

Pool Maintenance Preliminaries

Begin your pool service routine with some preliminaries. These are the things that you need to do first, and as you work through the process, you will see exactly why.

- 1. Empty the Skimmer Baskets** - this is so stuff will not float out of them and get the pool dirty again as you are trying to clean it.
- 2. Service the Poolsweep** - if you have a poolsweep, pull it out of the water and empty the debris. Also check the finger screen (found on any pressure side cleaners).
- 3. Net the Surface** - to remove as much floating debris as possible so that it does not fall to the bottom and mess up your nice clean pool.
- 4. Scoop out Large Items** - if there are any larger items in the pool (large sticks, golfballs, stones, compact cars, etc.) in the bottom of the pool, scoop them out with the net. You do not want to vacuum out anything large that may clog your hose or your skimmer lines.
- 5. Spray off the Deck** - again this is to keep the leafy material from blowing into the pool. It also makes things look really nice once you are done.

With these steps done, take a look at the pool and decide the best method of cleaning. Typically, vacuuming is the very best way to clean the bottom of the pool, but if you have a lot of leaves or sticks, you may want to use a leaf bagger.

Vacuuming the Pool

The largest part of the pool service process is cleaning the dirt and debris off of the bottom of the pool. This is normally done using a pool vacuum, but in some cases, a leaf bagging device may be needed. Here is the process of setting up and using a pool vacuum.

- 1. Assemble the Equipment** - connect your extension pole to the vacuum head. Then connect the vacuum hose to the vacuum head.
- 2. Sink the Vacuum Hose** - before you hook the vacuum hose into your skimmer, you need to get all the air out of it. If you don't, you will suck a bunch of air into your pump and you may lose prime on your pump. To sink the hose, extend the pole and put the head into the water. Slowly reel the hose down into the water, pushing it into the water as water fills the hose. This process can be a little tricky, but with practice, you should be able to do it in about 30 seconds!
- 3. Connect to the Skimmer** - plug the hose into the suction line in the bottom of the skimmer. It is best to put the hose over the deck and into the skimmer. This keeps the hose from floating out if the pump loses prime momentarily.
- 4. Adjust the Valves** - if you are vacuuming from one intake line (i.e. a skimmer), it is important to partially close down the other intakes (main drain and the other skimmer) in order to force adequate suction to the skimmer from which you are vacuuming. If you don't restrict the other intakes, the suction to your vacuum head will be pitiful and the job will take forever.
- 5. Vacuum the Pool** - use straight, slightly overlapping strokes. If your vacuum head is leaving streaks, check the vacuum or try to increase the suction. If this does not solve the problem, you may need to brush the entire pool afterwards to loosen up the dirt that the vacuum will not pick up.

When you are done vacuuming, pull the vacuum head out of the water and let the pump pull the water out of the hose BUT be sure to pull the vacuum hose out of the skimmer suction line before any air goes into that line. You don't want to lose prime on the pump. Adjust the intake valves to their original position and move on to netting and brushing the pool.

Pool Plaster Care

The next step is to care for the plaster, that means brushing the pool and treating any spots in the plaster.

1. Brush the Plaster - it does not hurt to brush the pool entirely, but if you are short on time or short on ambition, be sure to brush at least the walls, seats, steps and spa. In other words, wherever the poolsweep does not cover, it is a good idea to brush. This helps to keep dirt from building up in isolated areas. It also disrupts any algae film before it becomes visible.

2. Check for Spots - look to see any spotting or staining that may be developing. It is best to address algae or stain or scaling before it gets too bad.

Algae usually comes in patches or spots that are yellow, green or black. It should be brushed vigorously with a stainless steel brush and treated with an algacide. Yellow and green algae generally brush off easily, but black algae can be tough since it is very dense and often grows in pits in the plaster.

Organic stains left by leaves, sticks, acorns, pecans and such will eventually bleach out, although slight discoloration remain. A light shock can help speed the process, but will not make it happen overnight.

Metal stains are tougher to remove. They require the use of acid or a metal removal product such as Jack's Magic.

Scaling is a problem that often occurs with age in the pool. It is not unusual to see a light yellow or gray film developing on the plaster. A light acid wash can help treat the problem, but will not necessary remove it altogether. You may increase the roughness of the plaster with an acid wash.

One of the best ways to care for your pool plaster is to take proper care of your water chemistry. This will greatly reduce the likelihood of algae, metal stains and scale. The next step in servicing the pool is just that - pool chemical care.

Pool Chemical Maintenance

This is the part that most pool owners dislike the most. Part of the problem is that pool chemistry has become very complicated when in fact, it does not need to be. We recommend looking at the water chemistry section on our site. It will give you a much better understanding of this topic.

1. Test the Chemicals - using a good test kit test the chemicals on the following schedule

Chlorine* - one or two times per week

pH* - one or two times per week

Total Alkalinity - once per week

Calcium Hardness - once or twice per month

Stabilizer (Cyanuric Acid) - once per month

*On heavily used pools or semi-public pools, these levels should be checked at least once each day. Consult local pool codes for more information.

2. Fill the Chlorinator - add enough chlorine tablets to the chlorine feeder to feed the pool for the next week. The exact number of tablets will depend on the size and usage of the pool.

3. Make Adjustments - add chemicals as needed to bring chemical levels up the required ranges.

	Proper Level	
Chlorine	2.0-4.0	
pH	7.4-7.8	
Total Alkalinity	80-120	
Calcium Hardness	200-500	
Stabilizer	50-80	

4. Close the Pool - close the pool and ask swimmers to get out for sufficient time to allow the pool chemicals to dissolve and dilute. Re-open the pool once the chemical levels are within the proper ranges.

With the water chemistry taken care of, it is time for the last part of your weekly pool service - pool equipment care.

Pool Service Equipment

Taking care of the pool equipment will insure that it takes proper care of your pool. The circulation and filtration system must be kept in proper working order. This requires a small amount of attention each week as outlined in this section.

- 1. Empty the Pump Trap** - turn off the pump, close the intake valves and empty the trap basket. Inspect the basket closely and replace if it is damaged in any way.
- 2. Backwash or Clean the Filter** - when the pressure on the filter gauge rises 5-8 psi, it is time to backwash the filter (DE and sand filters) or disassemble and clean the filter (cartridge filters).
- 3. Check for Leaks** - look carefully around the equipment area to make sure that there are no leaks that may damage the equipment. Pump seal leaks should be repaired ASAP.
- 4. Other Maintenance** - since pool equipment varies so widely from pool to pool, it is important to make sure there are no items being missed. Here are a few to consider:

Salt Systems - make sure it is working properly with no warning lights. Inspect the cell periodically for scale or debris that will inhibit operation.

Energy Filter - this is a small filter used for pressure side pool cleaners and it should be cleaned out each week.

About once or twice per year the equipment will require preventative maintenance items that are covered under the heading of seasonal maintenance.

Seasonal Maintenance

The pool equipment requires more in-depth maintenance on a periodic basis. These are preventative maintenance items that help to extend the life of the equipment and insure dependable operation.

1. Pool Filter

DE Filters - disassemble and manually clean every six months

Sand Filters - change the sand every 3-5 years

Cartridge Filters - replace the cartridges every 3-5 years

- 2. Backwash Valve** - disassemble and lubricate the seals on the valve with silicone based lubricant. This will help them to operate smoothly and avoid premature wear and tear.
- 3. Valves** - make sure the valves operate smoothly and fairly easily. Some valves can be disassembled and lubricated. The newer never-lube style valves should not be lubricated.
- 4. Heater** - clean debris out of the heater and make sure it operates properly. More information.
- 5. Poolsweep** - check for wear and replace wear items as needed. More information.
- 6. Salt System** - remove the cell and inspect for scale. Lightly acid wash if needed.
- 7. Electronic Control Systems** - replace the backup battery once each year (if applicable).
- 8. Freeze Protector** - test the sensor with ice to make sure it turns the equipment on.