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Get Your Home Fall & Winter Ready With Five Simple Projects

(MS)- If boots, a warm hat and a tuned-up snow blower are the only items on your winter preparation list, your home maintenance plan may need a makeover. These simple home maintenance projects can help lower your energy bills, prevent more costly repairs and/or increase the lifespan of your home.

1. HEATING & VENTILATION: Examine your fireplace and chimney system to ensure that no soot or creosote has collected. Any cracks or voids could potentially cause a fire. Before you turn the furnace or boiler on, replace the air filter and hire a professional to inspect the unit more thoroughly. These steps will improve the efficiency and life of your furnace and will ensure stable indoor air quality.

2. SEAL WINDOWS & DOORS: If not properly sealed, windows and doors can be a major culprit for heat loss. To keep the warm air inside, inspect the weatherstripping around your home's windows and doors for leaks, rot or decay. Repair or replace structural framing, and caulk inside and out, if necessary.

3. INSULATE WELL: One of the easiest and most effective defenses against heat loss is proper insulation. Prevent cold drafts from entering and the loss of heated air through basement headers, which, when left exposed, can make your furnace work harder. Look for a moisture-resistant product offering high thermal performance, such as Roxul Comfortbatt insulation. This type of mineral wool insulation makes installation simple. All that's needed is a serrated blade or bread knife. Cut the batt to fit the cavity and press into place. The insulation will help improve energy efficiency as soon as it's in place and provide savings over the lifetime of your home. Comfortbatt can also be used to top or replace old attic insulation. Aim for an R-50 or a depth of 16 inches.

4. BACKYARD CARE: Save your property from potential damage by trimming overgrown trees and shrubs to prevent ice-laden branches from thrashing against electrical wires and your home's exterior. Drain/shut off any exterior faucets and sprinkler systems to prevent freezing. Ensure rain or snow drains away from the house to avoid foundation problems.

5. ROOF AND GUTTERS: Inspect your roof for shingles that are warped, damaged or even missing to prevent a future leak. Use roofing cement and a caulking gun to seal joints where water could penetrate, such as around the chimney, skylights or vent pipes. Make sure that your gutters and downspouts are securely fastened. Downspouts should extend at least five feet away from the home to prevent flooding.

When it comes to preventative maintenance, a little time and effort can save thousands in energy costs and repair bills over the lifetime of your home.

Coping With Condensation & Other Home Moisture Issues



Finding the right moisture balance in a home or office space can be challenging. Too little moisture and it can be plagued by static electricity and interior spaces that can feel dry and uncomfortable. Worse, too much moisture in a home or business may make it susceptible to mold, mildew and insect infestations. Moisture also can rot wood and cause unsightly stains on walls and ceilings. Maintaining humidity in the optimal indoor range helps to keep it safe, reduce energy consumption and keep the occupants healthy. Damp conditions can lead to the growth of fungi, viruses and bacteria and may exacerbate people's asthma and allergies. The ideal relative humidity range should be between 40 to 50, according to heating and cooling experts and the Environmental Prevention Agency. Humidity should be even lower in the winter to prevent condensation on windows and other surfaces. Lower relative humidity also reduces the out-gassing of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs.

Measure humidity with a hygrometer to get an accurate assessment. If the humidity levels fall above or below the desired range, action should be taken. Owners dealing with excessive moisture can try these remedies.

• **VENTILATE AREAS.** Ventilation can be the first step to reducing indoor humidity. Target the areas that create the most moisture, such as kitchens and bathrooms. Turn on venting fans to remove moist air from the bathroom during

showers and baths. Exhaust hoods can control humidity from cooking in the kitchen. When possible, open windows on dry days to help air out damp spaces.

• **RELY ON FANS.** Use fans to circulate the air and prevent moist air from pooling in certain locations. Fans also will help increase ventilation.

• **KEEP GUTTERS & DOWNSPOUTS CLEAN.** Prevent water from pooling around the foundation of a home and infiltrating the basement or crawl-space. Direct gutter water fur-

ther away from the building if possible, and keep gutters free of obstructions.

• **SERVICE HVAC SYSTEMS REGULARLY.** Routine inspections of heating and cooling systems can identify any problems, such as clogged air-conditioning drain lines or faulty operation, that can contribute to moisture problems.

• **ADDRESS ANY PLUMBING LEAKS.** Make sure you trace possible leaks to their sources and have them repaired. Constantly dripping water can add to humidity levels and create other problems.

• **USE A DEHUMIDIFIER.** If all other efforts have been tried, a dehumidifier unit can help remove excess moisture from the air. Dehumidifiers are particularly helpful in basements where moisture can collect.

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Winterizing 101 How To Prepare Your Yard For Winter

Changing seasons can be tough on a lawn. Always exposed to the elements, lawns can fare especially poorly upon the arrival of winter, a season known for its harsh and unforgiving weather. Even the most perfectly manicured lawn can suffer at the hands of winter weather, causing homeowners to sit idly by and hope spring arrives that much sooner. But as punishing as winter weather can be on a lawn, homeowners are not without recourse. Much like homeowners can take steps to help their lawns survive sizzling summer heat waves during the warmer months of the year, they also can take steps to help their lawns make it through the often stormy weather synonymous with winter.

* Don't procrastinate. Putting off the process of winterizing a lawn can put that lawn in jeopardy. Lawns will turn dormant the closer you get to winter, and they may reject the nutrients found in fertilizer as a result. Those nutrients will prove valuable once spring weather returns, so start the winterization process in early fall so the lawn has sufficient time to absorb nutrients and strengthen itself for the seasons to come.

* Treat trouble spots. Summer can be even harder on a lawn than winter, especially for those lawns located in regions where heat waves and drought are common. In such instances, certain spots on the lawn seem to be hit harder than others, and

those spots should get special attention when winterizing the lawn. Check the soil's pH levels before fertilizing or applying any treatments. Such a test will reveal which spots need the most attention, and treating trouble spots now will make spring lawn care that much easier.

* Aerate the property. Aerating can help a lawn recover after a long summer and help it survive the potentially harsh months that lie ahead. Aerating, which involves puncturing the soil or removing cores of soil from the ground, can restore a lawn to health by improving its drainage and allowing more water and air to reach the roots of the grass. Aerating also makes it easier for nutrients to penetrate the soil, which encourages a healthier lawn over the long haul. Aerators can be purchased or rented, but homeowners uncomfortable with the process may want to enlist a professional to tackle the job. Parents of small children who spend lots of time in the yard may need to aerate their lawn more than most, as heavy lawn traffic compresses the soil, a potentially harmful process that can be reversed via aeration.

* Take steps to strengthen the roots. Aerating promotes stronger roots, but homeowners might also want to find a winterizing product with potassium and phosphorous, both of which can strengthen roots. Different types of lawns will respond differently to certain

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winterizers, so discuss your options with a lawn care professional who can help you find the right fit for your property.

* Remove debris from the lawn. Debris left on a lawn over the winter can prove very harmful. Piles of debris left scattered around a lawn can suffocate the blades of grass, leading to long-term damage and a potentially unsightly lawn come the spring. In addition, piles of debris might make good homes for organisms that can damage the lawn. As fall moves into winter, periodically remove all debris, including leaves and branches fallen from trees.

* Make the lawn off-limits once the temperatures dip below freezing. A lawn should be off-limits once the ground freezes. Stepping on grass that has frozen will leave noticeable footprints, and walking on frozen grass can kill the turf. When winter arrives, people should avoid using the lawn as a shortcut into and out of your home and stick to driveways and sidewalks instead.

Why Homeowners Should Add More Exterior Light To Their Properties

Homeowners are increasingly realizing the benefits of improving the exteriors of their home, which can be just as valuable as improving the interior spaces. As individuals design picturesque garden beds and cultivate lavish lawns or revamp exteriors with architectural features, they probably want to spotlight these improvements. This is where exterior lighting can be put to great use. Exterior illumination can cast a glow on various features, but there are many other reasons to increase lighting around the exterior of a home.

- Safety: Trips and falls can occur at night when trying to traverse walkways and landscapes in the dark, as it can be difficult to see rocks, stairs and uneven pavement. Outdoor lighting can illuminate pathways, entryways and other areas for safer access for homeowners and their guests.
- Extend outdoor entertaining: Ample lighting can increase the amount of time one can use outdoor spaces and make them the perfect gathering spot. As autumn arrives, days become shorter. However, patios, porches and more can get extended use with lighting.
- Safeguard security: A well-lit home may be less likely to be targeted by burglars than one swathed in darkness and shadows. Lights can remain on all



evening or be motion-triggered. Setting lights on timers also ensures that the home is illuminated whether residents are home or not.

- Create drama: Landscape lighting designers can establish focal points around the landscape and highlight the best features of a property. Uplighting in trees, silhouetting techniques to showcase plants and spotlights to show off architectural features are all options for homeowners to consider.
- Add value: The experts at

Parker Homescape, a landscape design service, say that exterior lighting can add roughly 30 percent to the value of a home. They also indicate that 50 percent of all home buyers say that outdoor lighting is important when buying a home. If current residents are thinking about selling, now may be the time to invest in exterior lighting. Improving a home's exterior may be as simple as adding more lighting to improve functionality and beauty.

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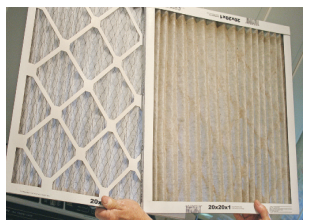
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How To Inspect Your Furnace Before Winter Arrives

It is almost time to bid adieu to the warm days of summer. Chilly afternoons followed by continually dropping temperatures are on the horizon, and fall is the perfect time to service



the home furnace to ensure it is ready to withstand the demands of winter. Furnace maintenance should be done on a regular basis. The best time to do so is in late summer or early fall, when you still have enough time to address any problems before it gets too cold outside. HVAC systems malfunctions are typically caused by one of a handful of common problems.

Inspecting certain components can help to guarantee a furnace is in working order when the first cold days arrive. **FILTER AND AIR INTAKES-** After several months of running the air conditioning, the filter on the heating and cooling system may need to be changed. Check the condition of the filter to see if it is heavily soiled. Furnace filters are relatively inexpensive. Since this thin barrier will be responsible for cleaning the air you breathe, it is important to keep a fresh filter in the unit. A clogged, dirty filter will reduce the efficiency of the HVAC system and may contribute to poor indoor air and allergies. Check the air intakes around the house for obstructions. Do not place furniture directly in front of intakes or venting that delivers air to the home, as this can compromise air flow and force the unit to work harder. Without adequate air flow

through the system, the furnace may not turn on. Many systems also have some sort of external vent or exhaust pipe. Check that the area is free of leaves, debris and animal nests. Again, any blockages can impede the efficiency of the unit or cause it to fail. **THERMOSTAT-** Very often a furnace may not turn over because the thermostat is faulty. Many a homeowner has spent money to have a service person come out to examine the furnace, only to learn they only need a new thermostat or battery in the thermostat. Check the thermostat against a separate thermometer to ensure that it is reading the right temperature in the house. Raise the setting a few degrees to test if the heat kicks on. **FUEL-** Furnaces are powered by various energy sources. Electricity, gas or oil may be involved in the process. If fuel is not being delivered to the fur-

nace, the pilot will not light and warm the air to be blown through the house. Some systems have an emergency shut-off switch that will halt fuel delivery to the unit. It's easy for these switches to be flipped accidentally if a furnace is located in a high-traffic area. Make sure the switch is in the "on" position before reporting a problem. In addition to these steps, you may want to vacuum the vent screens around the house. This will reduce the amount of dust blown around. Also, if the furnace exhausts into a flue, be sure that the exhaust route is clear so that carbon monoxide does not back up into the home. Many homeowners are fully capable of inspecting their furnaces to ensure they are ready for winter. If anything seems out of place or malfunctions, consult with an HVAC professional to make repairs.

Seven Uses For Fallen Leaves

By the time autumn hits full swing, many trees will have shed their leaves for the season, and the last vestiges of red, yellow and orange magic will have faded to brown. Raking, blowing and collecting leaves becomes the primary chores of lawn and yard maintenance, and presents most homeowners with large piles of gathered leaves to tend to. It is impossible to count just how many leaves fall to the

ground each year, or just how many pounds of leaves get collected curbside, but the numbers are substantial. Cleaning up leaves is considerable work, but not all of those leaves need to be carted away. In fact, there are several different uses of leaves that can be beneficial. 1. Spread leaves as a protective mulch to cover tender perennials or root crops/bulbs in the ground. The leaves will form a natural insulating cover

that keeps the soil and the plants within a bit warmer over winter. 2. Create a pile of leaves that will break down and form a crumbly, compost-like material called leaf mold. Even though leaf mold may sound like a blight, it's actually a good amendment to garden soil, improving its structure and ability to hold water. Leaf mold also attracts beneficial organisms that are vital in healthy soil. 3. Brown leaves can be added to green materials in compost piles to improve the health of the compost being formed. According to the healthy living resource Care2, the ideal ratio is 75 percent brown to 25 percent green materials in compost. Turn compost piles regularly to aerate them. 4. Store dried, mulched leaves in a dry spot so they can be used in the spring as a weed barrier for spring plantings. They will keep weeds at bay and help retain soil moisture to

ensure small sprouts have the resources to grow. 5. Use shredded leaves as a lawn supplement. Pass a lawn mower over leaves left on the lawn to break them down into pieces too small to rake. This will help keep the lawn healthy throughout the winter without blocking out needed sunlight. 6. Bag dried leaves and pack them tightly together in cold areas of the home, such as basements or garages. They can act as added insulation. Bags of leaves also can be placed around planting containers to protect them from frost. 7. Gather a few of the best-looking leaves and preserve them. Use an iron on a low setting and press leaves between two pieces of waxed paper until the waxed paper seals together. Or use clear contact paper to achieve the same effect. *Fallen leaves can be used in many different ways throughout the year.*

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End-Of-Summer Checklist

After a few months of blue skies and warm temperatures, summer revelers will soon bid adieu to the sultry days of this beloved season. Summer is often a season filled with vacations and recreation, but as the warm days dwindle and work and school commitments begin

anew, there is additional work to be done in preparation for the months ahead.
* Stock up on pool equipment. Homeowners who have pools can take advantage of end-of-season sales to purchase a few more gallons of pool chlorine or other pool equipment. Store

them after you have winterized the pool, and you will be ahead of the game in terms of supplies for next year.
* Plan your garden harvest. If you have a backyard garden, pick your tomatoes and other vegetables before the weather starts to get chilly. Herbs can be

washed and frozen in zipper-top baggies so they can be used when cooking over the next several months. Boil tomatoes for sauce and freeze or jar them. Begin to clear out residual stems and plant debris from the garden.
* Clean patios and furniture. Scrub and hose down outdoor furniture, cushions and living areas. Clean and dry items before storing them for the winter, so everything is ready to go when the warm weather returns next year.

* Purchase spring bulbs. Buy bulbs for spring-blooming flowers and map out where they will be planted for beautiful flowers next year. Wait until temperatures start to dip before planting the bulbs, otherwise they may begin to produce shoots prematurely, zapping the bulbs of energy.
* Check the heating system. Although turning on the heat may be the last thing you're thinking about, it's a good idea to test it and, if necessary, have the system serviced prior to the arrival of cold weather.
* Tend to the deck and other repairs. Make repairs to outdoor structures now, and they'll be more likely to survive the harsh weather that's just over the horizon. Apply stain or sealant to further protect wood structures in advance of snow and ice.
* Examine the roof and chimney. Winter is a poor time to learn you have missing roof shingles or a leak. Furthermore, ensure the chimney and venting to the outdoors is not obstructed by abandoned animal nests.
* Check your closets. Go through clothing and remove any items that are damaged or no longer fit, donating them if possible. Clean out kids' closets as well, as pants that fit perfectly in May will not necessarily fit come September.
* Stock the shed. Once the weather has cooled down, move outdoor flower pots, hoses and lawn ornaments you no longer need into the shed or garage while ensuring items needed in fall and winter, such as rakes, snow shovels and snowblowers, are more accessible.

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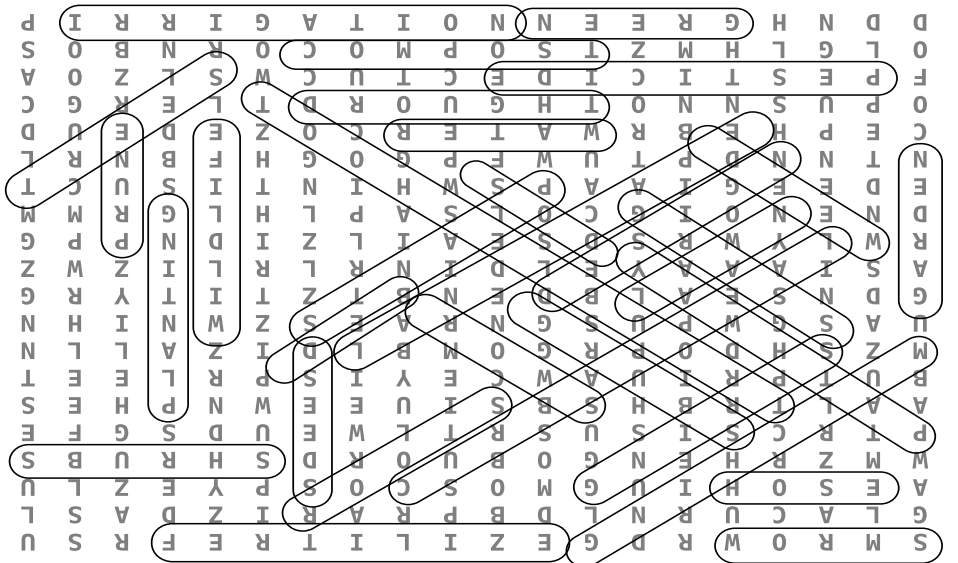
LANDSCAPE WORD SEARCH

S M R O W R D G E Z I L I T R E F R S U
G L A C U R N L D B P R A R I Z D A S L
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O L G L H M Z T S O P M O C O R N B O S
D D N H G R E E N N O I T A G I R R I P

WORDS

- BED
- COMPOST
- CURB APPEAL
- DESIGN
- DROUGHT
- FERTILIZE
- GARDEN
- GRASS
- GREEN
- GRUBS
- HOSE
- IRRIGATION
- LANDSCAPE
- LAWN
- MULCHING
- PATHWAY
- PESTICIDE
- PLANTING
- PLANTS
- PRUNE
- ROOTS
- ROWS
- SEEDS
- SHRUBS
- SOD
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- TREES
- TROUBLESHOOT
- WATER
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How To Winterize Your Pool

Homeowners with pools who live in regions where winter can be harsh know they must eventually prepare their pools for the colder seasons ahead. People who live in climates not con-

ducive to year-round outdoor swimming often find that by the cooler weather of autumn makes this season the perfect time to winterize their pools. Although closing a pool is rarely celebrated, it is a very important task. Properly winterizing a pool will reduce the likelihood of damage in the months ahead, saving homeowners from financing potentially expensive repairs. Closing the pool before trees begin to shed their leaves is a good idea, as is doing so before the arrival of the first cold stretch. Homeowners who want to get started on winterizing their pools can heed the following advice.



* Gather all of the necessary equipment. To winterize your pool, you will need the pool cover, drain plugs, certain chemicals, and cleaning equipment. Have all of the tools you will need nearby so you will not be scrambling for items once you start working.

* Check the chemical levels in the pool. Check the pool's chemical levels so you can create a sterile environment that won't be overtaken by microorganisms in the water during the off-season. Many pool experts recommended ensuring the pH is at the appropriate level (7.4 -

7.8), checking the alkalinity of the water to ensure it is between 80 and 120 ppm, as well as verifying the calcium hardness is at the right level. Creating the right water envi-

ronment reduces the risk that any problems will develop over the winter.

* Thoroughly clean the interior of the pool. When cleaning don't forget to remove any accessories, such as ladders, ropes, fountains, etc. Clean these items and store them in a winter-safe area.

* Bring up the pool chlorine to shock level. Bringing the chlorine to shock level means the pool will have a higher amount of chlorine, which is necessary to kill off any remaining algae or microorganisms in the water. Keep the water filtering and at this elevated chlorine level for a few days prior to closing the pool to ensure that there will be no algae blooms once the cover is in place and you cannot monitor the water.

* Drain some of the water. Depending on the type of cover you are using, and whether or not you will be using plugs to block any ports into and out of your pool, you may need to drain several inches of water to ensure that it falls below filter skimmer baskets and return jets. All water should be forced out from any hoses and internal components of the pool so that the water will not freeze and cause damage.

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Add A Pop Of Color To Your Garden This Winter

Winter weather comes on the heels of a vibrant, colorful autumn season. Shortly after fall foliage falls to the ground, nature tends to greet us with a considerably less colorful palette. What's more, much of the wildlife and plants that make spring, summer and fall so awe-inspiring tend to hibernate in winter, making it more difficult to find bright spots on drab days.

If you think that winter means the end of beautiful garden colors, think again. There are plenty of cool-season flowers and other plants that can add a pop of color to brighten your day. These flowers provide color right when most people need it most.

In areas where winter is not marked by a deep freeze, homeowners can plant pansies, snapdragons, English daisies, calendula, and other blooms from early fall through late winter. These plants will survive the cold, keeping containers, borders and gardens full of color.

Camellias are a type of flower that bloom in fall and winter in hues of red, pink, coral, white, and more. The plants are evergreen and will grow from shrubs or small trees when fully established.

Homeowners who live in climates marked by cold winters can opt for plants that offer color but without flowers. According to HGTV, these include cab-

bage and kales, which can survive most cold winters and lend an interesting texture to a winter landscape bed.

Of course, no list of winter's colorful plants would be complete without holly, which offers an eye-catching display of evergreen leaves and bright red

berries, though sometimes the berries are golden. Either way, they can be a sight for sore eyes on gray winter days.

For more ideas, visit a local garden center to learn about plants that can add vibrant color to a landscape, even as autumn transitions to winter.



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