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How to prepare your lawn and garden for WINTER

Winter weather can be harsh. Homeowners who spend much of the year tending to their lawns and gardens may worry that winter will undo all of their hard work. Though homeowners cannot do anything to prevent snow, wind and ice from affecting their properties, they can take various steps to prepare their lawns and gardens for whatever winter has in store.

• **Mulch leaves.** Falling leaves are a telltale sign that winter is coming. In lieu of raking leaves as they begin to fall, homeowners can mulch them into their lawns. Scotts®, an industry leader in lawn care, notes that mulching leaves is a great way for homeowners to recycle a natural resource and enrich the soil of their lawns. While it might not be possible to mulch fallen leaves in late autumn when they begin to fall en masse, doing so in the early stages of fall should be possible so long as the lawn is not being suffocated. Scotts® recommends mulching the leaves to dime-size pieces to a point where half an inch of grass can be seen through the mulched leaf layer.

• **Rake leaves as they start to fall more heavily.** Once leaves begin to fall more heavily, rake them up and add them to compost piles. The resource GardeningKnowHow.com notes composting leaves creates a dark, rich and organic matter that can add nutrients to garden soil and loosen compacted earth. Leaving leaves on the lawn once they start to fall in great numbers makes it hard for grass blades to breathe, and the leaves can block moisture from reaching the soil, which needs water to maintain strong roots. In addition, potentially harmful pathogens can breed on damp leaves left on a lawn, and such bacteria can cause significant damage to the turf over time.

• **Apply a winterizing fertilizer.** Winterizing fertilizers can help lawns store food they need to survive through winter and also can help them bounce back strong in spring. Such fertilizers are typically formulated for cool-season grasses such as fescue and bluegrass and are often best applied after the final cut of fall. Warm-season grasses go dormant in winter, so homeowners whose lawns contain these types of grasses won’t want to apply a winterizing fertilizer. Homeowners who don’t know which type of grass they have or are concerned about when to apply a winterizing fertilizer should consult with a lawn care professional before fertilizing.

• **Remove annuals from the garden.** Annuals won’t be coming back in spring, so it’s best to remove ones that are no longer producing from the garden before the arrival of winter. Doing so can prevent the onset of fungal diseases that may adversely affect the garden in spring.

Fall is the perfect time for homeowners who spend months making their lawns and gardens as lush as possible to take steps to prepare such areas for potentially harsh winter weather.

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Certain tasks become necessary once autumn arrives. Whereas spring and summer were spent tending gardens and maintaining a yard prime for entertaining, autumn is about preparing properties to survive the winter.

Just as with other jobs around the house and yard, fall clean-up can be done in a manner that is respectful to the environment.

**Leave plant stalks and leaves**

It is tempting to want to cut back perennials and other greenery so a property looks neat. But as flowers and plants dry and drop to the ground, they help insulate the roots from the cold. They also provide a natural habitat and serve as a winter food source for birds and small animals.

**Rake leaves sensibly**

Power blowers and mulchers make fast work of leaves, but at the expense of the environment. Gas-powered devices discharge fuel exhaust into the air, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, reap the benefits of peace and quiet as well as exercise from manual raking.

While raking, do not feel the need to remove every leaf. A certain amount of organic matter can be beneficial to the soil and even insulate the lawn somewhat. A leftover leaf here or there also may provide protection for insects and small animals. For example, many native bees spend the winter in tunnels in the ground, cracks in mortar, holes in dead wood, or within hollow stems, and they need lawn and garden litter to survive.

**Compost is a friend**

Spread a thin layer of compost on the lawn and in garden beds. Compost prevents weed growth, insulates and protects the soil and provides nutrients that will be needed once the spring busy season begins. By using compost, homeowners can reduce dependence on chemical fertilizers and weed killers.

**Check for drafts and leaks**

Fall is an ideal time to check windows and doors for cracks where water, air or insects can enter. Seal up holes and cracks, and ensure there are no drafty areas. Drafts can cause home heating and cooling systems to work harder, expending more energy than necessary.

**Collect and harvest**

Be sure to gather any useable garden vegetables and fruits and prepare them for storage if they cannot be consumed in the next few days. Canning is a time-honored preservation method. Herbs and seeds can be dried and saved for use later on. Vacuum seal fresh basil and parsley.

**Take inventory**

Look at which items in the yard have seen better days and prepare to recycle or reuse them in different ways. Faded plastic planters can be used as impromptu bird baths in a garden. An old tire can be mulched and turned into soft material to put around a playset. Inquire as to the proper way to recycle plastic lawn chairs that may be broken.

Autumn yard work should be performed in as eco-friendly a fashion as possible.

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FOSTORIA Great investment property w/ historic charm consisting of 3 retail store fronts, 3-2BR apts & 1-1BR apts. Room to finish more apts. Recently remodeled. #142 Don Cochran 419-934-0651

LIMA 2.6 ac prime development site on corner of Greely Chapel & Bellefontaine Rd./SR 117, high traffic area near I75, #143 Mike Hunsicker 419-234-3811

ELIDA 1.80 commercial vacant gravel lot w/ 212' road frontage on Washington St. & 50.4' frontage on Church St. 6' fence around property w/ 2-20' gates. #144 Ralph Haggard 419-234-0605

LIMA Great investment opportunity located very close to downtown, half of bldg. is currently occupied and producing income, 1.7 ac of land, great potential for further development. #145 Devin Dye 419-303-5891 & Randy Faulder 419-302-6455

BEAVERDAM Apx. 3.064 sq.ft. commercial bldg. incl. office area, shop, storage & 2 restrooms. Fenced lot consisting of 3 parcels. Many potential uses! #146 Randy Faulder 419-302-6455

KENTON Excellent commercial facility on SR 701 w/ storage for dry or liquid fertilizer. Office bldg., 60' truck scale & over 5 ac stoned parking area plus storage bldgs. & 34x98 workshop. Well & private septic. #148 Ron Spencer 419-230-1111

ALGER Grill/restaurant located on Lee St./SR 235 in Alger, OH. Ample off street parking. Consists of 3 parcels. #150 Randy Faulder 419-302-6455

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BEAVERDAM 37,000 sq.ft. brick commercial bldg. w/3-apt., banquet room w/ show stage & kitchen. Ample parking. Minutes from I-75 & Lincoln Hwy. #156 Randy Faulder 419-302-6455

ELIDA Great commercial location, currently being used as doctor’s office/ medical space. Property offers an updated kitchen & bathroom, fully enclosed front porch, full basement for storage, & handicap accessible ramp. Property can be turned back into a home. Possible lease options! #160 Devin Dye 419-303-5891 & Jacob McKissick 419-236-1890

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FOSTORIA 3 parcels on corner of Ebersole & Park incl. 2 bldgs. formerly used as sheet metal shop: 30x60 w/ att. garage & 2x4x48 w/ 2 overhead doors. Currently zoned R-2 Residential. #174 Don Cochran 419-934-0651
Visitors’ impressions of a home are often dictated by the home’s entryway. Must as one may judge a book by its cover, the same can be said about the impression that a front door and entryway can create, regardless of how accurate that impression is.

Making certain changes to an entryway can go a long way toward improving curb appeal. Entryways also can set the scene for a home’s interior. Whether one chooses to be classic or bold, modern or traditional, there are various ways to quickly transform a home’s entryway.

- **Bold front door color:** Color can dramatically enhance an entryway. Painting an existing door or replacing it with a more vivid option can do the trick. The DIY Network says certain colors stand out as favorites. These include turquoise, yellow, red, indigo, orange, and black. The door color should complement the other shades of the home, such as those on siding and trim.

- **Custom walkway:** Guide guests right to the front door with an attractive (and safe) walkway. Stamped concrete or decorative paver blocks may fit the bill. This walkway can extend to the street or to the driveway.

- **Contain plants.** Landscaping around the entryway should be neat and well-tended. Overgrown plants or shrubbery may give off an air of neglect. Container plants and carefully curated shrubs can create a neat and inviting aura.

- **Highlight the address.** Make sure the home can be found easily with bold and decorative house numbers. Consider two different address signs: one illuminated and easily viewed from the curb, and another closer to the front door.

- **Utilize high-end materials.** The relatively small area of real estate by the front door enables homeowners to splurge on more opulent materials that can really add a feeling of luxury. These can include colorful tiles, ornate planters, decorative wooden doors, or elaborate knobs and lighting fixtures.

- **Add architectural details.** Find out which architectural elements will meld with the style of the home and then incorporate them. Moldings, columns, shutters, and trim are areas to consider. The entryway to a home garners a lot of attention. Homeowners can enhance their spaces with entryways that really make a statement.
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A warm fire can make even the coldest winter day more enjoyable. Fireplaces may not get much use in spring or summer, but come late fall and throughout the winter, the fireplace can be a great place for families to gather.

Before fireplace season hits full swing, homeowners might want to brush up on a few fireplace facts so they can safely enjoy nights spent sitting by the crackling flames.

The Chimney Safety Institute of America advises homeowners with fireplaces to hire a CSIA-certified chimney sweep to clean their fireplaces. After a lengthy period of non-use, various issues could be affecting the chimney, many of which might not be noticeable to an untrained eye.

Professional, certified chimney sweeps have extensive knowledge of fireplaces, making them valuable resources who can let homeowners know if any safety issues developed since fireplaces were last used. The National Protection Agency recommends that chimneys be swept at least once per year.

A full inspection of the chimney might be in order as well. Chimney service technicians will conduct thorough examinations of readily accessible portions of the chimney exterior and interior and accessible portions of the appliance and the chimney connection.

The CSIA recommends that homeowners who plan to use their chimneys as they have in the past request a Level 1 inspection, which will examine the soundness of the chimney structure and flue as well as the basic appliance installation and connections. Technicians also will verify if the chimney is free of obstruction and combustible deposits.

Homeowners also should inspect their chimney dampers before lighting their first fires of the season. Dampers should open and close smoothly. If not, a service technician can help fix or replace the damper.

Firewood is another thing homeowners must consider before lighting their first fires of the season. The CSIA says that well-seasoned firewood works best, noting that wood that is not well-seasoned will produce more smoke than heat. In addition, the home improvement resource This Old House recommends using dense wood that’s been split and stored in a high and dry place for at least six months. Oak is an example of dense wood that, when stored properly, can make for an enjoyable fireplace experience. Avoid softwoods like pine. Pine can produce a lot of creosote, which is a byproduct of wood combustion. Creosote is highly flammable, and as it builds up in a chimney, the risk for a chimney fire increases. Choosing the right wood, making sure it’s well-seasoned and having a chimney professionally cleaned can reduce the risk of a creosote-related chimney fire.

A Level 1 inspection should determine if there are potentially dangerous levels of creosote deposits in the chimney.

Before nestling up to a fireplace this winter, homeowners should consider a host of factors and safety measures to ensure their fireplaces are safe and ready for the season ahead.
A basement remodeling project can add valuable and usable space to a home. For many years, homeowners overlooked the potential of a basement remodel, perhaps thinking it would not be a smart return on investment. But that’s no longer the case.

The latest “Cost vs. Value” report from Remodeling magazine says the average basement remodel can cost around $61,000 with a 70.3 percent recoup rate. In addition, HGTV says architects and contractors indicate the cost of redoing a basement is roughly one-third to one-half less than the price of putting an addition on a home.

Before remodeling a basement, homeowners should think about how they want to use the space. Homeowners also must focus on some potential obstacles in a basement that will need to be addressed so that the area can be as functional as possible.

Basements can be chilly and damp. That means moisture issues and heating and cooling needs must be addressed prior to any construction. Homeowners may have to consider the installation of a dehumidifier and run venting through the basement to allow for proper climate control. If a basement takes on water, either through the walls or a concrete slab, a professional waterproofing company can come in and fix these issues so they will not damage drywall and flooring afterwards.

The presence of insects and pests also must be addressed. Exterminators can help homeowners figure out which insects are in their basements and how to make the space less hospitable to these unwelcome guests so that the room will become comfortable for human occupants.

Space is often at a premium in basements, which may contain HVAC units, water heaters, filtration devices, ductwork, pipes, and the other appliances. Qualified contractors can suggest solutions for cording off appliances and camouflaging pipes and wires so they won’t detract from the finished product. However, building access panels into the design will make it easier to service or repair features as necessary. Homeowners also may want to wrap pipes before drywall is installed to quiet noisy drainage pipes.

Uneven basement flooring will need to be smoothed out and flattened before carpeting or tile can be laid down. A self-leveling underlayment can be applied to fill in gullies, while larger crack and holes will need to be patched.

Once the structure of the basement is addressed, then the design work can begin. Many professionals advise against drop ceilings, which can take away from ceiling height and look cheap. Basements can be dark, so the addition of plenty of lighting can help brighten the room. Small basement windows can be replaced with larger ones to add more light as well.

Homeowners can mimic built-ins and architectural details from elsewhere in the home so the basement is aesthetically cohesive and doesn’t seem like an addition. Bookcases and shelving can add valuable storage space as well. Decorate the basement with bright, neutral colors so they make the space feel more inviting.

With some effort and financial investment, basements can be as beautiful and functional as other rooms in a home.
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