



Lockwell HVAC

Honest HVAC work for the houses we live in.

FIELD GUIDE · BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Northern Birmingham HVAC Maintenance Calendar

A month-by-month maintenance playbook tuned for the climate and home stock of Gardendale, Fultondale, Center Point, and the north metro.

Who this is for: Homeowners in Gardendale, Fultondale, Center Point, Irondale, Bessemer, Hueytown, Pleasant Grove, Helena and the surrounding north metro.

What's inside: 12-month checklist tuned for the north Birmingham metro, the timing of seasonal tune-ups before contractors book up, the 5 most-ignored items, and the rule for when to stop repairing and replace.

Service area: Birmingham, AL metro — Gardendale, Fultondale, Center Point, Irondale, Bessemer, Hueytown, Pleasant Grove, Helena

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Why North Metro Is Different

Gardendale and Fultondale sit on wooded lots, tree-canopy heavy. Pollen loads on outdoor condensers are higher than in central Birmingham. Winter overnight lows run a few degrees colder than central — heat runtime is genuinely longer. This calendar is tuned for that.

January

Coldest stretch. Heat is running 16-20 hours/day in many homes.

- Replace filter — monthly during heavy heat use
- Listen for delayed ignition or unusual cycling on gas furnaces
- Heat pump owners: watch for ice on the outdoor coil. Light frost is normal; a block of ice means defrost cycle is failing
- Verify CO detectors have fresh batteries — non-negotiable with gas heat

February

Still cold. Last month of full heat duty before pollen arrives.

- Replace filter
- Schedule spring AC tune-up. April is too late — every reputable contractor in north Birmingham is booked by April 1
- For heat pumps, listen to the reversing valve on heat-to-defrost transitions. Loud hammering = bad valve

March

Pollen explosion in north Birmingham — wooded lots take the worst of it. Most important maintenance month of the year.

- Rinse the outdoor condenser — top-down, gentle garden hose pressure. Never a pressure washer (bends the fins)
- Replace filter every 3 weeks during pollen peak
- Get the spring tune-up done. Single highest-ROI service call of the year — catches failing capacitors and contactors before they fail in July
- Brush yellow film off the outdoor coil. Pollen + first warm rain = matted-on contamination that doesn't wash off

April

Warm days starting. Test the AC before you need it.

- Run AC for 30 minutes on a 70-degree day. Should drop indoor temp to 68-70 if set there
- Replace filter
- Inspect attic ductwork for taped joints lifting or daylight where it shouldn't be

May

Last calm month before peak cooling.

- Replace filter
- Clear 2 feet around the outdoor unit. North Birmingham homes are notorious for vines and ground cover encroaching
- Test the condensate drain — pour a cup of water in the drain pan. If it doesn't drain in 30 seconds, flush with 1 cup bleach + 1 cup water

June

Heat ramps up. AC runtime climbs to 12-18 hours daily.

- Replace filter
- Listen for short-cycling (turns on, runs 5 minutes, shuts off, restarts in 10). That's a problem
- Power bill jumps 25%+ without a reason → refrigerant or capacitor failing. Diagnose now, not in August

July

Brutal. AC runs 16-20 hours/day. 80% of HVAC failures in the metro happen in July.

- Replace filter
- Don't set thermostat below 72°F — every degree below doubles compressor strain for marginal comfort gain
- Spray outdoor unit gently with hose every 2 weeks to wash off accumulated debris

August

Hottest month on average. Survival mode.

- Replace filter
- Inspect indoor coil drain pan one more time — late-August storms cause backups
- Indoor humidity over 60% with the AC running constantly → oversized AC or thermostat-only control. Variable-speed retrofit or whole-house dehumidifier worth pricing

September

Heat easing but Birmingham still hits 90°+. Don't let down the guard yet.

- Replace filter
- Schedule fall heating tune-up. October calendars fill fast
- Inspect gas furnace ignitor (if accessible) or heat pump reversing valve. Catch wear now, not in November

October

Transition month. Both AC and heat run on different days. Best month for service appointments.

- Replace filter
- Hour-long heat test. Burning smell? Dust on heat strips burning off is normal first run; gas or chemical smell is not
- Attic insulation check — if under R-30, fix before heat season. Insulation is cheaper than a furnace upgrade

November

Heat ramps up. North metro first cold snap is usually second week of November.

- Replace filter
- Open every supply register — even in unused rooms. Closed registers raise duct static pressure and stress the blower
- CO detector battery check

December

Cold settles in. Heat runs heavy.

- Replace filter
- Heat pump owners: defrost cycle should kick in every 30-90 min in freezing weather. If it doesn't, schedule service
- If your unit is 12+ years old and you've had two service calls this year, start budgeting for replacement before next summer

The Five Most-Ignored Items

- Weak capacitor (causes hard starts, eventually kills compressor)
- Slow refrigerant leak (causes coil freeze-up, blower damage, then compressor failure)
- Partially clogged drain line (causes ceiling water damage in summer)
- Failing contactor (causes burning smell, electrical damage)
- Bypassed safety switch (fire risk — fix immediately)

About Lockwell HVAC

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Birmingham, AL metro — Gardendale, Fultondale, Center Point, Irondale, Bessemer, Hueytown, Pleasant Grove, Helena

This guide was written by working HVAC techs, not marketing teams. Direct, honest, practical. Real Alabama numbers, real local context, no guarantees we can't back up.

If something in here saved you a service call — or saved you from a bad one — share it with a neighbor. That's the whole point.

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