue liner will open up under high temperatures. Escaping heat and flame could set your house on fire! Sweeps who video-scan flues can provide photos of damage or defects.
  - Many chimneys need to be lined or relined. Damage from a chimney fire or the deterioration of the years may mandate that your flue be completely relined. High-quality rigid or flexible stainless steel liners are available for this purpose. Most professional sweeps have been trained in the necessary installation techniques. Cast-in-place liners are also available and can be a good choice for a weakened, oversized chimney.
  - If the date of a chimney fire can be determined, and there was a witness, homeowner's insurance might pay for relining the chimney. Many sweeps work with insurance companies on a
- regular basis. They are accustomed to supplying documentation of the damage, as well as estimates for rebuilding, repairing or relining a chimney.
- A stove or fireplace insert may have been incorrectly installed. These are like time bombs, ticking away, threatening your home and family. Sweeps frequently find that the stove's floor protection or clearances to combustible materials are less than the installation instructions or codes specify. The connector pipe may need to be replaced. Sections should be screwed together so they cannot rattle apart and spill burning creosote onto the floor if there is a chimney fire.
  - If you have converted to gas fuel or replaced your furnace with a high or mid-efficiency gas unit, your chimney should be swept to eliminate possible blockage. It will also need proper vent pipe installed, something service companies often neglect to do out of sheer ignorance. A gas furnace should never vent into an unlined masonry chimney. Excessive moisture and acids in the flue gases can destroy it in a few short years. In addition, sluggish draft in an oversized flue can cause poisonous carbon monoxide fumes to spill into the house. The installation of a gas furnace should not be left to amateurs or to behind-the-times professionals.
  - Many sweeps are dreadfully overworked in autumn. They must turn away customers or put them on hold until late winter or early spring.
  - Don't be surprised if your sweep raises his prices in autumn. He may offer discounts now to avoid those hot summer roofs and even out the workload.