

HOME & GARDEN

Winter 2013



Carpet Care and Maintenance

The carpet industry has expanded over the past decade as manufacturers continue to push boundaries with color and texture options for all tastes and styles.

And while consumers benefit from having such a wide array of choices in their carpeting, many neglect to properly care for it over the years.

Depending on whether you have pets or a lot of foot traffic crossing your carpet every day, you should consider using a carpet care strategy that includes dust prevention, routine vacuuming and periodic chemical cleans.

It also is important to choose the right spot for your new carpet, as experts recommend keeping it out of rooms where water will be present, including the kitchen and bathroom.

Water can soak through the carpet and into the pad underneath it, creating a potentially dangerous situation with mold buildup.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

Some homeowners wait until their carpet is well overdue for a chemical cleaning before taking any action. But the key to spotless, beautiful carpeting comes during the months in between thorough cleanings.

Dust prevention is one of the keys to maintaining the quality of your carpet, and you can achieve it by asking guests to remove their shoes



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upon entering your home. This will cut down on the transfer of dust, dirt and germs from the bottom of shoes onto your carpet.

Maintaining a regular vacuum routine – at least once every other day – will also prevent dust from building up in your home and on your carpet. Choose a vacuum with strong suction and a tight fil-

ter for optimum results.

CARPET CLEANERS

Most carpet care products are relatively safe to use and have been shown to have minimal impact on the environment. But some cleaners on the market do contain toxic chemicals that can be harmful to you and your family.

Harsh chemicals and detergents can remain in carpet fibers after a cleaning and have been shown to degrade indoor air quality, which the Environmental Protection Agency has identified as being six to 12 times worse than outdoor pollution.

The environment is also at risk from dangerous chemi-

cals, as we pour them out into our sinks after cleaning our carpets. Consider using a natural carpet cleaning product comprised of organic materials and zero chemicals.

If cleaning your carpet during the winter, choose an unseasonably warm day and open all of your windows and doors to provide extra ventilation.

Cleaning Stainless Steel

Stainless steel appliances have made their way from commercial kitchens into our homes over the past decade.

They are functional, beautiful and versatile enough to fit into nearly any style of kitchen. They work as a contemporary complement to the otherwise subtle styling of a country-themed kitchen. Inside a modern design, they are integral in creating a cohesion across bold colors and shiny fixtures.

But as beautiful as stainless steel refrigerators, dishwashers and stoves can be, they also can be equally as difficult to clean. Fingerprints and grime seem to add up in a hurry on stainless surfaces, and if not wiped away regularly, can create more of an eyesore than a kitchen centerpiece.

Dos

Stainless steel has for years been used in highly public places due to its durability and sustainability. Its smooth, non-porous surface makes it difficult for bacteria to adhere, survive and spread.

That doesn't mean, however that stainless steel is the easiest material to clean. Try the following tips to keep your appliances looking bright and shiny.

- **Water:** Believe it or not, warm water on a cloth rag will do the trick in most cases

- **Vinegar:** Another frugal, yet effective option, is vinegar.



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With water and vinegar, you may need to add a little elbow grease

- **Store-bought Cleaners:** Store shelves are lined with stainless cleaners, but be patient while shopping. It may take some time to find the option that works best for

you.

- **Wiping:** Surfaces should always be wiped with the direction of the grain, not across

Don'ts

As simple as cleaning stainless steel sounds, it may take

some serious due diligence on your part. Manufacturers of appliances can put different coatings on their products, eliminating the effectiveness of universal stainless cleaners. When searching for the perfect cleaner, avoid these options at all costs.

- **Abrasive Products:** Avoid abrasive cleaners and scrubbers as they will leave permanent scratches on your appliances

- **Chlorine:** Bleach and other cleaners with chlorine can cause unwanted spots and corrosion

Add a Concrete Patio

Running low on outdoor entertaining space? A concrete patio can add plenty. Visually appealing and functional, concrete patios are relatively inexpensive projects that can be finished in a day.

They offer a strong base for holding tables, chairs, furniture and a large number of guests, depending on their size.

The design and size of the patio are entirely up to you and limited only by your own creativity.

CHOOSING THE SPOT

This step is obviously the least physical portion of your concrete patio project, but it can be the most grueling. Settling on the perfect spot takes careful planning and a creative eye.

Your site should be relatively level with a slight slope away from your home to ensure optimum rain drainage. It should also make sense with the flow of your existing yard and landscaping. You want the patio to seem like a natural extension of your home, so plan carefully.

TOOLS REQUIRED

Here's what you'll need to pull off the perfect concrete patio:

- Measuring rule for choosing dimensions
- Stakes and string for making outline
- Shovel for excavating
- Pressure-treated 2x4 lumber for the frame

- Circular saw
- Hammer and galvanized nails
- Premixed concrete
- Wheelbarrow
- Steel Trowel
- Broom
- Weighted Plastic Sheet

BASIC DIRECTIONS

Once you have gathered your tools, follow these basic steps to finish your project:

- Measure and mark your patio spot
- Excavate three to four inches of the topsoil
- Build a perfectly square

frame to provide the boundaries for your concrete

- Mix your concrete with the recommended amount of water and pour into the frame
- Let concrete firm for about 30 minutes

• Smooth out entire surface with steel trowel

- Lightly drag a broom across the surface for a non-slip finish
- Tie down a plastic sheet over the concrete to protect it from debris while curing



Boost Your Curb Appeal

Curb appeal is an important part of home ownership no matter the season. Defined as the attractiveness of a home's exterior, curb appeal is subjective in nature but universal in importance.

Our differences in personal style, color choices and plant preferences can vary greatly. But people walking or driving by our homes are more likely to notice the overall care we put into our yards and home exteriors than the details. Passers-by can measure a homeowner's pride within seconds. What kind of impression does your home make?

BASIC STEPS

Fortunately, establishing and maintaining quality curb appeal is a relatively easy undertaking.

Your first step should be looking at your home's exterior and yard with an objective eye. Put yourself in the shoes of a person passing by your home. What do you notice first? What things stick out as negatives for your home? Positives?

The key to great curb appeal is taking away the detractors and adding more of the helpful features.

Before planting any new plants, it is important to take care of your existing ones. Trim up overgrown bushes and put down some new mulch or gravel. A fresh coat of paint on your outdoor trim work can also go a long way, as can giving your siding a power wash.



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OUTDOOR STRATEGY

A good tip in achieving optimum curb appeal is to think of the outside area of your home as having three main sectors: public, private and functional.

The front yard is your public portion because everyone from neighbors to people driving by

can see it. Keep your toys and swing sets in your back yard – the private sector – where you spend most of your time enjoying the outdoors.

Hide your trash cans and lawn equipment in the functional portion of your outside area.

LANDSCAPING

Even in areas of the coun-

try with cold winter months, landscaping is a year-round effort. Add plants to your yard that hold their color, even when the weather turns.

Planting and maintaining evergreen plants can also enhance the look of your yard during the winter, as rich green leaves will help landscaping from looking bare.

Shrub roses and flowers that bloom in different seasons are also options, as are native, organic plants that are tolerant to your region's climate and growing seasons.

All of these options are available at your local garden centers, where you can also find knowledgeable plant experts ready to help you plan, design and install the perfect landscaping.

Hold a Harvest Party

You've put in the work. Now it's time to party. As you pull your final zucchinis, peppers and tomatoes from the garden, you may be wondering what you're going to do with all of your extra produce.

A harvest party can be a great way to show off your bounty and to get your friends and family together for a celebration. Enjoying great food and company next to a fire will help you bid adieu to another successful planting season. If the temperature is too chilly for an outdoor party, bring your guests inside to celebrate.

GOOD PARTY BASICS

Fancy invitations and decorations are great extra touches to the perfect garden party, but don't forget the basics.

Make sure you have enough comfortable seating for all of your guests. Many businesses rent out benches or lawn furniture that can help accommodate your visitors.

Large buckets filled with ice can help keep your drinks chilled, while extra cutlery, plates and glasses will ensure your guests have everything they need to enjoy the food and drinks you will serve.

SET THE SCENE

Harvest parties can range from basic to elegant, depending on the theme you choose. A garden lends itself to versatile decorations that can range from fancy tulle and ribbon strewn across your fence or beautiful

colored lights to accentuate your perfectly manicured rows.

You can implement a dress code or costume theme for your party as well.

FOOD CHOICES

Depending on your strongest yields, incorporate your homegrown fruits and vegetables into a menu your guests will rave about throughout the winter. Consider large platters that can be easily set up on a table or served buffet-style.

Grilled meats, salads and homemade vegetable trays are popular options for garden parties as

simplicity is generally the way to go. If you plan on hosting a more elegant party, consider passing out finger foods and champagne to your guests.



A Look at Plant Hardiness

Looking to grow plants this winter, not your waistline? Cultivating fresh fruits and vegetables is possible during the winter, even in colder climates.

And keeping plenty of them stocked in your home can help you avoid adding extra weight from unhealthy snacks and inactivity.

The United States Department of Agriculture produces an annual map that displays the various hardiness zones of different regions. Gardeners and growers can use the map to determine which plants are most likely to thrive at a given location.

The maps are effective tools in producing bountiful crops year-round.

THE MAP

The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is comprised of colored sectors based on the average annual extreme minimum temperature during a 30-year period in the past. The zones are not representative of record-low temperatures in those areas, so keep that in mind when choosing your plants.

It is possible that unusually cold weather may come into play, dropping your hardiness zone and ruining your crops.

You can access the map on the USDA's website, which also features a zone-finder searchable by zip code. The maps can be downloaded and printed in a variety of sizes and resolutions for you reference.



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JUST A GUIDE

The USDA urges that its map is simply a guide for gardeners and growers. The organization points to one factor – microclimates – as an additional aspect to consider when determining your hardiness level.

Microclimates are defined as fine-scale climate varia-

tions that can differ from yard to yard or be created by areas that you shelter as opposed to areas that are exposed.

The USDA advises that no hardiness zone map can replace the knowledge gained by hands-on experience.

OTHER FACTORS

Many other environmen-

tal factors can contribute to the overall success or failure of plants, including wind, cold snaps and duration of exposure to cold and humidity.

Light can also play a part, as plants that require large amounts of shade may be impacted by the winter's leafless trees that usually provide

it.

Again, you most likely will not be able to tell what has the greatest effect on your plants until you actually attempt to grow them. Pay attention to any drastic climate changes and precipitation levels. Write down your observations to serve as a guide for future planting.

Winter Weather Preparedness

Nearly all Americans, no matter their geographic location, are likely to see severe winter weather at some point during their lives.

The snow, sleet and ice that often accompanies winter storms are only exacerbated by the dangerously low temperatures and strong winds associated with them.

Young children and the elderly are most susceptible to the danger that comes with cold temperatures, but people of all ages should be ready to protect themselves from potentially hazardous weather this winter.

WINTER CONCERNS

One of the most impactful aspects of dangerous winter storms is their ability to eliminate power, heat and communication – sometimes for days at a time.

Labeled as “deceptive killers” by the National Weather Service, winter storms cause most of their harm indirectly. People die in traffic accidents on icy roads or from hypothermia.

By preparing properly before these storms and taking precautionary measures during and after them, we can all stay safer during the winter months.

PREPARING FOR A WINTER STORM

If you live in an area prone to winter storms, the Federal Emergency Management Agency offers the following tips to protect you and your family from danger.

EMERGENCY KIT ADDITIONS

- Rock salt to melt ice on walkways
- Sand to improve traction
- Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment
- Sufficient heating fuel and stored dry wood
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm

FAMILY COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Establish and communicate plan for emergency situations
- Routinely discuss plan to ensure family cohesion
- If separated during emergency situation, remain in contact through phone, text or social media

OTHER TIPS

- Listen to a weather radio or local news during dangerous weather conditions
- Minimize travel during and after storm
- Bring pets inside during winter weather

