



**Winter**  
Home &  
Garden

# Snow Shoveling Alternatives

If you live in a region that experiences heavy snow, you likely spend time clearing your driveway.

Sure, using a shovel for removal is an excellent form of exercise. Still, it creates a risk for injury or other cold-related illnesses. This winter, avoid extended periods outside with efficient methods to remove snow-covered driveways and sidewalks.

The National Safety Council reports that snow shoveling is responsible for thousands of injuries and about 100 deaths each year across the country. While mortality is rare, the risks increase for sedentary people who suddenly exert themselves with heart-straining physical activity. Other factors include the cold weather raising blood pressure and heart rate. The chilly temperatures can also make blood clot easily while restricting arteries.

## PLOW ATTACHMENTS

Suppose you already rely on the power of a tractor, ATV or pickup truck for your daily routine. In that case, you can find attachable plows for the front of these vehicles. When choosing the type of implement to purchase, consider how often you plan to use it and the amount of space you must clear.

For smaller areas in regions that don't see treacherous snowstorms, homeowners can benefit from affordable manual attachments. However, when you are regularly clear-

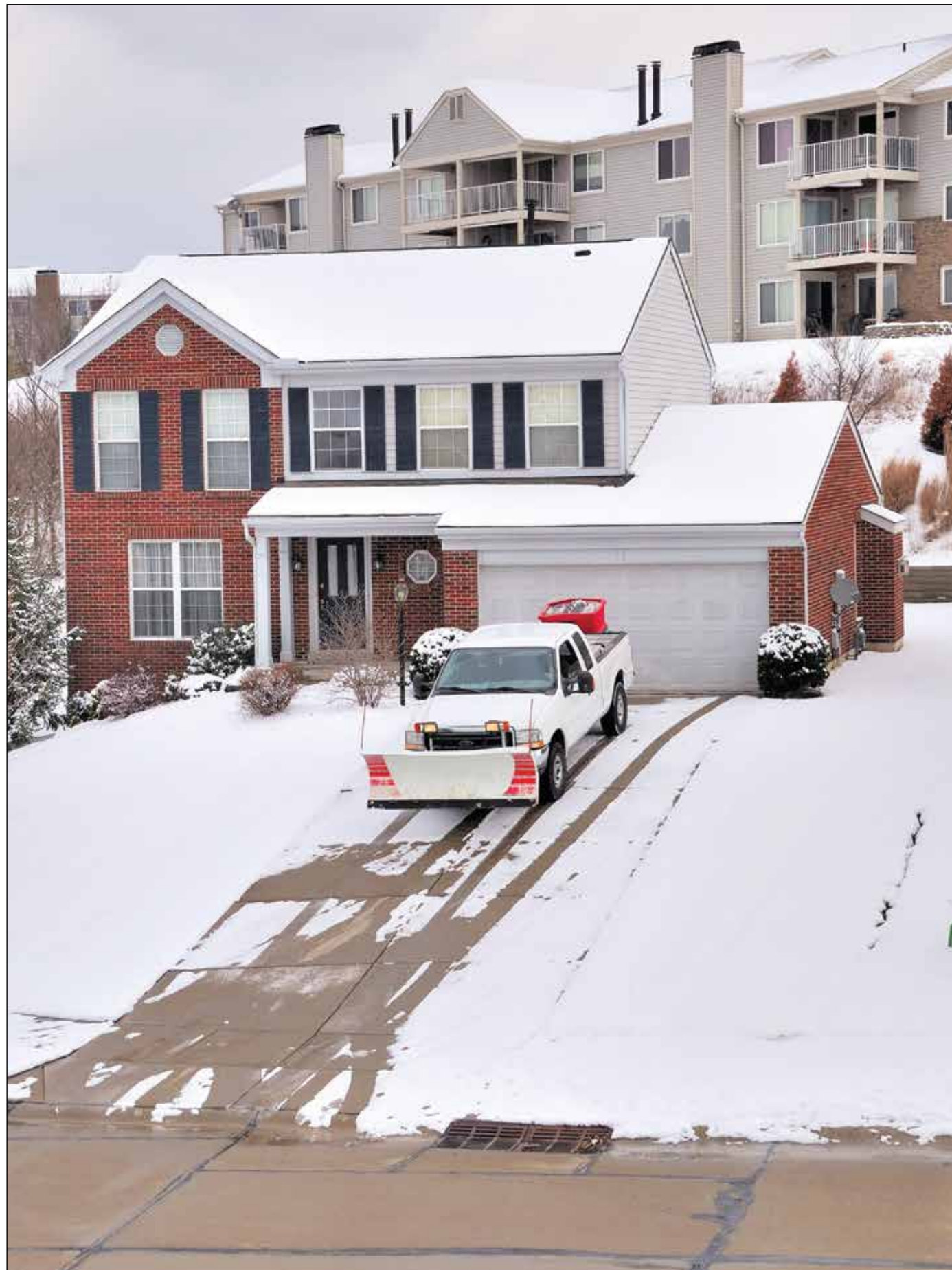
ing your driveway, a hydraulic-powered system may be more appropriate. Be sure to choose a plow that is compatible with your vehicle.

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

If getting out in the cold and eliminating snow isn't possible, consider hiring a professional service to remove it for you. When choosing a reputable provider, be sure to ask for references and if they primarily serve residential customers or commercial lots. You must be able to rely on the business to respond to your needs promptly. Keep in mind, some companies require customers to pay a one-time fee to acquire their services for the season. Consider how often snow falls in your area to determine if the investment is worth the cost.

## HEATED ASPHALT

To eliminate the need for snow removal, research the local costs for installing a heated driveway system. They work by pumping heated water and antifreeze into convoluted tubing that melts any snow collected on the surface. According to Home Advisor, factors like the time of year, soil compaction and nearby trees may require a new driveway to be installed rather than fitting a system to an existing setup.



# Winter Rodent Prevention

Many homeowners forget the importance of pest control during the winter months.

While insect and rodent activity may lessen during the cold season, those who already have an infestation may experience a more significant problem. As animals retreat from the frigid temperatures, make sure your home is equipped to fight off an intrusion.

A quick defense to limit access to food sources in the home. Be sure to use airtight containers for items in your pantry and avoid leaving your trash uncovered. Make a diligent effort to vacuum or mop floors to eliminate crumbs that may invite pests.

For even more peace of mind, consider hiring a professional exterminator service. Here are some benefits of treatment before winter, as suggested by the National Pest Management Association.

## RODENT RISKS

About 24% of homeowners report a mouse infestation during the winter, making this rodent among the season's top pest issues. In addition to causing severe structural damage to a home, they can also bring in fleas and lice while spreading diseases like salmonella and hantavirus.

You can help limit the risks of an invasion or spot an infestation by following these



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efficient strategies.

- Inspect wires, insulation and walls for gnaw marks.
- Store boxes off the floor to prevent rodents from residing in storage areas.
- Keep firewood at least 20 feet away from a residence and at least 5 feet off the ground.

If you still suspect an invasion after following these tips, a professional removal may be necessary.

## RISKS OF DIY ERADICATION

While rodents themselves pose serious health risks to the people and pets in a

home, attempting to eradicate them can also be dangerous without proper knowledge. You can find numerous baits and traps at most stores that claim to solve a rodent infestation issue. However, some may contain chemicals that can poison your family pet or cause a curious child to

become ill after encountering the product.

The safest and most efficient way to address a problem is by contacting a professional service. An expert will discuss a plan to eliminate rodents infesting a home and focus on entry points that must be sealed.

# Weatherproof Wooden Fixtures

Winter weather elements like snow, ice and rain can cripple wooden fixtures, including decks, fences and patio furniture.

Before the frigid temperatures enter your region, you can take steps to protect the sensitive material with waterproofing techniques. With the right maintenance, your items will survive the brutal cold and remain in good condition once spring rolls around.

Suppose you're not experienced in choosing waterproofing sealants, or applying the chemicals to wooden components. In that case, it's beneficial to hire a contractor. Their expertise will lessen the risk of using the wrong mixture or

breathing in dangerous vapors. To find a reputable handyman, ask your friends for referrals or check review websites for real experiences from peers in your community.

However, if you plan to tackle these projects yourself, here are some ideas to protect your outdoor fixtures.

## **STORE OUTDOOR FURNITURE INDOORS**

When possible, moving your outdoor patio furniture inside during winter can help prolong its life. Consider cleaning out a

shed or building on your property to accommodate the items while they are not in use. If you don't have access to an on-site structure, you may find room at a local storage unit facility.

Typically, you can rent a weatherproof area for a small fee to keep your belongings safe during the chilly temperatures. Another way to preserve patio furniture quality is to invest in a water-resistant tarp to provide coverage.

## **WEATHERPROOF A DECK OR FENCE**

While most wood used for decking or fencing is treated, it can become compromised by conditions caused by wet and cold winters over time. Take the time to protect your wooden

components with simple waterproofing methods.

- Before applying a sealer, thoroughly clean the surface with an approved cleaner.

- After it completely dries, choose the preferred shade of waterproofing stain, consider a clear product if you like the current color.

- Apply the sealer with a paint roller or use a tank sprayer to achieve even coats quickly. Check the instructions as most products recommend liberally coating the area twice.

- Allow the deck or fence to dry thoroughly before using the surfaces.

After a quality cleaning and application of waterproof sealer, your wooden components will be prepared to face winter.

# Rejuvenate Exterior Lighting

As Earth's axis tilts away from the sun during the winter months, darkness falls earlier. Check your property to ensure the exterior is well lit will help protect yourself while navigating slippery walkways and add security.

If you think you would benefit from more illumination, consider upgrading your setup or installing new fixtures.

Freezing temperatures are rough on old-fashioned halogen bulbs and can significantly decrease their lifetime and cause performance issues. If you haven't already, upgrading your lighting systems to LED components can save money on your utility bills while promoting more prolonged use.

According to the Environmental Working Group, LED bulbs are an excellent option for multiple reasons:

- They are difficult to break.
- LED bulbs do not include mercury, which contains neurotoxins that can damage the brain, liver, kidneys and the central nervous system.
- They are not sensitive to cold climates.
- While these highly durable bulbs may cost more than



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their traditional counterparts, the benefits and savings in energy use make them a worthy investment.

## WELL-LIT WALKWAYS

Walking on a sidewalk or driveway can be dangerous after a snow or ice storm. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about one million Americans are injured from falls because

of these elements.

Of these accidents, about 17,000 people die annually. Ensure your path is clear by illuminating walkways with ample lighting. If hardwiring lamps are not in your budget, invest in quality solar or battery-powered lights that turn on once the sensor recognizes darkness.

When deciding between models, consider their lumen

level to determine the brightness, the beam size or style and match your decor. The right light setup can create an attractive ambiance that improves your sight while navigating slippery conditions.

## INCREASING SECURITY

A well-lit home is efficient in deterring wrongdoers from approaching your property. The organization Safe Home

suggests that light discourages criminals by giving the impression that someone is home and making it easier to recognize and identify their presence.

Consider installing motion-sensor lighting above entrances like your front, rear and garage doors. For increased security, include a camera system that records with signs of movement.

# Protecting Plants from Frost

Suppose you spend most of the warm weather nurturing and perfecting your outdoor landscaping. In that case, winter's entry can cause considerable damage to exposed greenery.

Frost is a significant risk for unprotected plants. The ice crystals that form on leaves when air temperatures dip below 32 degrees cause injury and sometimes kill most flowers and shrubs.

As winter approaches, it's necessary to protect plants to prevent scalding, frozen roots and foliage damage. In warmer regions, merely adding a mulch layer can add enough security to get your greenery the cold. However, extra steps are encouraged in cooler climates to ensure a bountiful return once spring rolls around.



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## RECOGNIZING FROST CONDITIONS

Paying attention to your local meteorologist can provide a heads up of incoming frost alerts. The Farmer's Almanac offers helpful tips to recognize its approach.

- **Clear sky:** Falling afternoon temperatures and cloud-free skies create the perfect conditions for frost development. Once the sun sets, the heat radiates

upwards, lowering the temperatures near the ground. However, when clouds are present, they trap the heat and keep warmer conditions lower.

- **Wind:** Even a gentle breeze can prevent cold air from settling near the ground and plants. When your region faces freezing conditions on a windless day, frost will likely

be an issue.

- **Humidity and moisture:** Humidity is a beneficial condition that may protect your plants. When the air is dry, the soil's moisture is evaporated, creating a warmth that provides greenery security.

Once frost is imminent in your area, it's crucial to provide your plants with extra levels of protection.

## PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Many plants and trees will benefit from anti-desiccant sprays that provide a secure coating to specific foliage. Follow the instructions on your product as some regions require additional treatments throughout the winter.

The spray is also helpful in strengthening bulbs before

storing and transplanting stressed shrubs before replanting.

The experts at Better Homes and Gardens recommend shielding plants with screens or burlap coverings that allow some sunlight and air circulation. Using these barriers helps shrubs or plants avoid contracting disease during frosty conditions.

# Attracting Birds to Your Garden

Just because winter is rolling in doesn't mean you have to say goodbye to the welcome sights and sounds provided by birds in your backyard.

By understanding which foods attract your native fowls and why feeder location matters, you can be treated to their presence throughout the cold.

While some birds spend their winters migrating to warmer climates, many use cold-weather tactics to survive. According to the National Audubon Society, they rely on feathers and gain fat to supply insulation. You can help the wildlife in your area thrive by providing nutritious meals that boost their ability to endure the winter.

## FILLING FEEDERS

The American Horticultural Society suggests that birds lose about seven to 15% of their body fat just trying to keep warm. Like humans, when their body temperature lowers, they use shivering to heat up. This takes a toll on their small stature.

Ensure your feeders are filled with healthy berries and favorable seeds to attract numerous species to your backyard. If possible, allow spent flowers to remain until season end so seeds can



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mature and provide nutrients for local wildlife.

In addition to using a delectable menu, you should also remember to place your feeders one to three feet above the ground. This tactic will invite a wide variety of fowl, including tray and ground feeders. You can also

use tube or hopper feeders to welcome more species like finches and cardinals.

## WATERING

Supplying water for backyard birds for winter is just as crucial as during the hot summer months. Follow these tips from the National Wildlife

Federation to ensure the fowls in your area have a fresh source for drinking.

- Place baths in a sunny area to make them more visible.
- Clean the basin regularly to ensure quality.
- Consider installing an immersion-style heater.

• Avoid using glycerin for antifreeze as it can be dangerous.

In addition to providing food and water, birds also require protection from winter elements and predators. A long-term plan is to plant evergreens in your landscape to create safe havens.

# Prepare your Home for Santa

With young children in the home, winter brings the excitement of Christmas and the anticipation of the man in the red suit.

Get in the spirit by tapping into your childlike wonder by preparing your home for the arrival of Santa. Of course, as an adult, the season requires serious attention to detail to ensure the holiday is accident-free.

The National Fire Protection Association reports that between 2013-17, an average of 160 home fires were caused by a Christmas tree. Electrical distribution or lighting equipment was responsible for at least 44% of these incidents. If you have avoided an inspection by an electrician, it's essential to hire their services before straining your home's power supply with excessive decorations.

## DECORATE SAFELY

Setting the scene for Christmas includes holiday plants, festive lights and fir or cinnamon scents. If decorations are part of your family's tradition, follow these tips from the National Safety Council to keep your well-being in mind.

- Keep potentially poisonous plants like mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis away from pets and children.



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- When using an artificial tree, ensure that it is fire resistant.

- Replace lights that have broken sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections.

- Turn off all lights and decorations before going to sleep or leaving the house.

Displaying a live Christmas tree requires homeowners to cut off about two inches of the trunk to expose fresh

wood to promote better water absorption.

## FIREPLACE SAFETY

It's critical to ensure your fireplace is in good working order before igniting ablaze and hanging your stockings with care. The Chimney Safety Institute of America breaks inspection requirements into three levels.

- Level one: When the

chimney is intended for use under continued service, and no changes have been made, only a basic inspection is required.

- Level two: A more thorough examination should be made when changes to the fuel source, shape or flue are administered.

- Level three: The highest inspection level is performed if issues are found during lev-

els one or two. This typically results in repairs to the permanently attached components.

According to the CISA, most chimney fires go undetected until significant damage has already impacted the structure. For peace of mind this holiday season, hire an expert inspector to ensure it's safe to roast chestnuts over an open fire.