

CONTACT

Robert Lenney

Robert@gutterglove.com

(916) 778-8777

Gutter Cleaning Tips From A Pro

Gutter cleaning pro offers advice and safety tips that just might save your life

Fall is the time of year to get your house in order before winter sets in. For most homeowners, this means it is once again time for a good, old-fashioned gutter cleaning.

According To Robert Lenney, gutter cleaning expert, it's the semi-annual project that strikes fear into the heart of all urban and suburban warriors who face that dreaded request, "Honey, it's time to clean out the gutters!"

"At its best, gutter cleaning is a tedious and disgusting task. At worst, it can be scary and downright dangerous. One slight misstep and you are heading to the hospital with a broken bone and bruised ego," says Lenney.

Each year, Consumer Reports states that about 180,000 homeowner accidents and fatalities occur that are ladder related.¹ That is why it's best to be prepared to do the job right. Here are a few tips and tricks that Mr. Lenney, co-owner of Gutterglove suggests for safe and effective gutter cleaning.

Ladder Safety: Always let someone know you will using a ladder to work on your roof or gutters. Use a safe and sturdy ladder, preferably with a small shelf strong enough to hold a five-gallon bucket to collect gutter debris. Make sure to secure the bucket with a lanyard. We recommend a four-legged step ladder for a single story home, and an extension ladder for a two-story home. An orchard ladder is not recommended because there are only three legs for support and they can become unbalanced.

A wooden ladder is also not recommended because they are often wobbly and difficult to safely balance. Fiberglass ladders seem to be the sturdiest, but are also the heaviest. If you are cleaning gutters for hours upon hours, muscle fatigue can set in from moving the heavy ladder numerous times. If this is the case, you should try using an aluminum ladder, which is the second-choice option for strength and support.

Inspect the ladder for defects, dents or loose parts before climbing. If your ladder is fastened together with screws and bolts, make sure all parts are tightened. When opening up a step ladder, make sure the extension-hinge arms are fully extended and locked in place.

Before climbing the ladder, lightly jump on the first rung a few times to make sure the ground is secure. Sometimes the soil is soft, or there might be a gopher hole underneath one of the ladder legs. Either condition could cause the ladder to collapse with the combined weight of the ladder and a person. A piece of half-inch plywood can be placed under the ladder legs to keep it level and steady.

When climbing the ladder, always remember the "Three Point Rule." As much as possible try to have both legs and one hand firmly secure on the ladder at all times to provide stability and balance while cleaning. Conversely, do not lean out from the ladder balancing on one leg while using two hands to clean debris from the gutter. Oftentimes, it is this stretching and reaching for that last scoop of debris

that lands a person in the hospital. Lastly, if at all possible, have someone hold the ladder to provide additional safety while climbing.

Garden Hose: To use a garden hose with normal water pressure (30-40 psi - the standard for municipal water services), simply attach a pistol-grip trigger spray nozzle. This type of spray nozzle allows you to adjust the water pressure with the use of just one hand. This style of spray nozzle comes with a handy pistol-grip trigger, allowing it to be easily hung over the front edge of the gutter while moving the ladder, or while using a gutter scoop. This type of spray nozzle can be purchased at any hardware store.

Spraying out the gutter is generally best when most of the larger debris has already been removed. It's difficult to spray out leaves and pine needles that have piled up over the summer and fall. Spray toward the downspout (leader pipe) so the small, murky debris flows down the downspout. If the downspout is connected to an underground drain that goes out to your street, the base of the downspout needs to be disconnected so the debris can be released at this point, preventing a potential clog further down the system under your lawn or driveway.

Gutter Scoop: Scooping out the leafy debris seems to be the best overall method for cleaning out the gutter. An excellent tool for this job is the bright orange plastic "Gutter Getter" scoop, which can be purchased at most hardware stores. This tool is unique because the front scooping edge is very thin and it forms itself to the bottom of the gutter trough, making it easy to scoop out even the toughest of debris in any size gutter system.

Stay away from using a metal scooping tool because the bottom of the gutter and seams can be damaged. Scraping the bottom of a steel gutter can introduce areas to rust, and if the bottom of the gutter is already rusting, the rusting process could speed up. Using a metal scooping tool can also damage seams in the gutter because the motion of scraping out the bottom of a gutter with a metal tool can damage the caulking that seals two ends of a gutter together (called a seam).

An extension pole can also be attached to the gutter scoop for reaching farther to clean the gutter, reducing ladder moves.

Wear Gloves: Gloves can help protect hands against dirty, rotting leaf debris that often contains bird, pigeon and squirrel droppings that are ridden with bacteria. Gloves can also prevent painful cuts from the torn metal shards of an old, ragged gutter. Cotton gloves can soak up dirty water that exposes skin to bacteria. Leather gloves are not as maneuverable and tend to shrivel up when they dry after cleaning. Rubber gloves can get poked or torn by metal shards in the gutter. Thick, suede glove material is recommended because it is superior to cotton, thin leather or rubber gloves.

Protective Eye Wear: Eye protection is a must because one never knows what might fly out of the downspout when cleaning gutters. People have experienced rats, birds, frogs, wasps and bees leaving at high speeds once they start removing a clog, and the last thing they want to have happen is an eye injury.

Rake Off Roof: Rake all debris off the roof first. Otherwise, the next rain will wash all the debris down into the clean gutter, clogging it up again. Also, debris left on the roof can lead to water damming up in valleys or around the chimney, which can cause erosion and roof leaks over time.

Rubber Shoes: If walking on the roof is necessary to perform gutter cleaning, it is good to use rubber soled shoes. Rubber soles tend to adhere best and prevent slipping and falls. Roof tops tend to be

moist in the morning, so it is best to walk on the roof after the sun is well up in the sky and has dried up all the moisture. Late mornings or early afternoons are the best times to walk on a roof.

For wood shake roofs, an excellent option is to wear special spiked roofing shoes called Korkers, which have small, metal spikes similar to golf shoes, helping attain a good grip when walking on the roof. However, if the gutter cleaning project is bad enough to warrant Korkers, it is probably best at that point to use a professional gutter cleaning company. Wearing Korkers can be tricky, and slips can still occur.

Downspouts Unclogged: Make sure the downspouts (leader pipe) are clear. After all the gutters are cleaned out, run the water hose down the downspout at full pressure. If the water backs up out of the top, a clog is present. Normally, it can be unclogged by tapping on the side of the downspout. But if that doesn't work, the downspout and back need to be removed, and it should be flushed from the bottom. If a clog is present, and the downspout is connected to an underground drain, it is best to disconnect the bottom of the downspout from the underground drain. Otherwise, the clog may move to the underground drain.

CAUTION: When unclogging the downspout, make sure protective eyewear is being used, because anything can escape from the downspout at high speeds once the clog is being removed.

Downspout Chain: If the downspout makes an annoying dripping sound during or after a rain storm, a special decorative chain can be installed to hang down in place of a traditional downspout. The rainwater runs down the chain gracefully and looks rather beautiful, like a decorative fountain.

There are also magnetic sponges available that stick to the side of the downspout and absorb water to stop the dripping sound. In place of a sponge, people have tried using men's underwear and socks in downspouts for just this purpose, but it is not recommend.

Clean Gutters Two Times A Year: Make sure gutters are cleaned at least twice a year, once in the fall and again in the spring. One main reason for cleaning out gutters is to eliminate the possibility of water damage from rainwater runoff due to a clogged gutter. Another reason is to reduce the possibility of rust corrosion. Even though it may not rain during the summer, if there is debris in the steel gutters, the rusting process can speed up. It's difficult for rust to speed up with clean gutters. The faster the rusting process, the sooner new gutters will be needed.

Power Line Hazard: When cleaning gutters around a power line cable that drops from the power pole to the roof of a home, conduct a visual inspection of the electrical cable where it connects to the roof. This is to ensure that the protective wire insulation hasn't rubbed off through years of wear-and-tear by weather and nearby trees. If the cable appears to have damage, do not attempt to repair it. Call a licensed professional electrical contractor to fix it.

If it's raining and there is an electrical wire problem, do not attempt to clean out the gutters until the wires are fixed. Water is a dangerous conductor of electricity. Whether it's raining or not, it would be a good idea to have the electrical wiring repaired before cleaning out your gutters.

It is not advisable to use a metal ladder near power lines when cleaning out your gutters. A fiberglass ladder is a better safety solution in this situation.

Gutter Guards: Using a quality gutter guard can eliminate the need for cleaning out gutters. Consider carefully the manufacturer's claims before purchasing a gutter protection system that keeps out leaves and pine needles, because many promises are made that can't be delivered.

According to Lenney, he and his staff have found an amazing collection of items while cleaning gutters, including men's underwear, diapers, socks, pigeon droppings, golf balls, tennis balls, syringes with sharps, dead animals, aluminum cans, children's toys, live adult rats with babies in the nest, small and large frogs, wasp and bee nests, snakes in areas like Florida, books, newspapers, nails, and tile pieces. These are in addition, of course, to the usual debris, such as leaves, pine needles, seed pods and sand grit.

Lenney can't turn this annual tedious job into a Disneyland experience, but he can make the job easier with these few simple cleaning tips and tricks while keeping safety in mind. Happy cleaning!

Side Bar:

TOP 10 TIPS FOR GUTTER CLEANING

Always let someone know you are working on a roof.

Use a ladder with a shelf and a plywood platform for stabilization.

Clean off roof first.

Wear rubber-soled shoes or Korkers (shoes with grip spikes) for stability when walking on roof.

Use a small plastic spade or gutter scoop.

Use gloves and proper eyewear.

Unclog downspouts with a garden hose that has an adjustable spray.

Install a downspout chain to eliminate annoying rain dripping sounds.

Watch out for hazardous power lines.

Clean gutters twice a year – better yet, install gutter guards!

Source - Robert Lenney: www.gutterglove.com

###

¹Consumer Reports, "Consumer Reports Rates 13 Ladders 'Not Acceptable' for Safety Risks; Multiple Consumer Weight Classifications, Voluntary Standards Troublesome; Ladder Ratings and Tips on Safe Use." AScribe Newswire via M2 Communications, Ltd. (Yonkers, New York: August 7, 2006).

About Robert Lenney

Robert Lenney is a professional gutter cleaning expert whose company has cleaned out more than 4.5 million feet of gutter in northern California since 1996, including the prestigious Stanford University. For more information, he can be reached at his office at (877) 662-5644 or on his cell at (916) 778-8777, or through his website: www.Gutterglove.com.