

# DIY AC Troubleshooting Checklist

For Coachella Valley homes. Work top to bottom — most “broken AC” calls in the desert are solved in the first five steps. Section 3 is where you stop and call a licensed tech.

## 1 · Safe DIY checks (start here)

| ✓                        | Step                  | What to do                                                                                    | Cost     |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Air filter            | Swap if grey or dust-loaded. Desert dust clogs filters in 3–4 weeks in summer.                | \$8–\$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Thermostat            | Fresh batteries, mode = COOL, setpoint 5° below room temp, cancel schedule holds.             | \$5      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Return & supply vents | Open every register, clear furniture and rugs blocking returns.                               | \$0      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Outdoor condenser     | Power off at the disconnect. Rinse fins inside-out, gentle pressure. Every 2 weeks, May–Sept. | \$0      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Condensate drain      | Flush with distilled vinegar or shop-vac the exterior outlet. A clog trips the float switch.  | \$0–\$20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Breaker / disconnect  | Reset ONCE. Clear 2 ft around the outdoor unit.                                               | \$0      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bent fins             | Comb straight after monsoon debris or trimmer damage.                                         | \$10     |

## 2 · Symptom → likely cause

| ✓                        | Symptom                         | Likely cause                                                                | Next step               |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Blowing warm air                | Filter, low refrigerant, or failed capacitor.                               | Check filter, then call |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Unit freezes over               | Restricted airflow or low charge. Fan-only 1–2 hrs to thaw, replace filter. | Call if it refreezes    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Runs but never reaches setpoint | Undersized for 110°F+ load, leaking attic ducts, or dirty coils.            | Duct test needed        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Outdoor fan spins, no cool air  | Compressor or capacitor.                                                    | Call                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Nothing turns on                | Breaker, float switch, thermostat power.                                    | DIY once, then call     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Water around the air handler    | Blocked condensate line or rusted pan.                                      | DIY flush, then call    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Burning smell / grinding        | Shut off at the breaker immediately.                                        | Call now                |

### 3 · Stop — licensed tech required

| ✓                        | Repair                         | Why a pro is required                                  | Typical cost     |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Refrigerant leak / low charge  | Sealed system; EPA 608 certification required.         | \$400-\$900      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Capacitor or contactor         | Holds a lethal charge with power off.                  | \$250-\$500      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Blower or fan motor            | Needs sizing and amp-draw testing.                     | \$500-\$1,200    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Compressor                     | On a 12+ year desert system, replacement usually wins. | \$2,000-\$4,500  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Duct leaks / imbalance         | Attic ducts here lose 20-30% of cooled air.            | \$600-\$2,500    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Smoke, scorching, repeat trips | Fire risk. Breaker off, call same-day.                 | Diag. \$90-\$180 |

#### Not sure which column you're in?

Describe what your AC is doing and get an AI diagnosis with a realistic cost range in about a minute — free, no phone call.

[localmorelocal.com/diagnose](https://localmorelocal.com/diagnose)

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