

Fall Home & Garden





Winterize your Home

Once the temperatures start dropping and the winds pick up, it's time to start thinking about how to keep your home as cozy as you can during the cooler months.

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The good news is that the Family Handyman says that winterization is a job that can be done in a single weekend with just a few easy steps.

FURNACE

If your home has a furnace, you should call your HVAC professional for a tune-up before it's time for it to start putting in work. This will keep your furnace running efficiently, meaning your bill stays lower, and it may extend the life of your HVAC system.

ADD INSULATION

Speaking of keeping those utility bills low, the fall is a great time to check on your insulation and make sure it's not too packed or bro-

ken down. Adding an extra layer of modern insulation is easy to do in attics and crawl spaces, and the protection it gives your home can pay off bigtime.

CLEAN GUTTERS

The leaves are falling — and that means in your gutters, too. Clean them out before fall's rains (or snows) hit so that water flows neatly away from your home.

CHECK YOUR PLUMBING

While you're putting in that new insulation, check on your plumbing, particularly any pipes that run through basements or unheated spaces. Wrap your pipes with pipe insulation or, if it gets really cold at your house, run a heat cable

under the insulation to avoid burst pipes when the temperatures dip below freezing.

RUN SNOWBLOWERS

After the first snow fall is not the time to find out your snow blower isn't working. Check on it before the season starts and perform any of the manufacturer's recommended maintenance. If you shovel, check your shovel to make sure it's free from rust and in good working order.

STOCK UP ON SALT AND SAND

The time to buy these simple ice-fighters is before the temperatures drop before freezing the first time. Keep plenty of salt and sand on hand to keep your feet firmly on the ground in even the worst of winter weather.

Decorating for Fall

Fall is one of our favorite seasons for decorating. This year, though, go beyond the traditional orange gourds and dried cornstalks.

Here's how you can pump up your pumpkins this year.

PORCH LOOKS

If you're lucky enough to have an open porch, fall is its time to shine. The weather is gorgeous, making porch-sitting a prime autumn idea. And you can decorate your new outdoor room just for the occasion.

Make it memorable by selecting a color scheme that accentuates your existing palette, but don't be afraid to kick it up with bright colors. Think a punch of orange and fiery red heirloom pumpkins. Don't be afraid of bright yellows, either, as Pantone picked a sunny yellow as one of the top colors for this fall.

GOOD GOURDS

Speaking of pumpkins, let's get out of the orange pumpkin rut. Pumpkins come in a huge variety of colors, including neutral creams and whites, deep jewel greens, blazing reds and hot yellows. Group your pumpkins in complementary colors and pick a variety of shapes so that your pumpkin patch really shines. Bonus points:



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Decoupage or paint faux pumpkins in any color scheme you like for a personalized peck of pumpkins.

COZY UP

Come fall, there's literally no space that couldn't use an extra blanket. Elevate your cozy game by displaying throw blankets in a variety of

textures and colors that compliment your existing decor. Also consider using blankets in new ways, such as draped over tables as table cloths.

TERRIFIC TARTANS

Plaid is back this fall, and look for it on throw pillows, blankets, tableware and more. Go beyond the traditional

buffalo check, though, and hit plaid patterns in warm jewel tones. Don't be afraid to play with pattern and mix and match, using neutral plaids as your base and working up from there.

FORAGED FOLIAGE

Create gorgeous centerpieces, posies and other

arrangements by going no further than your front yard. Sprays of limbs festooned with colorful leaves, fall grasses and seasonal blooms are all perfect for bringing the outside in this season. Also look for seasonal fruits in jewel tones, such as pears and apples, to dress your table and kitchen.

Learn to Love the Leaves

Fall leaves are lots of fun, unless you're the one that has to rake them. The good news is you don't have to rake them this year.

Leaves are an important part of the ecosystem, providing fall and winter homes for overwintering insects, including butterflies and other valuable pollinators.

MULCHING

If you must keep the leaves off your lawn, instead of raking or, even worse, blowing the leaves away, try mulching the leaves into fertilizer for a greener spring. Leave your leaves in the flowerbeds and in other places that are away from the grass as a home for helpful insects and other pollinators to keep your gardens happy next year.

HOW TO MULCH YOUR LEAVES

You can mulch your leaves with a lawnmower or a leaf shredder. Mulching the leaves chops them into fine pieces so they don't smother your grass and so that they break down more quickly into a nutrient-rich fertilizer for your yard.

Your lawnmower may have its own mulch setting, or you can buy inexpensive mulching kits to put on your mower instead of mower blades.

Follow the manufacturer's instruction for those kits, but generally, they are used on the mower's highest setting. Deep drifts of leaves may require multiple passes, or you can rake the mulched debris so that it's evenly distributed across your yard.

COMPOST

Another idea for your leaves is to pile them up or bag them and move them to a safe place in your yard where you can compost them. Leaves can also be piled into flower beds to act as insulation during the colder winter months. If the leaf litter is too deep and doesn't break down by spring, just remove them to the compost bin.

USING LEAVES FOR WEED PREVENTION

Remember how leaves can smother your yard and kill your grass? It also works for weeds. You can spread leaves over patches of weeds to kill them during the fall and winter. More importantly, you can spread leaves or mulched leaves over bare spots in your yard to keep weeds from setting up shop.

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Gutter Maintenance

Those gorgeous colored leaves that drop every fall don't just fall on your yards and flower beds.

They also drop on your roofs and gutters, keeping precipitation from moving efficiently and safely away from your home. You can prevent costly roof and home repairs with a little simple maintenance done every fall.

STEP 1: TIME TO CLIMB

The first step in maintaining your gutters properly is to grab a ladder and safely ascend to the gutter height. Using your hands or any number of available tools, clean all the leaves, debris, dirt and assorted crud from your gutter.

STEP 2: CHECK FASTENERS

The next thing you want to do is to check the gutter spikes to make sure they pass through the gutter, fascia board and into the rafters of your roof. Over time, these spikes can work their way out or they may have never been properly fastened at all. If needed, invest in new gutter spikes to keep your gutters safely secured to your home. While you're up there, look for holes in the gutters themselves or in the caulking in the seams.

STEP 3: ATTEND TO DOWNSPOUTS

While you're cleaning out the



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gutters, don't forget to also clean the downspouts. If these spouts are clogged, it can cause backups that will pull your gutters down from your house. You also want to check the rivets on your downspouts. If the rivets are loose or have dropped out, head the hard-

ware store and get a set of new rivets and a rivet gun to make quick repairs. At the bottom of the downspout, there may be a splash guard to prevent the water from eroding the earth near your home. Make sure these are routinely replaced to keep your foundations secure.

STEP 4: PRESSURE WASH

Once you've got everything securely fastened, you can then break out the big guns. Pressure washers are powerful tools, and it's important that you use them according to the manufacturer's specific instructions, especially while

you're working up high, such as on ladders cleaning your gutters.

Also be careful with positioning the stream from the pressure washer so that it doesn't hit the roof shingles at the wrong angle and blow them off the roof.

Caring for Trees

It can be easy to forget that the big trees in your yard are plants just like your more fragile roses and flowers that need frequent care.

Don't forget to care for your larger plants just like you would your smaller ones.

START IN THE FALL

Proper tree maintenance starts in the fall. Prepare your trees for colder weather by pruning back unruly branches; inspecting the trees for dying limbs, insect damage or signs of disease; nourish your trees with plenty of water and organic mulch; and, if you're planting, plant your new trees in the fall.

Healthy, well-cared-for trees don't snap, lose limbs or have termites. Prune branches that are broken, either from storms or disease, and also take any branches that are perilously close to your home or other property. Remember that pruning slows the growth of trees because they must heal the cuts before they resume growth.

KEEP A DISTANCE

Remember that the tree isn't just the trunk and branches. Getting too close to trees, even by building a deck or parking a car under it, can damage fragile root systems, making the tree less healthy and more prone to



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disease. Roots need two or three times the length of the tree's branches to grow enough to support the whole tree.

COVER IT UP

A good layer of mulch will keep your tree cozy just like a

warm fuzzy blanket keeps you warm when temperatures dip. Layer the mulch 2-3 inches deep around the base of your tree, but don't let it touch the tree's bark. Remove any older mulch before putting down a fresh layer.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TREE

Every tree has its own place. And that place may not be in your yard. Don't judge the mature tree by the tiny specimen you see in your tree nursery or garden store. Instead,

consider the mature size of the tree (and look at the maximum; don't bet on the minimum). Consider both the canopy size and the reach of the roots. Also look at the types of leaves it will drop and where they will fall.

Get Your HVAC Ready for Fall

For many parts of the country, fall is a golden season where the air conditioners and heaters aren't working overtime to keep us comfortable in our homes.

It's also a great time to do routine maintenance on our heating and air conditioning systems to make sure they're running at peak efficiency. This maintenance can also extend the life of your unit.

CLEAN IT UP

Clean off the outside unit and keep it clear of debris and dirt, such as falling leaves. If you're going to use a water hose or pressure washer, make sure you switch off the power at the circuit first. Take out any branches, tall grass or brush in a four-foot perimeter around the outside unit so that it can get adequate air-flow for heating and cooling. Inside, vacuum your vents and register covers to keep your system free of dust and debris.

PROTECT IT

Insulate any exterior pipes with foam pipe covers wrapped in duct tape and, if you'd like, cover the condenser unit with a plastic or vinyl cover secured well with bungee cords and tape. Take this step only if you know you aren't going to be running the



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outside unit. You also want to regularly change the filter to make sure the system is working easily and efficiently. If you have allergies, you may want to change your filters more frequently than the manufacturer recommends.

CALL IN PROFESSIONALS

There are some tasks best left to the HVAC professionals. These include clearing drain lines and pipes, cleaning the coils, check the refrigerant charge, belts and ductwork, and performing any needed

maintenance. Also have them check your thermostat to make sure it's properly calibrated for your system. Climate control systems are complicated and it's all too easy to mess it up and trigger a bigger repair bill than you may

have had in the first place. For any task you have questions about, call in the pros first. You may also be able to set up a regular maintenance plan that could also earn you discounts on repairs and other service.

Putting Away the Patio

Believe it or not, there's a proper way to put away the patio furniture that stands up to the elements all summer so that they live to entertain again next summer.

Winter is often more harsh on summery outdoor furniture, so it's a good idea to put it away in the fall if you're not going to be using it during the winter months. Keep reading to learn how to put away all types of patio furniture.

WOOD FURNITURE

Wood can absorb moisture, so wooden outdoor furniture needs to be regularly sealed to keep it protected. During the winter, any absorbed moisture can freeze and crack the furniture, so make sure it's thoroughly dry before sealing it, covering it and putting it away. Begin by washing it thoroughly with a water and detergent and bleach solution and a gentle sponge. Rinse it well and let it dry completely before applying a sealant according to the manufacturer's instructions, covering it and storing it for the winter.

PLASTIC FURNITURE

This material doesn't absorb moisture, but it does get brittle enough to break, especially if the temperatures drop below freezing. Store



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plastic furniture indoors or somewhere where the temperature will stay above freezing. Wash it down with a detergent solution, rinse and allow it to dry before putting it away.

METAL FURNITURE

The downfall of metal fur-

niture is rust caused by moisture, including winter snows and freezing rain. Before you store metal patio furniture, closely examine it for any rust spots. If you find any, treat it with a rust-neutralizing primer. Smooth the area and then paint it with a paint that matches the original surface.

To keep it in the best shape, coat it with automotive wax and then put it away.

CUSHIONS AND FABRICS

Mold and mildew will ravage your patio cushions and fabrics during the winter months. Before putting them away, vacuum your cushions

and wash them with a bleach-detergent mix or soap and water, depending on your manufacturer's instructions. Keep fabric patio accessories in a covered shed or storage box and bring them indoors when it rains. Wrap them in tarps and set out traps to keep them safe from rodents.