

# HOME & GARDEN

Fall 2014





# Fall Planting Season



**W**hen you picture “planting season,” you may envision the springtime months: rainy conditions, soft ground and plenty of impending sunshine on the horizon of summer.

But the fall also is an ideal time to load up your yard with new bulbs, perennials, shrubs and trees – depending on where you live.

## AIR-SOIL CONDITIONS

So what makes the fall season such an ideal time for planting? As the temperatures begin to cool, the soil remains warm – the ideal setting for a new plant. In fact, the National Gardening Association (NGA) states that most plant roots continue to grow until soil temperatures drop into the 40s.

Gardening in the fall can be better for both your plants and you. Which of these scenarios sounds more appealing as you toil away in your garden: Sweating in the summer heat while you pick the never-ending assortment of weeds or planting a new tree in comfortable, crisp weather conditions?

The soil will also be your best friend during the fall, since it is not likely as muddy as it is during the springtime. You will be able to pop your new shrubs, perennials and container-grown trees right into the ground without much of a struggle.

## CLEAN UP

The fall season brings leaves, dried foliage and seed heads to your garden, and you may feel the urge to quickly tidy up. Not so fast, says the NGA.

Of course, aesthetically speaking, you can decide to keep your garden area nice and clean for the next planting season. But the NGA recommends leaving fallen leaves within your garden bed, because they are nature’s way of insulating the soil. They also add nutrients to the soil as they decompose.

You can also rake up the leaves and add them to a compost pile, or simply choose to mow over them to add small, nutrient-filled pieces to your grass.



# Beat the Wrath of Winter

**W**intertime brings with it holiday gatherings, beautiful snowflakes and adventure-filled sledding expeditions.

But if your house could talk, it would tell you that winter is also accompanied by biting winds, damaging ice and dropping temperatures that correlate with increasing heating bills. The fall is the perfect time to listen to your house and prepare for those chilly conditions.

Doing so can help you save time and money in costly repairs come springtime. There are certain pain points of your home – drafty windows and outdated furnaces come to mind – that may need immediate overhauls. Other improvements require only a bit of sweat equity to fully ready your home for the wrath of winter.

## REPLACE YOUR WINDOWS

An inefficient window can lead to more than an uncomfortable draft once winter arrives. It can also welcome damaging frost or condensation on the inside of the window, which can lead to rotting wood frames.

Replacing a window is a fairly straightforward process, but you may want to consult a licensed professional to ensure warranty-protected installation. Find a company dedicated to carrying the latest, most efficient models for your home.

## SERVICE YOUR FURNACE

Gas and electric furnace systems are projected to efficiently operate for about 10 to 15 years and require annual service checks for optimal operation. Do you know how old your furnace unit is? Check the sticker with your model number for the date of manufacture and installation. If you're around the 10- to 15-year mark, it may be time to consider an upgrade.

A lower heating bill is one of the immediate benefits of having your unit replaced or repaired. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that residential energy costs have been rising across the board for several years. With this trend likely to continue, now may be the time to dramatically improve your family's bottom line in terms of heating and cooling expenses.

## OTHER TIPS

You can complete plenty of other basic tasks to winterize your home:

- Add a fresh coat of exterior sealer to your home to minimize the impact of snow or ice.
- Check your roof for any leaks or damaged shingles – or have a professional do it for you.
- Power wash your siding and decking to prevent the growth of mold and mildew that grow on dirt and grime.





# Love Garlic? Plant it in the Fall

**G**arlic can absolutely thrive out of the garden, especially if you plant it during the fall months. It is a perennial bulb that, when planted in the fall, will root, make limited growth before the first hard freeze and produce a bountiful harvest the next summer.

## THE CHILL FACTOR

What many green thumbs may not realize about garlic is that it has an internal chill requirement, according to the University of Illinois agriculture extension center. When planting it in the spring, garlic should be stored in the refrigerator for at least eight weeks prior to planting. This will ensure proper chilling.

Not as much planning is needed if you decide to plant garlic in the fall, since it will obtain its chilling directly in the soil. Fall-planted garlic will also have the advantage of gaining much earlier maturity.

## PLANTING YOUR GARLIC

Here are the proper planting methods for garlic, according to the University of Illinois extension:

- Soil recommendations include high organic matter levels, good drainage and a couple of pounds of fertilizer per every 100 square feet.
- Lay out your planting rows 15 to 18 inches apart.



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- Separate individual cloves from the main bulb and plant them about four to six inches apart in the row.

- Set your cloves tip up and one to two inches below the soil surface.

## WEED CONTROL

The University of Illinois identifies garlic as a “weak competitor,” which explains its needs for extra help fighting against garden weeds.

You shouldn’t have to worry about the weeds much in the fall or winter, but be prepared to stave them off during the spring and summer seasons.

Since you will likely consume your garlic, avoid all

chemical-based weed killers and instead opt for mulch, straw or other organic materials that can help keep weeds from taking over. Doing so directly after planting the bulbs can also help alleviate winter soil frost.



# Asphalt Driveway Cracks

**I**t's too bad asphalt doesn't stay smooth and flawless forever. Potholes, cracks and weathering are common enemies of asphalt as it battles the elements year after year.

Luckily for you, repairing driveway cracks may be simpler than you realize.

High-grade crack fillers are likely available at your local hardware store and are relatively inexpensive, depending on the size of your crack. You will generally need the filler, a wire brush and a trowel tool to get the job done.

## PREPARING THE SURFACE

Before applying the driveway crack filler, it is important to clean the entire area thoroughly. Use your wire brush to remove any dirt or vegetation from the crack for a nice, smooth surface. Next, prepare your crack filler by shaking up the bottle.

The mixture can be a bit thick, so be vigorous in your motion. Doing so will ensure that the mixture is completely mixed for optimal application. Also, carefully cut the top of the applicator, making sure to match the opening with the width of the crack.

## APPLYING THE FILLER

After your surface and filler are ready for application, fill the crack flush with the surrounding pavement. Be



careful not to overfill the crack, which will result in an odd-looking raised spot in your driveway once dried.

Use your filler tool or trowel to smooth out the

crack filler even with the height of the adjoining pavement. The most important requirement of this DIY process is patience. Depending on the brand of

filler you choose, it may take up to 24 hours before applying a second coat is recommended.

You will also likely need to wait at least 24 to 48 hours

before driving or walking on the repaired area. Read all of your manufacturer instructions to make sure your repair stands up to daily use and the elements.



# Safe Garage, Safe Home

**G**arage security is a crucial, yet often-overlooked aspect to the overall safety of your belongings and family. Some reports have shown that experienced burglars can open a locked, yet deficient garage door in only six seconds.

And once they're in your garage, they can get away with valuable tools and toys, not to mention having easier access to the inside your home.

And with the fall season full of trips to family members' homes and the shopping mall, it's time to check all of the doors, windows and other features of your garage to measure its security level when you're away from home.

## SERVICE AND ENTRY DOORS

The side door on your garage is the most common point of entry for burglars. Why? Because many homeowners overlook the importance of having a dead-bolted door to the garage, which is just as important a feature on other exterior doors.

Install a dead bolt and heavy-duty strike plate to make forced entry a difficult task.

## LIGHTING – INSIDE AND OUT

Bright lighting can deter a burglar – especially motion-detector lighting that not only can spook a thief, but will also be more cost-efficient for you than lighting that stays on all night.

As for the interior of your garage, think on the opposite end of bright lighting when you are away or sleeping. Cover all of your windows to keep visibility from the outside to a minimum. A crook may be more likely to pass on trying to enter if he can't see inside.



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## KEEP THE CLICKER CLOSE

If you leave your garage-door remote affixed to your sun visor, you

are in danger of simply giving away access into your home. A thief who breaks in to your car – no matter where you are – can also swipe the remote for easy access into your garage.

Why not opt for a keychain remote that can be in your pocket or purse at all times? These small, handy clickers are perfect for ensuring garage security every time you leave the car.



# Avoiding Autumn Ouches



**A**s the wind chills and the leaves begin to fall, our outdoor activities turn from yard maintenance to cleanup. And taking care of the clutter can be a physically challenging endeavor. There's the raking, mulching, wheelbarrowing and bagging of leaves, not to mention cleaning them out of your gutters.

The fall season can be one of the most dangerous in terms of injuries suffered while performing yard work. Consider the following safety tips from the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons to prevent injuries while performing yard work.

- Use a rake that is comfortable for your height, strength and physical ability. If you generally don't use your hands for manual labor, wear special gardening gloves or use rakes with heavily padded handles to avoid painful blisters.
- Wet leaves can be slippery, so be safe by wearing shoes or boots with slip-resistant soles.
- Do not overfill leaf bags, especially if the leaves are wet. Lifting too many leaves at once can cause back or neck injury, so be sure you can lift your bags comfortably before transporting them.
- Avoid throwing bags of leaves over your shoulder or to the side. The twisting motion required to do so places undue stress on your back.
- Make sure the engine is off and cool before you begin any maintenance work on your lawnmower, mulcher or leaf blower.
- Wear protective gear such as goggles, gloves, boots and long pants when mowing. Never mow barefoot or in sandals and always check areas for poison ivy, branches or other obstructions that could harm you or your mower.
- Never use your hands or feet to clear debris from under a lawnmower. Use a large stick or broomhandle instead. Also, never touch the blades with your hands or feet, even if the engine is off. The blade can still jar forward and cause serious injury.



# Your Gardening Glossary

**H**ave you ever brought a plant home from your local gardening center only to be confused by the directions for actually putting it in the ground?

The gardening industry has lingo all its own, which can be somewhat perplexing for the novice green thumb. What does it mean when a plant is “bolting?” How exactly do you “broadcast” seeds? And those are just a couple of gardening terms that start with ‘B.’

Use this simple glossary the next time you are staring in bewilderment at the directions for planting your seeds.

- **Annual:** A plant that grows, flowers and dies all in the course of one year. Petunias, violas, marigolds and dianthus are some of the most popular annuals.
- **Bolting:** The early stages of flowering for a plant, even before it enters the development phase of its crop. Some of the most common bolting plants include lettuce, radishes and cabbage.
- **Broadcast:** A method of scattering seed by hand instead of sowing it in rows.
- **Compost:** An organic growing matter comprised of decomposed garden waste such as fallen leaves, grass clippings and even food by products like banana peels.
- **Deciduous:** Plants that naturally lose their leaves during the cold winter months.
- **Herbs:** Used for seasoning, medicinal purposes or garnishes, these aromatic plants have fragrant leaves or flowers.
- **Leaching:** Occurs when substances such as fertilizer or pesticide are dissolved and transported by rain water.
- **Outcropping:** When landscape beds extend beyond their designated surroundings. Vines, expanded shrub beds or climbing plants fall into this category.
- **Perennial:** A plant that grows, flowers and comes back year after year. Evergreens are perennials, as are many plants that actually die back to the ground but grow again the following season.
- **Sandy Loam:** A soil mixture made from a combination of sandy soil and loam, which is a mixture of silt, sand and clay.
- **Thatch:** A dead-grass layer between the soil level and blades of grass. It restricts air, water and fertilizer from reaching the soil.

