



Fall Home
& Garden

Leave the Leaves

Forget the raking and bagging, this fall, help both wildlife and your back by leaving the leaves where they land. The National Wildlife Federation says that raking up fallen leaves may harm the environment, wildlife and rob your lawn and garden of nutrients.

“Leaves form a natural mulch that helps suppress weeds and fertilizes the soil as it breaks down. Why spend money on mulch and fertilizer when you can make your own? Turning leaves into solid waste is, well, wasteful,” said National Wildlife Federation Naturalist David Mizejewski. “Removing leaves also eliminates vital wildlife habitat. Critters ranging from turtles and toads to songbirds, mammals and invertebrates rely on leaf litter for food, shelter and nesting material. Many moth and butterfly caterpillars overwinter in fallen leaves before emerging in spring. Also, sending organic matter such as leaves to the landfill causes the release of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Best of all, the less time you spend removing leaves, the more time you’ll



© ADOBE STOCK

have to enjoy the gorgeous fall weather and the wildlife that visits your garden.”

Leaves and yard debris account for 13% of the nation’s solid waste, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or about 33 million tons a year. These tons of organic matter, piled up in the

nation’s landfills, lack sufficient oxygen to decompose. Piled up there, yard waste releases the greenhouse gas methane, which also harms the environment.

All kinds of animals also use leaf litter as their home. This includes turtles, toads, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibi-

ans. Furthermore, leaves smother weeds and can fertilize the grass and plants you want to thrive in warmer months.

If you can, let leaves break down naturally, exactly where they fall. Pile them into leaf shelters along with branches, sticks and stems to give shelter

to vulnerable wildlife. You can also mulch them with a mulching mower. If you have to remove the leaves, add them to your compost pile or use them as mulch in your existing flower beds. Some community groups and gardens may also offer to pick them up for use in their own gardens.

Growing Fall Vegetables

Summer is known for its array of bountiful fruits and veggies. But there are plenty of tasty crops that thrive the cooler months of fall.

KNOW YOUR ZONE

The USDA divides the country into zones of plant hardiness so that you know what plants are more likely to thrive in your area. It's based on the average annual minimum winter temperature, divided into 10-degree zones ranging from 1a-13b. You can visit the USDA website, enter your ZIP Code and find your growing zone to determine which plants will do best in your yard.

FALL VEGETABLES

No matter where you live, there are certain plants that will do best in the fall. Look for these tasty plants to add to your fall gardens (and tables).

- **Beets:** These root vegetables are nutrient rich, packing a punch of folate as well as vitamin C and magnesium. Try them roasted.

- **Beans:** There are tons of varieties of beans and all of them are high in protein and fiber.

- **Broccoli:** This relative of cabbage is full of nutrients and fiber that promotes healthy digestion.

- **Turnips:** Another root



© ADOBE STOCK

vegetable, turnips are full of vitamin A and K, and also has plenty of calcium and manganese.

- **Collard greens:** Here's another relative of cabbage that's loaded with vitamins A and C. In the South, greens are a staple vegetable usually served smothered with smoked meats and served

with cornbread.

- **Lettuce:** Get ready for tasty salads. The cooler months mean tender leaves.

- **Pumpkins:** You can't have a fall garden without the season's favorite decorative squash. In addition to making a great pie, a serving of pumpkin packs a whopping 197% of your daily value of

vitamin A.

- **Potatoes:** Fall is the perfect time for root vegetables, as you can probably tell. Potato is a staple and will be perfectly at home in your fall garden.

GET STARTED IN SUMMER

A great fall garden actually

starts in summer. You need to plant in the heat of summer (usually around August) to give your fall crops more time to mature. Cooler weather also means that crops can stay in the garden longer instead of having to be harvested immediately like their warmer weather counterparts.

Prepare Gutters for Winter

Gutters are the unsung heroes of the outside of your home. A clean gutter keeps water away from the vulnerable structure of your home, including your foundation. You may be used to clearing fall leaves out of your gutters, but take the opportunity to get them ready for the coming winter, too.

CLEAN

Get rid of leaves, sticks and other debris in your gutters. Clogged gutters can send water under the roof and into your home's foundation. If your area gets below freezing, it can also cause ice dams in the winter. Use an old plastic spatula (hit up the dollar store if you don't have one) clipped to fit your gutters. Scoop leaves and other debris right out of the way. For downspouts, run a plumber's snake through them to make sure water can run away from your home.

GUTTER SCREENS

You can install screens to protect your gutters from leaf and other build up, or you can have them installed. As with any professional installa-



© ADOBE STOCK

tion, ask friends and family for recommendations, get several quotes, ask lots of questions and make sure your chosen contractor is licensed and insured.

INSPECT

While you're cleaning out your gutters, inspect them for

damage, creases, rust or holes. Also check for sagging gutters or seams that have begun to separate. If you find loose joints or leaks, clean the gutter and scrape away the old sealant, then re-coat it with fresh sealant from your local hardware store. Holes may require a patch, which

you can make with roofing cement and a piece of metal similar to your gutter material.

MAKE A DE-ICING CABLE

If your area gets snow and ice, consider making a de-icing cable to make sure an ice dam doesn't form on your

roof. Take an old pair of pantyhose and fill with an ice melting compound, such as what you would use on your sidewalk. Toss them on your roof intersection with the gutter, and this dam will give water a way to travel off the roof if the gutter fills up with ice.

Get a Fresh Coat

The cooler weather of fall can be a great time to update the exterior of your home with a fresh coat of paint. Here are some tips from HGTV on how to get your home looking great in no time.

Step 1: Clean it up. You can't put paint over dirt. Get the best coverage by removing dirt and debris from your house using a pressure washer. Work from the top to bottom, overlapping each stroke.

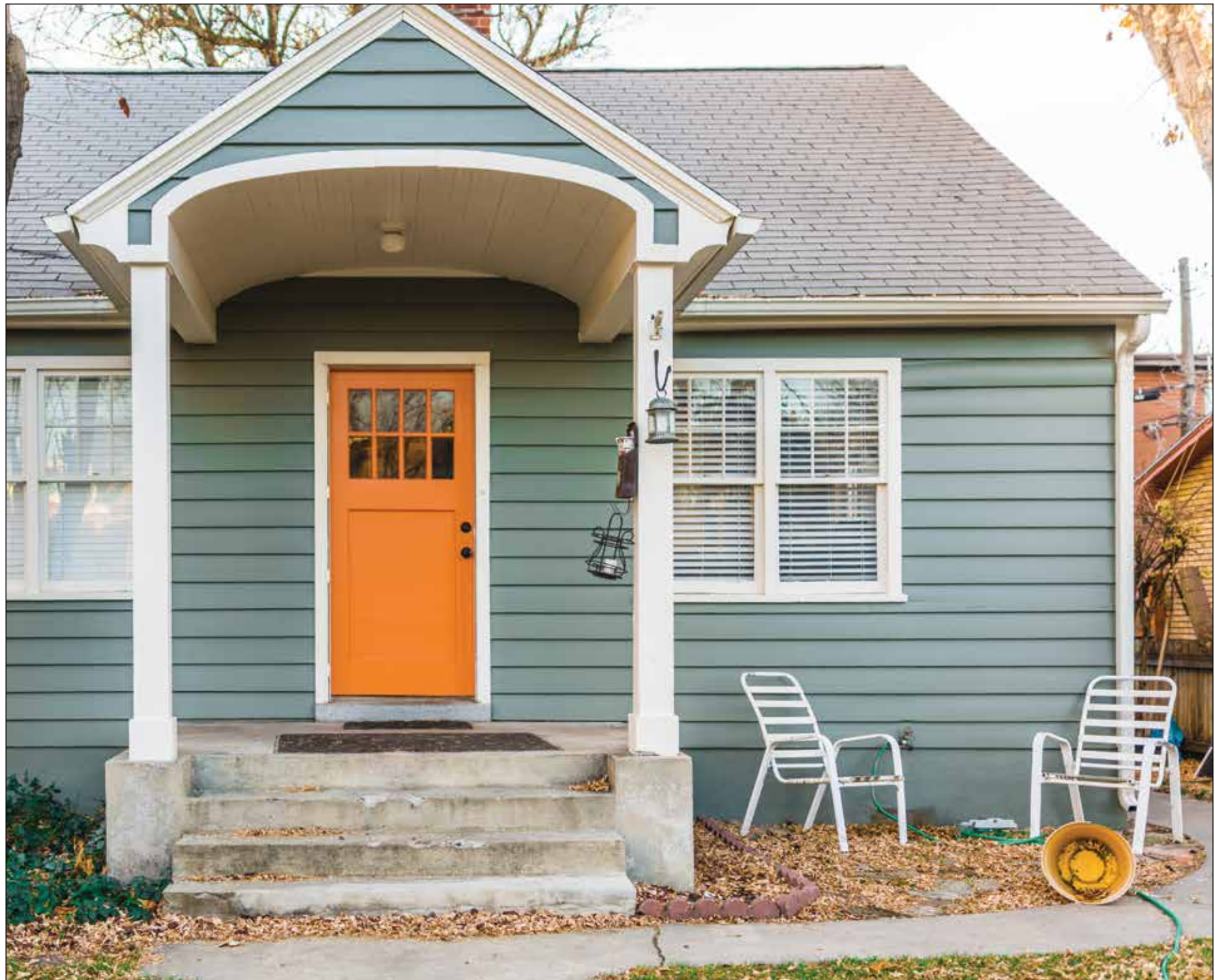
Step 2: Repair. While you're washing, make note of any damage to wood, brick, stucco or siding. Use epoxy filler to cover cracks or holes. Once the filler is dry, lightly sand it using medium-grit sandpaper.

Step 3: Remove loose paint. Scrape or sand loose paint off the surfaces around your home before painting.

Step 4: Caulk the trim. Fill any gaps between the house and trim around your doors and windows using caulk made for exterior finishes. Caulk wherever different materials meet.

Step 5: Cover stains. Put a coat of stain-blocking primer over any stains to help your paint cover it.

Step 6: Protect doors, windows and lights. Cover anything you don't want painted



© ADOBE STOCK

with plastic sheeting and tape.

Step 7: Paint! Here's the fun part. Load a paint sprayer with your chosen exterior paint (pick a flat or eggshell finish for the best look). Work your way from top to bottom,

moving smoothly and overlapping your strokes, just like you did when you power washed. If your color is very different from what's already on the house, you may need a coat of primer, too. Talk to the professionals at your local

paint store for advice.

Step 8: Paint the trim. Remove the plastic sheeting and get to your windows and doors using an exterior semi-gloss paint and a paintbrush. Use drop cloths to make clean up easier.

Step 9: Touch up. After you get everything cleaned up, walk around your house and touch up any surfaces that may have gotten missed or scratched during the process. Then, sit back and enjoy your fresh curb appeal.

Install a Water Feature

You can put in a gorgeous, eye-catching water feature in just the span of a weekend. Keep reading for more on turning your backyard into an oasis.

LOOK AT YOUR SPACE

Decide what kind of feature that your space, your budget and your lifestyle can handle. Is it a giant koi pond or a simple fountain trickling over rocks? Generally, the larger your feature is, the more electric or plumbing work you may have to have done. You also need to consider what's under the ground, and that includes tree roots and utilities.

USE UNDERLAYMENT

No matter which project you choose, you'll likely need underlayment to protect your water feature. Look for it at your local home and garden center. Get enough so that it extends over and around your water feature.

GET PHYSICAL

Also common to almost all water feature projects: holes. You're likely going to have to dig and it's probably going to be more than you think. Consider getting help if you're not sure you might be up to the task.

ROCK 'N' ROLL

Almost all features also have



© ADOBE STOCK

rocks, from gravel to help filter your water to boulders to set it off. Most home and garden centers sell a variety (though they can be surprisingly expensive) and you'll also need help placing them when you get home. Look for finishes and textures that complement your surrounding land-

scape, any patio stone or masonry on your home, and that will wear well in the weather. Depending on the design of your feature, you may also have to drill through the stone. You may be able to rent the equipment from the home and garden store or a local tool rental.

CONSIDER PLANTINGS

Set off your new water feature with plants, but not those so big they might disrupt your pond or fountain with roots or branches. Also make sure you choose perennials at this time of year and tend to them carefully over the winter until they are well established.

FOUNTAIN CARE

If you live in a colder climate, take your water pump inside for the winter and store it in a pail of water to keep the seals wet.

Otherwise, your feature should weather freezes nicely and be ready for you in the spring.

Pressure Washing Safety Tips

So many fall projects, like painting the house, start with getting everything clean. And the quickest way to clean most exterior surfaces is with a pressure washer or power washer.

Remember that any pressure washer that produces greater than 100 pounds per square inch of pressure can cause serious injury that can lead to infection, disability or amputation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers these safety tips for using a pressure washer.

- Always follow the safety instructions included in the owner's manual.
- Never point a pressure washer at yourself or others.
- Remember that the spray can throw objects, also at high pressure, that can cause injuries to bystanders or to yourself.

- Never attempt to push or move objects with the pressure washer spray.
- Never use a gasoline-powered washer in an enclosed space or near air intakes.
- Always test the ground fault circuit interrupter before using a pressure washer.
- Always plug a properly grounded pressure washer into a properly grounded



© ADOBE STOCK

receptacle.

- If you need an extension cord, keep the pressure washer's power cord connection out of standing water and use a heavy duty extension cord rated for use in wet locations.
- Keep the power cord and any extension cords as far away as you can from the item being washed and any water runoff.

- Wear rubber-soled shoes that provide insulation from electrical jolts.

- Never cut or splice the pressure washer's power cord or extension cords.
- Never remove the grounding prong from the pressure washer's power cord or the extension cord.
- Always have a qualified electrician check the pressure

washer if it trips a circuit breaker.

- Never allow children to operate a pressure washer. Keep children away from a pressure washer while it's in use.
- If you injure yourself with the pressure washer, keep in mind that what seems like a small wound can be more serious. Get treatment right

away.

- Before you treat any injuries incurred by a pressure washer, wash your hands with soap and clean water.
- Make sure you clean the wound well, too, with clean or bottled water.
- Leave unclean wounds open. If you can clean the wound, cover it with a clean cloth or bandage.

Fall Container Gardens

Fall, with its cooler days, just begs you to get outside and enjoy your patios and porches. And while spring and summer's glory days are over, that doesn't mean you still can't add pops of color with container gardens. Here are some ideas for sprucing up your outdoor spaces with containers of color.

DON'T FORGET THE TEXTURE

Color is important when planning a container garden, but so is texture. This means the shape of the plant, the leaves and how it grows. Fall is a great time for tall, elegant ornamental grasses, and they also make great container garden centerpieces. Look for varieties like ponytail grass (*stipa tenuissima*) and purple fountain grass, with stunning deep aubergine blades.

CREATIVE CONTAINERS

Go beyond the basic flowerpot. With the right drill bit, you can turn just about anything into a container for plants. Think of particularly fall-like accents like plastic pumpkins, craft logs or a basket.



© ADOBE STOCK

BLOOMING AUTUMN

Yes, there are still lots of flowers that bloom right through fall, depending on your growing zone. Look to plants with trailing blooms, like petunias, which also come in a dizzying array of colors. Snapdragons are another fall favorite and come in a wide array of fall shades, like deep

red and vibrant orange. In the warmer South, pansies do well in late fall and autumn and come in a riot of colors to match every decor.

FESTIVE FOLIAGE

And there's plenty of non-blooming plants to provide great color in your container. These include coleus, which comes in several bright

hues; heuchera; stonecrop; golden leaf sage; flowering kale or cabbage; all kinds of ficus; sweet potato vines and many ivies. Just keep some of the more voracious growers, like vines and ivies, neatly trimmed.

MUMS

It wouldn't be fall without mums. You can choose all

kinds of colors. Look to bring home a plant that's healthy and green with an upright attitude and lots of tightly closed buds. Make sure your container's light enough to move easily; as the season wears, you may need to move your mum around to better growing conditions. Pair fluffy mums with wiregrass or creeping Jenny for an elegant look.