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Reap Garden Rewards Even In Fall

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that can help people relax and produce an enviable landscape. Many gardeners even find their meals are more fresh and flavorful when using items they grew themselves. While many gardeners do the bulk of their gardening in the spring and summer, certain plants thrive in cooler temperatures. That group includes autumn vegetables that are ripe for the picking when leaves begin falling. Fall gardens provide a reason to enjoy the off-enjoyable autumn air. So many different vegetables come to life in the autumn, and they can make wonderful additions to the dinner table. Broccoli, kale, collards, spinach, squashes, artichokes, and beets are just some of the many autumn planting options you can try. Celery also is best in the fall, and its harvest continues through winter in temperate climates. By replacing crops that have been harvested through the spring and summer with fall-friendly alternatives, you can keep your garden productive for most of the year. Begin the process by counting back 12 to 14 weeks from the expected first frost date for where you live. Begin seeds for your autumn plantings indoors, because summer heat and dryness are not the best conditions to nurture young seedlings. Enrich the soil with compost so that you can replenish the nutrients lost from the last crop harvested. Each region is different, so learn about when to put plants in the ground for your region. Many plants still need the sun and warmth of late summer to thrive and produce well into the fall. If you are unsure, consult with a local garden center, where you can learn about various aspects of autumn gardening. Onions, shallots and garlic are best planted mid-fall after the soil has cooled. Gradually introduce seedlings to more sunlight and outdoor temperatures before they go in the ground, as they need time to adjust to the unfiltered sun. Be sure to thoroughly water the garden. Newly planted beds should be kept moist to germinate and so established plants can take root. In addition, consider a shade covering so that the soil doesn't dry out or get baked in the sun. Mulch also can help retain moisture and keep the conditions ideal for your autumn vegetables to grow. Remember that moisture and cooler temperatures can attract garden pests, so you may need to employ some strategies to keep them under control. For example, insect barriers and all-natural baited traps can keep slugs and snails from munching on your autumn plants. Fall vegetable gardens can be worthy endeavors, yielding plenty of crops and providing the fun and fulfillment of gardening into the fall.

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Preparing Your Fireplace Or Stove For The Season

Fireplaces and wood-burning stoves not only can be beautiful focal points within a home, but they also provide an additional source of heat and can be used to keep rooms or entire homes comfortable without the need for additional and potentially costly heating sources. Just like more modern home heating systems, stoves and fireplaces need to be maintained, and that maintenance includes readying them before winter when they are used more heavily. Ensuring a fireplace or stove is in good working order helps to guarantee efficiency of use and safety during the winter months. Open-flame heating sources carry with them certain risks. The National Fire Protection Association states that, between 2009-2013, American fire departments responded to 56,000 home structure fires that involved heating equipment. The NFPA notes that the leading factor contributing to home-heating fires is a failure to keep things clean, principally from solid-fueled heating equipment. The following are a handful of ways to stay safe as you get ready for another cozy season around the fire.

- Start with the chimney. Begin by having your chimney thoroughly cleaned and inspected. Creosote can build up inside of the chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and becomes more difficult and expensive to clean the longer it builds up inside your flue lining. In addition, animals may have created nest inside of the chimney since the last time the fireplace was used. A professional chimney sweep should be hired in this

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situation. He or she will be able to effectively clean the chimney in a manner that is the least messy and disruptive to residents. Operational alarms are essential to preventing injury or death resulting from smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation. Such detectors are inexpensive safeguards that should be installed on every floor of the house. Batteries should be replaced every six months, and the alarms themselves should be changed every five to 10 years. • Inspect the chimney from outdoors as well. Inspect the mortar around any bricks in the chimney and surrounding areas for cracks. If left unaddressed, these can cause dangerous fires. If there are serious cracks, a professional may need to make repairs or the chimney may need to be replaced. You also can have the chimney capped with a screen to keep animals and debris from entering. • Inspect the damper. A damper is a valve or plate that stops or regulates the flow of air inside a chimney. It should be checked

prior to the first use of a stove or fireplace so homeowners can be certain it opens and closes smoothly. • Clear out flammable items. Move flammable items away from the front of a fireplace or stove. Be sure curtains or other home furnishings are far enough away that they will not catch fire from any errant sparks or flames. • Order wood now. Be sure there is plenty of wood for the season. Ask a wood supplier to estimate just how much will be needed, and double-check that the wood will arrive in time for

the start of the season. By preparing for fireplace and wood stove use now, homeowners can ensure their winters are comfortable and safe. Prepare fireplaces, chimneys and heating stoves for another season of regular use.



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Address Air Leaks To Save Energy And Money

Rising energy costs coupled with the continued adoption of eco-friendly lifestyles are two factors driving homeowners to seek ways to reduce energy consumption in their homes. Reducing energy consumption is reason enough for many homeowners to make changes around the house, but saving energy sometimes means saving substantial amounts of money as well. Energy-efficient appliances and eco-friendly building materials can help homeowners reduce energy consumption. But homeowners looking for additional ways to cut cooling and heating costs can address air leaks around the house to make their homes more energy efficient.

• Identify air leaks around windows and doorways. Autumn is a great time of year to identify air leaks. Fall, and particularly late fall, tends to be characterized by cold air that makes it easy to detect air leaks. Feel for leaks around windows and doorways, ideally conducting such tests on cold, windy days when you can quickly detect if air is flowing in from the outside. Leaks around windows and doors waste energy because the interior of the home is either colder (in the winter) or warmer (in the summer) than it needs to be, prompting homeowners to turn up their thermostats or rely more heavily on air conditioning units.

• Look for leaks elsewhere around the house. While windows and doorways are where many leaks are found, leaks also may be found around plumbing, electrical fixtures and dryer vents. Inspect such areas by feeling for drafts or looking for signs that insects and critters might be entering.

• Look up and down. Evidence of air leaks may be noticeable on both the floor and the ceiling. Dirty spots on carpeting and the ceiling may be indicative of air leaks at interior wall/ceiling joints and wall/floor joists.

Fixing such leaks may be as simple as applying some caulk.

• Go with gaskets. The United States Department of Energy recommends installing foam gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on walls. Outlets and switch boxes on exterior walls provide another place for air to leak into a home and drive up energy costs. Properly installed gaskets can cut back on air infiltration, providing an inexpensive way to save energy and money.

• Cover the kitchen exhaust fans when you are not cooking. Kitchen exhaust fans can help prevent fires and unfavorable indoor air conditions when preparing meals at home. But such fans provide opportunities for air to enter a home, so make sure they are tightly closed or covered when no one is cooking in the kitchen.

Air leaks around a house can waste energy and contribute to high energy bills, particularly during the winter and summer

when temperatures outside tend to be at their most extreme. Homeowners looking to reduce their energy consumption and save money can inspect various areas of their homes for air leaks and immediately address any they discover. Air leaks around doorways can waste energy and cost homeowners substantial amounts of money.

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3 Potential Trouble Signs For Driveways

Though they are often easy to overlook, driveways are durable parts of a home that can greatly impact a home's curb appeal. Driveways endure quite a bit of wear and tear over their lifespans, and homeowners who have not given their driveways much thought may want to start looking for potential trouble signs that indicate a need for some driveway maintenance. Damaged driveways do not necessarily need to be replaced, as some may just need minor repairs. But homeowners who see any of the following trouble signs in their driveways may want to consult a professional contractor to determine what their next steps should be.

- 1. POTHOLES** - Potholes might be most often associated with heavily trafficked roadways, but even driveways are susceptible to potholes. As the ground beneath the driveway expands and contracts, the pavement above that ground weakens and becomes more susceptible to damage. That damage may ultimately lead to large chunks of the driveway breaking down, creating holes as a result. Homeowners who live in areas that experience heavy snowfall may see their driveways develop potholes after they are shoveled or plowed. Potholes that are not fixed may damage vehicles that drive on the pavement, and potholes may even expand over time.
- 2. ACCUMULATION OF WATER** Puddles that form during a rainstorm may not be indicative of anything other than a rainy day. But water that pools or runs down the middle of the driveway may indicate drainage problems. Such problems may be the result of structural problems with the slope of the driveway, which can cause bigger issues down the road. When water is not absorbed into the ground or directed away from your home, it can then flow into the house, potentially making your garage or home susceptible to water damage.
- 3. CRACKS** - Cracking is one of the more noticeable issues that can plague driveways. Many driveways experience cracking as materials inevitably succumb to the elements. Driveway cracks may develop for various reasons, including poor initial installation. Tree roots that grow beneath the driveway surface may also contribute to cracking as the driveways ultimately succumb to the pressure created by the growing roots. Some cracks may prove less problematic than others, but homeowners should still speak with a contractor if they notice their driveway is starting to succumb to cracks. Driveways may not draw the attention of homeowners too often, but damaged driveways that go ignored may ultimately lead to very costly problems. Surface cracks in a driveway may indicate a problem that requires immediate attention.

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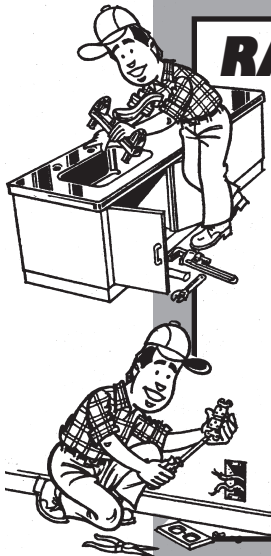
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As quickly as autumn weather arrives it seems to move aside for the blustery, cold days of winter. Winter can catch a person off guard and the seasons are now less predictable than ever before. It's never too early to begin preparing your yard and outdoor living spaces for winter. Homeowners may be sad to bid farewell to the furniture and accessories of the fair-weather season, but time is of the essence when prepping for impending ice and snow.

- * Clean patio furniture. Give cushions and structures a thorough cleaning and allow to dry completely. Cleaning items before storing them for the winter saves time and energy next year when it's time once again to set up the yard for recreation. If anything is damaged beyond repair, discard it and look for replacements during end-of-season sales when savings can be had.
- * Move things indoors. The more items you can store in a safe and secure location the better. Load the garage, basement or storage shed with outdoor gear. Leaving items exposes them to the elements, and such exposure can cause rust, wear and damage. Flower pots and lawn ornaments also can blow around in winter wind or collapse under the weight of the snow, so collect these items and store them for the winter. Take out patio umbrellas and put them in the shed. If something is too large to move indoors, such as a barbecue or a pool filter, cover it with a durable tarp and secure it with rope.
- * Cover delicate trees. Depending on where you live, certain fruit trees, may need to be covered for the winter. Covering protects them from subfreezing temperatures

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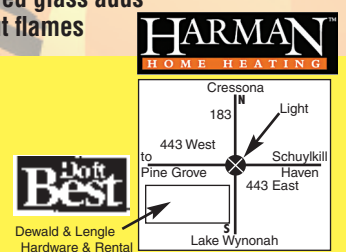
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and helps ensure they will rebound in the spring. Tropical plants should be moved indoors where they can thrive in a heated home. Do not rip out chrysanthemum plants. Contrary to popular belief, these are not annuals. They will rebloom year after year if allowed to do so.

- * Remove water collectors. Bring in or cover anything that may accumulate water, such as bird baths or kids' toys. Water expands when frozen, and that means water trapped in any ceramic, glass or even plastic vessel can expand and cause the container to crack.
- * Clean up leaves and debris, or mulch them. Piles of leaves not only can suffocate a lawn and cause discoloration, but also can be attractive homes for rodents and insects looking for a warm place to spend their winters. Keep your yard neat and clean to discourage wildlife from taking up residence near your home.
- * Cover vegetable and flower beds. Invest in some burlap to lay down over planting beds. This helps to keep the ground from freezing over and minimize weeds for next season.
- * Care for outdoor ponds. If you have a pond on your property, remove any weeds around it and fish out any leaves from the water. Leaves will decay in the water and build up ammonia levels that can harm fish. If the pond is small, cover it for the winter. Also, start cutting back on feeding outdoor fish. These aquatic animals' bodies begin to prepare

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for winter by slowing down metabolism. Continuing to feed them can harm the fish when the temperature drops.

- * Wrap up pool season. It's wise to close the pool and cover it before leaves start to drop. Otherwise you will have a hard time of keeping the water clean.
- * Plant spring bulbs now. Now is a good time to plan where you want to put spring bulbs. Bulbs are relatively inexpensive and will provide that first punch of color when winter finally skips town. Autumn is a busy time for preparing your home and yard for the arrival of winter weather.

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What To Look For During Roof Inspections

Cold weather can be tough on a home, and perhaps no part of a home is more vulnerable to harsh winter weather than its roof.

Fallen snow can equate to several pounds of pressure placed on a residential roof. Roofs do not often collapse under heavy snowfall. But adverse winter weather conditions can compromise roofs in other ways. Water leakage and damage to the roof's interior are just two of the potentially problematic issues that can arise when roofs are battered by cold, blustery weather. That's why many home improvement specialists advise homeowners to conduct roof inspections prior to the start of winter.

Many homeowners can conduct their own cursory roof inspections, but they may not know exactly what to look for. The National Roofing Contractors Association says that there are certain key areas to inspect that may reveal some telltale signs of roof damage.

- Curled, cracked or missing shingles may prove troublesome. Inclement weather can test the strength of even the most durable roofs. Even though many roofs are designed to last up to 30 years, some may need to be replaced early, particularly when they have been exposed to harsh weather over a period of years. Individual shingles can be replaced as spot treatments, but if the damage is widespread, a new roof may be necessary.

- Attic leaks or water elsewhere might signal issues with the roof. Figure out if water inside the home is coming from the roof. Water stains do not always indicate problems with the roofing, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

- Look for protective granules wearing off. If gutters are filled with the sandy granular material that coats roofing shingles, that may be a sign of an aging or damaged roof.

- Inspect flashing. Professional roofers can recognize properly installed flashing, the material that connects the roof to other parts of the house that adjoin the roof, like skylights or a chimneys. Poorly installed flashing can cause leaks. Stains that appear below chimneys or near attic windows may indicate new flashing, and not

new shingles, is needed.

- Gutters and downspouts should be in good condition. A roof is the sum of its parts, and that includes downspouts and gutters. If the gutters are clogged or damaged, they cannot direct water away from the house properly. Snow, leaves and other debris needs to be cleared from gutters to help them function at optimal capacity.

- Animals and insects can cause damage, too. It's not just poor weather that homeowners need to consider with regard to roof damage. Boring insects and animals may cause problems with roofs as well. A roof inspection may shed light on potential pest problems. Holes or nesting materials may indicate that an animal or animals are using the attic as a shelter from the elements.

Get to the root of issues with your home's roof before they become bigger problems once winter arrives. A thorough inspection can reveal problems that may prove costly if ignored. Inspect a roof each fall to get an idea of the potential damage and any necessary repairs that may be needed before nasty weather sets in. Hire a professional to do a quality job.

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These Professionals Can Help Maintain Your Home

Home repairs are inevitable. For the homeowner who also happens to be handy with a hammer, the occasional home repair is nothing to fear and something that many even enjoy. But there are many homeowners who aren't so adept at home repairs, and such men and women typically rely on trained professionals when something goes awry around the house. For those homeowners who either don't have the time or the ability to fix issues that arise around the house, the following is a breakdown of three of the more commonly called on home service providers.

- * **ELECTRICIAN:** An electrician specializes in addressing a building's or home's electrical wiring issues, stationary machines and the equipment related to those machines. Electricians can fix existing issues, but many also can design and install new electrical components and systems. The dangers of working with electri-

cal systems are many, so electricians typically must be certified and licensed before they can practice their trade. Such danger is one reason why even those who are adept at fixing problems around the house might want to hire an electrician should an electrical issue arise.

- * **PLUMBER:** A plumber is a professional whose area of expertise is in installing and maintaining systems for drinking water, drainage and sewage. Though not all jurisdictions require a plumber be licensed before he or she can practice, many do, and it can take years of training and experience to master the skill of plumbing. Many people call a plumber when a toilet or sink backs up, but plumbers must have far more extensive skills as well. Plumbers must be skilled in a number of areas, including having an ability to read and understand a home's blueprints, detect faults in a

plumbing system if the homeowner cannot install and repair fixtures and systems, and be aware of any legal requirements to ensure a home is safe.

- * **LANDSCAPER:** Homeowners have increasingly looked to professional landscapers to maintain their home's exterior and subsequently ensure their property value remains high. A typical landscaper offers his client an array of services, from cutting the grass to raking leaves to more complicated tasks that gravitate toward landscape architecture. A home's curb appeal has been shown to vastly improve a prospective buyer's impression of the house, and as a result many homeowners rely on a landscaper to take care of their property. Many landscapers an extensive knowledge of the science involved in tending to a lawn and how to help it weather the seasons without losing its appeal.

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Find The Right Fencing Fit

Homeowners choose to erect fences on their properties for various reasons. Parents may find fences provide peace of mind during those times when their youngsters are playing in the yard, while other homeowners prefer fences for the privacy they can provide. Whatever compels homeowners to consider fencing for their properties, those that have decided to install fencing will soon realize they have numerous options. Finding the right fencing material for your property requires considering a host of factors, including budget and personal style.

ALUMINUM: Aluminum fencing is ideal for those looking for something that's both ornamental and functional. Aluminum fencing may not appeal to those homeowners whose biggest priority is privacy, as aluminum fences are not solid walls. But aluminum fences are typically low maintenance, and they can be effective at keeping both kids and pets in the yard. Aluminum fences painted with a rust-inhibiting primer may require even less maintenance than aluminum fences painted without primer.

BAMBOO: Bamboo is a less traditional fencing option that may appeal to homeowners who want to do something that's both different and eco-friendly. Bamboo grows naturally, which should appeal to homeowners who want their homes to have as little negative impact on the environment as possible. Bamboo provides ample privacy and comes in various styles. Homeowners should consult with a fencing specialist before choosing a style so they can be certain they choose the most climate-appropriate option.

CHAIN-LINK: Chain-link fences may not add the aesthetic appeal homeowners are looking for, but they are relatively inexpensive, durable and functional. Chain-link fences are low maintenance, though homeowners looking for fences to provide some privacy may need to get creative if they install chain-link fencing. Planting flowers, shrubbery or trees near chain-link fences can add some aesthetic appeal and a little privacy.

VINYL: Among the more expensive fencing options, vinyl can make up for that initial sticker shock thanks to its durability. In addition, vinyl fences require little maintenance, saving homeowners the expense of paying for upkeep such as repainting. Vinyl fencing comes in various styles, and homeowners can choose the style that best suits their priorities with regard to aesthetic appeal and privacy.

WOOD: Of course, no discussion of fencing would be complete without mentioning wood fencing. Many homeowners love wood fencing because of its versatility with regard to design and color. The options are endless when it comes to crafting wood fencing, which also can be stained in any color homeowners prefer. Wood fencing can be designed not only for homeowners who prioritize privacy, but it also can be crafted for homeowners for whom privacy is not a significant concern. Wood is a relatively inexpensive fencing material, but the maintenance required to keep wood fencing looking great can sometimes be costly and time-consuming. Options abound for homeowners looking to add fencing to their properties. Homeowners hesitant to choose a material and/or install their own fencing can consult local professionals to find the best fencing fit for their properties.

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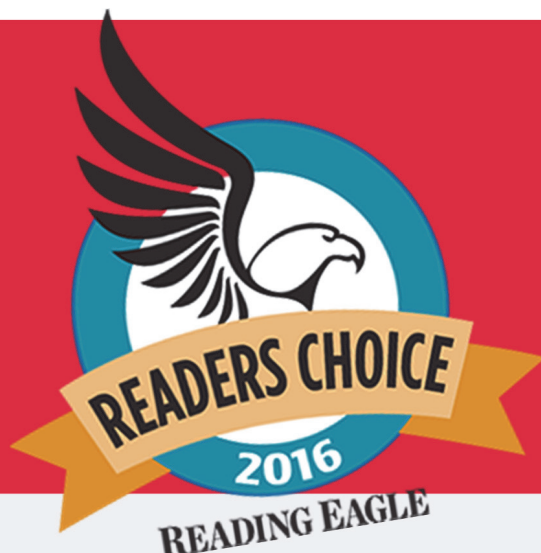
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*Limit 1 Cart Per Customer. Exceptions include product sold as full skids including but not limited to wood pellets, coal, rock salt, and ice melt. No additional discount will be given on grills, patio furniture, and sale merchandise. Power equipment (gas and electric) including STIHL qualify for a 10% discount.

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