

The Texas Brick Maintenance Calendar: A Year of Small Jobs That Prevent Big Ones

A Month-by-Month Guide to Keeping Your Brick Out of the
Repair Column

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Chapter 1: The Brick House Maintenance

Checklist Nobody Gave You at Closing

When you bought your brick house, somebody probably handed you a folder full of appliance manuals and told you the warranty on the water heater. Nobody handed you anything for the brick. That's a shame, because the brick walls are the most expensive thing on the outside of your house to fix, and they're the one thing that gets almost no attention until something goes wrong.

I've been doing this fifty years. Here's what fifty years taught me: brick doesn't fail all at once. It fails in small, quiet steps — a joint opens a little, a downspout backs up one season, a sprinkler head drifts two degrees over the summer — and by the time you notice, the small job has turned into the big one. The difference between a fifty-dollar afternoon and a five-thousand-dollar repair is almost always the same thing: somebody was watching, or somebody wasn't.

This book is the watching. It's a brick house maintenance checklist organized the way your house actually experiences a year — month by month, season by season, Texas weather

and all. Every month has one or two small jobs. None of them take more than an afternoon. Most of them take fifteen minutes. Do them, and your brick stays in the "fine" column year after year. Skip them, and you're my customer sooner rather than later — and I'd rather you keep your money.

A word on what this book is and isn't. This is seasonal brick care: inspection, small fixes, drainage, vegetation, the little habits that keep a masonry maintenance schedule on track. It's not a repair manual. When a chapter finds something that needs a mason — cracked chimney crown, stair-step cracks through the joints, a bulging wall — I'll say so plainly and point you at the professional. The calendar tells you when to look; looking tells you whether to call.

One more thing before we start. Brick walls in Texas are almost always brick veneer — one layer of brick over a wood frame, with an air gap behind it. That's the house you're maintaining if you live in DFW or most of the state's suburbs. Everything in this book assumes veneer unless I say otherwise. And the calendar assumes Texas: our springs come with storms, our summers cook, our falls are the sweet spot, and our winters freeze just hard enough, just often enough, to punish anything water's been getting into. Let's

walk the year.

Chapter 2: January — The Freeze Watch

January in Texas is not a month of deep, constant cold. It's a month of swings — sixty degrees on Tuesday, a hard freeze on Friday, thawed again by Sunday. For brick, that swing is the whole story. Water gets into mortar joints and small cracks on the warm day, freezes overnight, expands about nine percent, and pries the joint open a hair wider. Then the next warm day, more water gets in. The Brick Industry Association's maintenance guidance — their Technical Note 46, the standard reference on masonry maintenance — puts freeze-thaw right at the center of what kills masonry in climates that cycle above and below freezing. North Texas cycles like that all winter.

Your January job is the freeze watch. After any hard freeze, walk your walls and look at three things.

First, the chimney. It's the most exposed masonry on the house — full weather on all four sides — and freeze damage shows there first. Look for mortar crumbs at the base, faces of brick that look freshly popped or flaked, and white staining that wasn't there before the freeze. If you see new

spalling — brick faces peeling or crumbling — photograph it. That photo is the "before" for the rest of the year.

Second, any wall where a hose bib, downspout, or AC drain puts water near brick. In freezing weather, water sitting against the wall is the enemy. If your condensate line drips onto a brick wall every day the heat runs, redirect it this week. A piece of PVC pipe costs almost nothing and the fix takes twenty minutes.

Third, don't seal anything in January. I say this because somebody always gets the idea to caulk weep holes in winter to stop drafts. Don't. Weep holes — the small gaps in the bottom course of brick — are the wall's drainage. Sealing them traps water in the wall cavity, and in a freeze cycle that trapped water does exactly what we just talked about. The air gap behind your brick veneer is outside your insulated envelope, so open weep holes don't raise your heating bill. Leave them open.

Cost of the January job: zero dollars and a walk around the house with coffee. That's the theme of this whole calendar — the expensive jobs are the ones you didn't catch.

Chapter 3: February — Plan the Spring Walk and Check the Gutters

February is the planning month. The freeze watch continues — our worst ice usually hits in February — but your real job this month is to set up the March inspection and to deal with the one thing that damages more Texas brick than anything except age: gutters.

Roof water has to go somewhere. When gutters and downspouts work, it goes away from the house. When they're clogged with leaves from the fall, it goes over the side and straight down the brick. A gutter that overflows for one wet winter saturates the wall behind it season after season. I've seen whole walls of mortar ruined by a downspout elbow that came loose three winters ago and nobody noticed.

So in February, while the trees are still bare and you can see everything: walk the house and look up. Every downspout should discharge at least several feet from the foundation — extensions, splash blocks, or buried drains, something that gets the water away. Look for the telltale green or dark staining on the brick under each gutter line; that's the

signature of a gutter that overflows in rain. Check that gutters are actually attached — pull gently on the low end. Texas storms work fasteners loose, and a gutter that's pulled an inch away from the fascia dumps its whole load down the wall.

If you find problems, February is the month to schedule the gutter fix, not April. Gutter work in Texas is typically a few hundred dollars for cleaning and resealing, more if sections need replacing — depends on the house and the access, same as everything else. Get it done before the spring storms, because a March thunderstorm finds every weakness you meant to fix.

Also in February: buy a cheap pair of binoculars if you don't own one. Ten-power binoculars turn your March chimney inspection from a guess into a real look. Thirty or forty dollars at any sporting goods store, and you'll use them every season for the rest of the time you own the house.

Chapter 4: March — The Spring Inspection

Walk

March is the big one. Winter's done its work, the weather's pleasant, and this is the walk that sets the agenda for the whole year. Give it thirty minutes and a screwdriver — the flat kind, for the tap test you'll read about in a minute.

This is your annual brick inspection checklist, the core of the whole calendar. Start at the chimney — it's always first because it takes the worst weather on the house. From the ground with your binoculars: are the mortar joints recessed, crumbling, or missing? Is the crown — the cap on top — cracked? A cracked crown lets water straight down the flue chase, and crown damage plus bad joints is the combination that turns a repointing job into a rebuild. Note what you see. Photograph it.

Walk the south and west walls next. Sun and weather hit these sides hardest in Texas, and mortar fails there first. Now the screwdriver test: drag the flat blade firmly across mortar joints at several heights, a dozen spots per wall. Sound mortar resists — the blade leaves a mark but the joint stays

solid. Failed mortar powders, flakes, or scoops out. Count roughly what fraction fails. If a quarter or more of the joints on a wall fail the test, that wall goes on this year's repair list. If it's just a few spots, note them for watching.

Check under windows and at sills. Water concentrates below openings. Look for white powdery staining — efflorescence. A little, one time, is cosmetic. Efflorescence that keeps coming back after every rain means water is moving through the wall and the joints are its highway. That's a find-somebody month, not a watch-it month, if it's heavy.

Walk the base of every wall. Mortar crumbs piled at the base are the wall telling on itself — some grit is normal aging, piles mean active deterioration. While you're down there, check the weep holes: the small gaps in the bottom course, roughly every couple of feet. They should be open. If they're packed with mud, mulch, or spider nests, clear them gently with a piece of stiff wire — don't jam it hard, there's flashing behind the brick you don't want to puncture. If your landscaping mulch is piled up over the weep holes, pull it back. Grade and mulch should sit below the weep line, not burying it.

Check where sprinklers hit. Texas yards run sprinklers most of the year, and a head that sprays the wall every morning is

quietly the most destructive thing on this whole list. Walk the system while it runs — yes, actually turn it on and walk it — and look for any arc that touches brick. Redirect those heads today. It's free, it takes minutes, and it stops wet-dry cycling that eats mortar joints alive. This one adjustment, done once, prevents more damage than any other single item in this book.

Write everything down. Which walls, roughly how much bad joint, chimney condition, weep holes cleared, sprinkler heads moved. Date it. This record is what turns next March's walk from a fresh mystery into a comparison — and comparison is how you catch change early.

Chapter 5: April — Vegetation, Vines, and the Things Growing Into Your Walls

April in Texas is when everything grows, including the things growing into your brick. Vegetation against masonry is one of the slowest, quietest damage sources there is — the Brick Industry Association's guidance specifically calls it out: plants trap moisture against the brick, roots dig into mortar joints as they grow, and the damp shade they create is an invitation to mold and mildew.

Your April job is the vegetation cutback. Walk every wall and look for:

- **Ivy and vines on the brick.** Cut them at the base and let them die on the wall — do not pull live vines off. Pulling rips mortar out of the joints and damages brick faces. Once the dead growth dries, brush it off with a stiff fiber brush, not a wire brush. Wire brushes score brick faces and open them up to water.
- **Bushes and shrubs touching the wall.** Trim everything back so there's airflow between the plant and the brick — a foot of clearance is a good rule.

Bushes against the wall hold moisture there after every rain and every sprinkler run, and that constant damp is what grows the green film and rots the mortar.

- **Tree branches overhanging the roof and walls.**

Branches drop leaves into gutters (see February), drip water onto the same spot of wall for hours after rain, and in a storm they scrape the brick. Cut back anything touching or nearly touching the house.

- **Grass and weeds at the wall base.** Keep the bottom course clear so weep holes breathe and you can see the wall base during inspections.

One thing people ask: what about a trellis with climbing roses, the pretty look? The BIA's answer is practical — a trellis or lattice that holds the plant off the wall is far less risky than growth directly on the brick. Air moves behind a trellis. If you want the look, build the trellis. The plant gets its wall, the brick gets its airflow.

April is also the month to look at any sealant joints — the flexible caulked joints around windows, doors, and where brick meets other materials. Sealants live a much shorter life than mortar; industry guidance puts sealant service life as

short as five years in harsh exposure. If the caulk around your windows is cracked, pulling away, or missing chunks, water is getting behind the trim and into the wall. Recaulking is a homeowner-level job: cut out the failed sealant, clean the joint, and lay a fresh bead of a quality exterior sealant. A tube costs a few dollars; the water it keeps out would cost thousands.

Chapter 6: May — Storm Season Prep

May is Texas storm season — hail, driving rain, wind that finds every loose thing on the house. Your brick's job in a storm is to shed water, and May's job is to make sure it can.

Walk the roof-wall junctions. Where the roof meets a brick wall — chimneys, dormers, second-story walls above a lower roof — there should be flashing: metal that directs water away from the joint. Look for flashing that's lifted, bent, rusted through, or missing. Step flashing around a chimney is the classic failure point. You can't fix flashing from the ground, but you can spot the problem and get a roofer or mason scheduled before the big storms, not after water's been running behind the brick for a month.

Check the chimney cap and spark arrestor if you have them — a missing cap turns every rainstorm into water poured directly down the flue chase, soaking the chimney masonry from the inside out. Caps are inexpensive; the damage from not having one is not.

May is also when you deal with anything the March walk put on the repair list. Spring and fall are the sweet spots for

masonry work in Texas — moderate temperatures, mortar cures at the right pace — and every good mason is booking up. If March found a wall that needs repointing or a chimney that needs attention, get the bids now and get on the schedule. Waiting until the mortar is actively falling out doesn't make the job cheaper; it makes it bigger.

And one storm-specific habit: after any severe storm with hail or wind-driven rain, do a five-minute walk. Look for new cracks, displaced flashing, and mortar on the ground that wasn't there before. Storms do in an hour what weather does in a year. Catching it in May beats discovering it in October.

Chapter 7: June — The Sprinkler Audit

June is when Texas irrigation runs hardest, and it's when sprinkler damage to brick peaks. I put a sprinkler check in March, but June gets its own audit because heads drift, nozzles clog and spray sideways, and new landscaping goes in — all of which change where the water lands.

Here's why this matters enough for its own month. Brick and mortar are porous. A sprinkler head that hits the same section of wall every morning does something no rainstorm does: it wets the wall daily and never lets it fully dry. That constant wet-dry cycling is brutal on mortar joints — it dissolves and redeposits salts, it keeps the joint damp enough for biological growth, and in winter it loads the wall with water right before the freezes. I have walked houses where the single worst section of mortar on the entire building was a four-foot square exactly where a rotor head overshot the flower bed. The rest of the house was fine.

The June audit: run every zone, walk every zone, and watch where the water actually lands — not where the installer said it lands. Adjust, redirect, or replace any head that touches

brick. Check for heads that are stuck, tilted, or spraying through a bush onto the wall behind it. While you're at it, check that drip lines and soaker hoses aren't piled against the foundation saturating the soil at the wall base — that water wicks up into the bottom courses and feeds efflorescence.

This is also the month to look at the green stuff. Algae and mildew love Texas summer — heat, humidity, shade, damp. A green or black film on the north side or under dense shade is usually just biological growth, not structural damage. The fix is gentle: a soft-bristle brush, water, and a mild detergent. Not a pressure washer on full blast — aggressive pressure washing erodes mortar joints and can damage brick faces, and the BIA specifically warns that pressure cleaning is work for experienced hands because improper use permanently damages the finish. If you must pressure wash, keep it low pressure, keep the nozzle back, keep the angle shallow — or hire somebody who does it for a living.

Chapter 8: July — The Heat Check

July in Texas is survival mode — for you and for the house. Brick handles heat fine; it's the things around the brick that suffer, and your July job is to check them.

First, expansion joints. Long brick walls have intentional vertical breaks — expansion joints — that let the wall move with temperature. Texas heat moves walls. A little seasonal shifting at these joints is normal. What isn't normal is a joint that's gapping wider at the top than the bottom, or one that's opened dramatically wider than it was in March. Photograph your expansion joints in March and compare in July — that's the comparison habit paying off. Uneven gapping can be an early sign of foundation movement, and the joint is often the first place it shows because it's already a break in the pattern. If a joint looks wrong compared to spring, that's a professional-look month, not a wait-and-see month.

Second, check anything metal attached to the brick: shutters, light fixtures, hose reels, satellite mounts. Heat cycling works fasteners loose over the years, and every penetration through the brick is a potential water entry. Tighten what's loose, and

check that the sealant around each penetration is intact. A two-dollar tube of sealant around a loose fixture beats a rotted wall cavity.

Third, the attic and interior side. July is a good month to look at the inside of your exterior walls — not with tools, just with eyes. Water stains on interior drywall at the base of exterior walls, musty smells in rooms against brick walls, paint bubbling near the floor: these are the interior symptoms of exterior water problems. The BIA's inspection guidance specifically includes interior surveys for exactly this reason — stains and finish damage inside often point at water getting in outside. If you find something, the cause is outside: failed sealant, bad flashing, clogged weep holes, a gutter issue. The calendar's other months fix those; July is when you check whether any of them have been failing quietly.

July is also honest about what not to do: don't schedule masonry repairs in the brutal stretch if you can avoid it. Fresh mortar in 105-degree heat dries too fast — the surface sets before the joint cures through, which weakens it. Good masons manage it with early mornings and shading and misting, but if you have the choice, the March walk's repair list gets done in April or waits for October.

Chapter 9: August — The Drainage Review

August is typically the driest, hottest month — which makes it the best month to think about water, because you can see the drainage system for what it is without rain hiding the problems.

Walk the grading around the house. Soil should slope away from the foundation everywhere — you want water running away from the walls, not toward them. Look for low spots where water ponds against the brick after rain or irrigation. In Texas clay, grading settles and shifts; a yard that drained fine five years ago may not now. Low spots against the wall keep the bottom courses wet, feed efflorescence, and in a freeze, they're the wettest masonry on the house.

Check that mulch and soil still sit below the weep holes — spring planting and summer mulching have a way of burying the bottom course. If the weep line is buried, pull the grade back. This takes a shovel and an hour, and it's one of the highest-value maintenance jobs on the calendar.

Look at the driveway and patio where they meet the house. Concrete settles; when a patio slab settles toward the house, it

funnels water straight at the wall base. If you see standing water against the brick after the sprinklers run, that's a drainage problem wearing a concrete disguise.

August is also the month to service the chimney if you use the fireplace. Chimney sweeps book up in fall — everybody calls in October. Call in August, get the sweep and inspection done before the rush, and if the sweep finds crown cracks or flue problems, you've got September to get the masonry fixed before burn season. A chimney inspection and sweep typically runs in the low hundreds of dollars — depends on the chimney and the market — and it's the cheapest insurance a fireplace owner buys all year.

Chapter 10: September — The Fall Inspection Walk

September is the second big walk of the year — the mirror of March. Same route, same screwdriver, same binoculars, same notebook. The question this time is different: what did summer do?

Compare against your March notes and photos. New mortar crumbling that wasn't crumbling in spring? A crack that's longer than the one you photographed in March? Efflorescence that's back after you noted it in spring? Change is the signal. A wall that looks the same as March is a wall that's stable. A wall that's changed in six months is a wall that's telling you something.

September's specific checks:

- **Weep holes, again.** Summer insects love weep holes — mud daubers in particular will pack them with mud. Clear them gently, same as March. If pests are a recurring problem, purpose-made weep hole covers — small stainless mesh inserts — keep insects and mice out while letting water and air through. They're a few

dollars each and press into the opening. What you never use: caulk, mortar, expanding foam, or anything that seals the hole shut.

- **Sealant joints, again.** Summer heat is hard on sealants. Check the caulk lines around windows and doors for cracking or separation that wasn't there in spring.
- **The chimney crown, again.** Summer thermal cycling — hot days, cooler nights, repeated hundreds of times — works on crowns. If March was fine and September shows a new crack, get it sealed before winter. Crown sealant applied in fall protects all winter; a crack left open all winter invites freeze-thaw into the crown itself.
- **Vegetation, again.** Summer growth spurt. Cut back anything that's reached the wall since April.

September is also the month to schedule fall masonry work. October and November are the year's best window for mortar work in Texas — mild temperatures, lower humidity, good cure conditions — and masons' schedules fill. If the September walk found a wall that needs repointing, get it on the calendar now.

Chapter 11: October — The Sweet Spot for Repairs

October is the month to get masonry work done. Temperatures are moderate, humidity drops, mortar cures the way it's supposed to, and you're ahead of the winter freeze cycles. If this year's walks found work — repointing, chimney crown repair, brick replacement, flashing fixes — October is when it happens.

A few notes on getting it done right, from the repair side of my life:

Get the scope in writing — square footage, which walls, what mortar, how deep the cut. Never pay in full upfront. And hire a mason, not a handyman — repointing is masonry work, and the skill is in the hands, not the bag. (I wrote a whole separate book on reading bids and hiring right — it's in the free library at the back of this book.)

October is also gutter-cleaning month, round two. The leaves are coming down. Clean gutters before the winter rains, check the downspout extensions one more time, and make sure everything from the February and March checks is still

in place. A gutter that worked in spring can be a gutter full of oak leaves by Halloween.

And if you didn't need any masonry work this year — congratulations. That's the calendar working. The October entry in your notebook reads "walked, no change, gutters cleaned," and that's the best outcome this book can produce.

Chapter 12: November — Winterize the Water

November is freeze-prep month. Texas freezes are short but they hit hard — a single overnight freeze with water sitting in the wrong places does more damage than a month of cold rain.

The checklist:

- **Hose bibs.** Disconnect hoses, drain them, and shut off and drain the bib if you have a separate valve. A burst hose bib soaks the wall behind it all winter — and it's the wall you walk past every day without noticing.
- **Irrigation.** Shut the system down and drain the lines before the first hard freeze. A cracked sprinkler line at the wall base saturates the bottom courses all winter. While you're at it, confirm one more time that no head was left spraying the wall.
- **Exposed pipes and spigots near brick.** Cover them. The five-dollar foam cover beats the repair.
- **The chimney.** If you burn wood, you're burning now or about to. The August sweep should be done; if it isn't, do it now. Check the cap is in place before the

winter rains.

- **Firewood.** If you stack firewood against the house — stop. Move it away from the walls. A woodpile against brick holds moisture against the wall all winter, invites termites to the neighborhood, and blocks your view of the wall base during inspections. Eighteen inches of clearance, minimum, and never stacked against the brick.

November is also the month to photograph the house. Take a full set of exterior photos — every elevation, the chimney, the wall bases — in the good fall light. These are your winter "before" photos. If something changes by March, you'll have the comparison. Digital photos are free; the record is priceless.

Chapter 13: December — The Quiet Month

December is the month the calendar rests — mostly. The work is done, the winterizing is done, and your job is just to watch.

Keep the freeze watch habit from January: after hard freezes, glance at the chimney and the walls for new spalling or mortar on the ground. It takes two minutes and it's the only December job that matters for the brick.

The other December job is paperwork — ten minutes, indoors, warm. Pull out the notebook and write the year-end summary: what you found in March, what you did in April through November, what changed in September, what the plan is for next spring. One page. This is the document that turns you from a homeowner with a brick house into a homeowner who knows his brick house — and if you ever sell, it's a quiet piece of proof that the place was cared for. Buyers and inspectors notice.

Then close the notebook. You've done more for your brick this year than most homeowners do in a decade. The calendar starts again in January.

Chapter 14: The Fifteen-Minute Monthly Habit That Ties It All Together

Twelve chapters, twelve months — but here's the truth: the calendar only works if the habit sticks. So let me shrink the whole book into the one habit that matters.

Once a month, walk your house. Fifteen minutes. Same route every time: chimney glance, sun-side walls, under the windows, wall bases, weep holes, sprinkler check while the system runs. You're not doing the full March inspection every month — you're doing a pass, looking for change. New cracks. New staining. New crumbs at the base. Anything that wasn't there last month.

Change is the whole game. Brick fails slowly, and slow failure is only visible as change-over-time. The monthly walk catches change at one month old instead of one year old. A crack caught at one month is a watch item. A crack caught at one year is a repair.

Keep the notebook by the door you use for the walk. Date, weather, what you saw, one line. "Oct 14 — clear, 72°. No change. Gutters clean." That's a complete entry. The notebook

is the cheapest diagnostic tool ever made for a brick house, and it never needs batteries.

This is the masonry maintenance schedule the industry recommends, by the way — the Brick Industry Association's maintenance guidance calls for periodic, preferably seasonal, inspections with documentation: notes, photographs, comparisons over time. You're not doing something I invented. You're doing what the people who make the brick say to do, adapted to a Texas year.

Chapter 15: The Homeowner's Brick Toolkit

Everything in this calendar can be done with a small kit. You don't need a mason's truck — you need a shelf in the garage. Here's what to keep on hand, all of it inexpensive, all of it used somewhere in these twelve months:

- **A flat screwdriver.** For the tap test on mortar joints. It lives in the kit, not the junk drawer, so it's there every March and September.
- **Binoculars, 8x or 10x.** For the chimney and upper walls. The single best inspection tool a homeowner can own.
- **A stiff fiber brush — not wire.** For cleaning weep holes, brushing off dead vine growth, and sweeping mortar crumbs. Wire brushes score brick faces; fiber doesn't.
- **A piece of stiff wire** — a straightened coat hanger works — for gently clearing weep holes. Not a drill, not a screwdriver jammed hard. Gentle.
- **A quality exterior sealant and a caulk gun.** For the sealant joints around windows and doors in April and September. Buy the good stuff — the cheap tubes fail

in two Texas summers and you're doing it again.

- **A notebook and a pen.** Dated entries, sketches, measurements. Or use your phone's notes app — but keep it in one place, every month, for years.
- **Your phone's camera.** Before-and-after photos of every crack you decide to watch. Stand in the same spot each time so the comparison is honest.
- **A five-gallon bucket and a soft-bristle brush** for the gentle wash jobs — detergent and water, the BIA's recommended first resort for dirty brick.
- **Foam faucet covers** for November. Buy them in October before the rush.
- **A tube of chimney crown sealant** if your crown has hairline cracks the sweep said were minor. Applied in September or October on a dry day, it buys years.

That's the whole kit — maybe sixty or seventy dollars if you're starting from nothing, most of it one-time. Compare that to one emergency mason call and the math does itself.

Chapter 16: Questions Homeowners Ask Me About Brick Maintenance

How often should I really inspect my brick? The industry guidance says seasonally — four real looks a year — and this calendar gives you twelve light ones plus two deep ones. If you do nothing else, do the March and September walks. Those two catch almost everything.

My house is only ten years old. Do I need this yet? Yes — the calendar isn't about age, it's about water. A ten-year-old house with a sprinkler head spraying the wall and clogged weep holes can have worse mortar in one section than a forty-year-old house that's been watched. Start the notebook now; future you will thank present you.

Can I pressure wash my brick? Carefully or not at all. Low pressure, wide fan, kept back from the wall — that's the safe end. Full-blast zero-degree nozzle held close — that's how you carve the faces off brick and blast mortar out of joints. The Brick Industry Association warns that improper pressure washing permanently damages brick finish. When in doubt, soft brush and detergent first.

Should I seal my brick walls? Usually not as a maintenance item. Sealers don't fix failed mortar — they get applied over problems and trap water behind them. The right sequence is always: fix the mortar, fix the drainage, then ask whether a breathable water repellent makes sense for your exposure. And "breathable" is non-negotiable — a sealer that doesn't breathe turns your wall into a moisture sandwich.

What about painting the brick? Paint is a one-way door. Once brick is painted, it's painted forever — stripping it damages the faces, and paint traps moisture in the wall. If you're considering it for maintenance reasons, fix the underlying issue instead. Paint hides problems; it doesn't solve them.

The white powder keeps coming back. Is my wall ruined? Probably not. Recurring efflorescence means water is moving through the wall — find the water and the powder stops. Check gutters, sprinklers, grading, and weep holes first. Those four solve the large majority of efflorescence cases I see.

Do I need to worry about the brick on a new-build home? Walk it like any other house. New construction has its own issues — mortar droppings clogging the cavity behind the brick, weep holes missed or mortared shut, flashing laps left

open. Your builder's warranty year is the time to find these, not year five.

When is a crack just a crack? Hairline cracks in mortar alone, not growing, on a stable wall — usually shrinkage or minor settlement, watch them. Cracks that stair-step through joints, cracks wider at one end than the other, cracks that grow between your March and September photos — those get a professional look. The notebook is what turns "is it growing?" from a guess into a measurement.

Chapter 17: When the Calendar Says "Call Somebody"

The calendar is for maintenance. It's not for repair, and it's not for diagnosis. Here's where the line is — the things your monthly walk might find that mean it's time to call a professional:

- **Stair-step cracks running through mortar joints over a long distance.** That's often the wall moving, not the mortar aging. Repointing over active movement is painting a sinking ship — get the movement evaluated first.
- **A bulging or leaning wall.** Stop. That's structural. Call a masonry or foundation professional and say exactly what you see.
- **Widespread spalling — brick faces popping off across a wall.** Individual spalled bricks get replaced; a whole wall of them means water is getting in somewhere systemic, and you need the source found, not just the symptoms patched.
- **Efflorescence that keeps coming back after you've**

fixed the water sources. Persistent white staining means water is still moving through the wall from somewhere you haven't found. Time for experienced eyes.

- **Chimney problems beyond surface mortar** — a leaning stack, a badly cracked crown, flue damage the sweep flagged. Chimneys are the most failure-prone masonry on the house; don't improvise on them.
- **Anything you're unsure about.** A good mason would rather look at a nothing and tell you it's a nothing than have you watch a something turn into a rebuild. The inspection is cheap; the rebuild isn't.

When you call, hand over the notebook. A homeowner who walks in with dated notes, photos, and "this crack was half this length in March" gets better diagnosis and better pricing than a homeowner who says "I dunno, it's been like that a while." The calendar doesn't just prevent repairs — it makes the unavoidable ones cheaper, because you catch them early and you describe them precisely.

That's the whole book. Twelve months, fifteen minutes a month, a notebook, a screwdriver, and a pair of binoculars. The small jobs, done on time, keep the big jobs from ever

happening. Your brick will outlast us both if you let it — it just needs somebody watching. Now somebody is.

A Final Word

People ask me why I give this stuff away free. Fifty years in this trade, and the answer's simple: an educated homeowner is the best customer I never have to meet. If this calendar keeps your brick out of my repair column, we've both won. And if the day comes that the calendar finds something real — the crack that keeps growing, the chimney that needs work — you know where to find me.

For the full library of free guides — costs, hiring, repairs, the works — visit [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>). And for the technical side of everything in this book, the [Brick Industry Association maintenance guidance] (<https://www.gobrick.com>) is the industry standard I measure against.

If your walls ever need professional [brick maintenance services] (<https://championbrickrepair.com>), that's what we do — but I'd rather this book keeps you from needing us.

About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick

Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).