

# HOME & GARDEN

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2017

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A More Organized,  
Functional Garage

Helpful and  
Harmful Insects

Easy Spring  
Cleaning Projects



# Post-winter garden prep

Lawns and gardens can bear the brunt of winter weather and are often in need of tender loving care by the time spring arrives.

Preparing a garden for spring and summer involves assessing any damage that harsh weather might have caused. As temperatures climb, gardeners can heed the following post-winter garden preparation tips in an effort to ensure some successful gardening in the months ahead.

## ASSESS THE DAMAGE

Even if winter was mild, gardens might still have suffered some damage. Inspect garden beds and any fencing or barriers designed to keep wildlife from getting into the garden. Before planting anew, fix any damage that Mother Nature or local wildlife might have caused over the past several months.

## CLEAR DEBRIS

Garden beds and surrounding landscapes that survived winter without being damaged might still be littered with debris. Remove fallen leaves, branches and even litter that blew about on windy winter days before planting season. Make sure to discard any debris effectively so it does not find its way back into the garden.

## TURN THE GREENHOUSE INTO A CLEAN HOUSE

Spring cleaning is not just for the

interior of a home. Cleaning a greenhouse in advance of spring can help gardeners evict any overwintering pests that can threaten plant life once spring gardening season arrives. A thorough cleaning, which should include cleaning the inside of greenhouse glass and washing flower pots and plant trays, also can prevent plant diseases from surviving into spring.

## CHECK FOR PESTS

Speak with a local gardening professional to determine if there are any local pests to look out for and how to recognize and remove these pests from gardens. Pests may hibernate in the soil over the winter, and such unwelcome visitors can make it difficult for gardens to thrive come spring and summer.

## ASSESS PLANT LOCATION

If plants, flowers or gardens have struggled in recent years or never grew especially vibrant, then gardeners may want to assess the location of their plant life before spring gardening season begins. Some plants may not be getting enough sunlight in certain locations on a property, while others might be overexposed to the sun during spring and summer. Moving plants that are not thriving prior to the start of spring gardening season may be just what gardens need to flourish in the coming weeks.

# HELPFUL AND HARMFUL INSECTS

Although it's virtually impossible to count them, insects are the most diverse group of organisms on the planet. Nine hundred thousand different kinds of insects are known to exist. At any given time, it is estimated that there are around 10 quintillion individual insects living.

Gardeners grow frustrated when seeing their gardens infested with insects. In an effort to restore their gardens, homeowners might be tempted to eradicate any bug that moves in their yards. But gardeners would be wise to first learn which insects are hurting their gardens and which can actually help gardens in the long run.

## HARMFUL

Certain insects can be dangerous to animals and plants. The following are a handful of insects that can threaten the vitality of gardens.

**Aphids:** These insects suck on the juice needed to sustain plants, particularly when they congregate.

**Bald-faced hornet:** Hornets tend to be an aggressive species that can sting repeatedly. Should you find a nest near an entertaining space or garden, it can cause trouble.

**Carpenter ants:** These ants will burrow into wood causing damage. They may compromise any wooden structure in and around a home.

**Locusts:** Various species of locust can damage plants and crops due to their voracious appetites.

**Treehoppers:** These small, green insects mimic the look of leaves, and their appetites can affect crops and gardens.

**Red pavement ant:** As they feed on all manner of human food, these ants can quickly overtake areas with their staggering numbers and deliver painful bites.

**Grasshoppers:** Certain grasshoppers, like the red-legged grasshopper, can decimate food crops and transfer parasites to birds when eaten as prey.

**Caterpillars:** Many caterpillars, the precursor to adult moths, will feed constantly on leaves, stems and other parts of plants. The tobacco hornworm moth caterpillar

can damage potato and tomato plants.

## HELPFUL

Plants depend on insects to transfer pollen as they forage, and many insects are quite beneficial to have around. While some pollinate, others are predators of other pests.

**Antlion:** A foe of ants, they'll help eat and control ant populations and pollinate flowers. They pose no threat to humans, either.

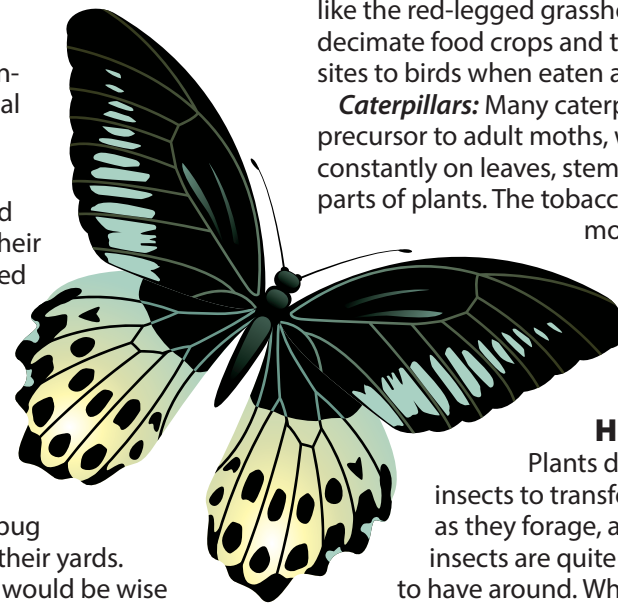
**Big dipper firefly:** These colorful insects feast on earthworms, slugs and snails during the larval stage. Fireflies add drama to evening gardens with their twinkling lights.

**Garden spiders:** Although some spiders can be venomous, many are quite handy to have around the garden. They'll help control pest populations that can damage plants and crops.

**Dragonflies:** These aerial artists that zip around the yard are consuming smaller insects that would otherwise pester plants and humans.

**Blue-winged wasp:** This wasp attacks the larvae of Japanese beetles, helping to control beetle populations.

**Bees and butterflies:** Butterflies and bees are some of the best pollinators out there, and each can add whimsy to gardens. Helpful and harmful insects



*Spring gardening season is right around the corner, so now is an ideal time to prepare gardens for the warmer seasons ahead.*





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# Composite decking can be a smart choice

Decks add character and functionality to a home, increasing outdoor entertaining space and oftentimes improving the resale value of a home. Homeowners have various options when choosing decking materials, but one such option, composite decking, is growing in popularity.

Decks used to primarily be made from pressure-treated lumber. While lumber remains a popular material, more and more homeowners are opting for composite decking products. As anyone who has pressure-washed, stained and sealed wood decks can attest, such spaces require lots of upkeep to look new year after year. Composite decks require much less maintenance, making them highly attractive to homeowners who would rather spend time using their decks instead of maintaining them.

Composite decking is any type of decking material that is formulated from different recycled materials. The

majority of these materials include hard plastic and wood shavings of pulp. Unlike wood, which can fade, crack and rot, composite decking, which has been available for roughly a decade, does not degrade quickly and requires very little upkeep.

Available in a variety of wood colors to match outdoor decor, composite decks also can feature artificial wood grains to make them look similar to wood planks. Although composite decks are not completely impervious to the elements, with some occasional washing to impede mold growth and new technology that has improved stain-resistance, many of the pitfalls of other materials can be avoided with composite decks.

Composite decking fits in with eco-friendly lifestyles. The planks are made from recycled materials that would normally end up in landfills. Products from Trex, a popular composite decking manufacturer, are made from 1.5 million



*Composite decking can mimic the look of wood, but requires much less maintenance.*

shopping bags and wood mill waste. As composite decks do not rot away and are long-lasting, they will not need to be replaced frequently, which is another eco-friendly benefit.

When comparing composite decking brands, look mainly at the colors, materials used in the composition and the fastening systems. Many are fastened with regular deck screws, offers This Old House. The newer systems have channels for hidden fastening, and the composite deck tiles snap into place.

Composite decks do have a few draw-

backs. They can be expensive — nearly double the initial cost of wood decks. And although they don't rot, composite planks can scratch. Without refinishing, damaged boards will need to be replaced. Harsh chemicals may fade color and damage the composite materials, so caution is needed.

Composite decking remains an in-demand choice for outdoor spaces. Low-maintenance and long-lasting, these decks have quickly become favorites among homeowners.

## Create a safe and enjoyable backyard play area

Homeowners often aspire to have attractive backyards that look like they belong in a magazine. While these can be picturesque and functional for adults, they may not be entirely practical for homeowners who have young children, especially when the majority of the yard is covered with paving stones or concrete.

When young children are part of a household, homeowners may benefit by designing yards that are both functional and fun. Incorporating safe play areas for kids is one way to unlock the potential of both big and small backyards.

As children run off to enjoy a playground, safety is the last thing on their minds. Kids are most interested in scaling ladders to treehouses or coasting down slides. That's why adults must take it upon themselves to keep injury prevention in mind.

SafestPlayground.com indicates that playground-related injuries routinely result in severe fractures, internal injuries, concussions, and dislocations. In the majority of playground injuries to children younger than age 5, the head and face are affected. Children between the ages of 5 and 9 experience more leg and arm injuries than younger kids. The Consumer Product Safety Commission states 70 percent of children's injuries occur on home playgrounds. More than 28,000 children are injured each year on playgrounds across



*Backyard playgrounds should be built with safety in mind. Learn the rules of play equipment and yard safety.*

Canada, according to Parachute, a national injury prevention organization.

When considering playground equipment for the yard, parents need to make safety a priority. The Canada Safety Society advises parents to follow the "**5 S's of Playground Safety**":

• **Surface:** Parents should assume that children will fall. To lessen the blow of falls, choose playground equipment with a perimeter of six feet of a softer surface, such as sand, rubber pieces or wood chips. This material should be between six and 12 inches deep.

• **Structure:** The structure of the play equipment should be built from sturdy materials. Pressure-treated lumber was once the standard, but it's not advisable for kids' playgrounds, as the chemicals used in the lumber can leach and young children may actually bite or pick at the wood. Use cedar or another wood that resists decay. Once the structure is built, inspect it frequently for damage.

• **Site:** Look around the landscape for an ideal place to locate the playset. There should be no obstacles that children can hit while sliding or swinging. Avoid overhanging branches and do not place equipment too close to trees or fencing. Try to keep the set out of direct sunlight, which can make components heat up and scald young bodies.

• **Supervision:** Do not leave children alone while they are playing. Prevent children from using the playset in an incorrect manner.

• **Safety:** Follow the directions for installation. Make sure all posts are anchored into the ground securely. Railings should be spaced so that children cannot get stuck between them. Check that metal components have not rusted and that there is no additional excessive wear. Be sure that no tools or other dangerous items are left around the yard.



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# Pitch in and save money

Home improvement projects can be expensive. While the size and complexity of a project will affect how expensive the project is, homeowners can expect to shell out a pretty penny when they renovate or remodel areas of their home.

According to HomeAdvisor, an online resource for homeowners looking to connect with home improvement, maintenance and repair professionals, the average bathroom remodeling project costs \$9,348, while the average home addition costs slightly less than \$41,000. But renovation-minded homeowners need not reconsider their commitment to remodeling, as there are various ways to cut the costs associated with home improvement projects.

One such way is for homeowners to pitch in and do some of the work themselves. Calculating labor costs can be difficult, as such costs can vary greatly depending on the project, the contractor and the amount of hired help that contractor intends to employ. However, some estimates suggest labor will account for anywhere from 25 to 50 percent of the overall cost of the project. So it's no surprise that homeowners can save themselves substantial amounts of money by doing some of the work themselves.

Homeowners who intend to do some of the labor themselves should discuss this plan with contractors during the vetting process. Before hiring a contractor, make sure homeowners' expected labor contributions are clearly defined in the contract.

While it's best to leave the most complicated parts of a project to the

professionals, homeowners can pitch in during the following phases.

• **Demolition:** Demolition involves more than picking up a sledgehammer and swinging away. Some demolition projects are best left to the pros. For example, any projects that involve exposure to hazardous materials are risky and therefore best left to experienced laborers. However, many homeowners are capable of safely and effectively pulling cabinets from walls, removing flooring or knocking down drywall. Homeowners unsure of how to approach demolition tasks can ask their contractors to demonstrate the proper technique so the demolition is done right and on time.

• **Salvage:** Removing debris and items that will no longer be needed once the renovation is complete is another way homeowners can pitch in. Homeowners remodeling their kitchens may be replacing their existing stoves and refrigerators and hoping to donate these items. In such instances, driving the items to the donation site or arranging for them to be picked up rather than taken off the premises by the contractor or his employees can cut labor costs, as it allows laborers to keep working toward the end goal rather than requiring them to leave the work site to drop unwanted items off.

• **Cleanup:** Homeowners also can save costs by cleaning up after the contractors at the end of each workday. Speak with the contractor about cleaning up the site each day, asking him or her what can be discarded and what must remain on-site.



## Steps to a more organized, functional garage

Organization can help homeowners transform their homes into less cramped, more spacious oases without forcing them to finance potentially expensive expansion projects.

Homeowners who park in their driveways may find that their garages have become crowded, cluttered spaces in which searching for tools can feel like scouring a haystack in search of a needle. Organizing a garage can create extra room in a home while affording homeowners the chance to protect their vehicles from the elements. Homeowners who want to turn their garages into something more than cluttered storage units can employ the following strategies to transform these largely overlooked areas into more valuable spaces.

### CHOOSE THE RIGHT DAY

Garages tend to be separate from the rest of the homes they're a part of, meaning the only way to organize a garage is to first remove all items from the garage and into the driveway. Because items removed from the garage will be exposed to the elements, homeowners should choose a day that's temperate and sunny to clean their garages. If possible, homeowners should opt to organize their garages in late spring, summer or early fall when there are additional hours of daylight. This protects homeowners from having to work in the dark should the job take longer than they initially anticipated.

### DISCARD OR DONATE DUPLICATE ITEMS

Duplicate items are some of the main culprits behind cluttered garages. As garages gradually become more cluttered, homeowners may buy tools



*Organized garages that are free of clutter can serve as valuable work spaces for handy homeowners.*

they already have simply because they cannot find their original tools. When organizing the garage, create separate piles for duplicate tools, placing still-useful items in a pile that can be donated to neighbors, local charities or organizations and another pile for old tools that are no longer

useful.

### HOST A GARAGE SALE

Homeowners who want to organize their garages and make a buck at the same time can host garage sales. Make only those items that are still functional available for purchase, and let neighbors and bargain hunters do the bulk of your organization

work for you.

### DESIGNATE AREAS OF THE GARAGE FOR CERTAIN ITEMS

Once the items that won't be going back into the garage have been sold, donated or discarded, organize the garage by designating areas for certain items, making sure to separate items that can pose safety risks. For example, store kids' bicycles and outdoor toys in a corner of the garage that is opposite the corner where potentially dangerous items such as power tools and gas cans will be stored. Keep the center of the garage open for vehicles.

### PERIODICALLY PARK CARS IN THE GARAGE

Homeowners who are comfortable parking their vehicles in their driveways can improve their chances of maintaining organized garages over the long haul by periodically parking in the garage. Doing so not only prevents the gradual buildup of clutter that can slowly take over a garage, but also protects homeowners' automotive investments.



# Problems that can lead to lawn damage

A beautiful lawn is a goal for many homeowners. Some homeowners may find that lovely lawns may last momentarily, only to disappear when damage — be it pest-, weather- or child-related — sets in.

While well-established turf can be resilient, even the most well-maintained lawns can be vulnerable. Preventing lawn damage first involves getting to the root of the problem.

## LACK OF SUNLIGHT:

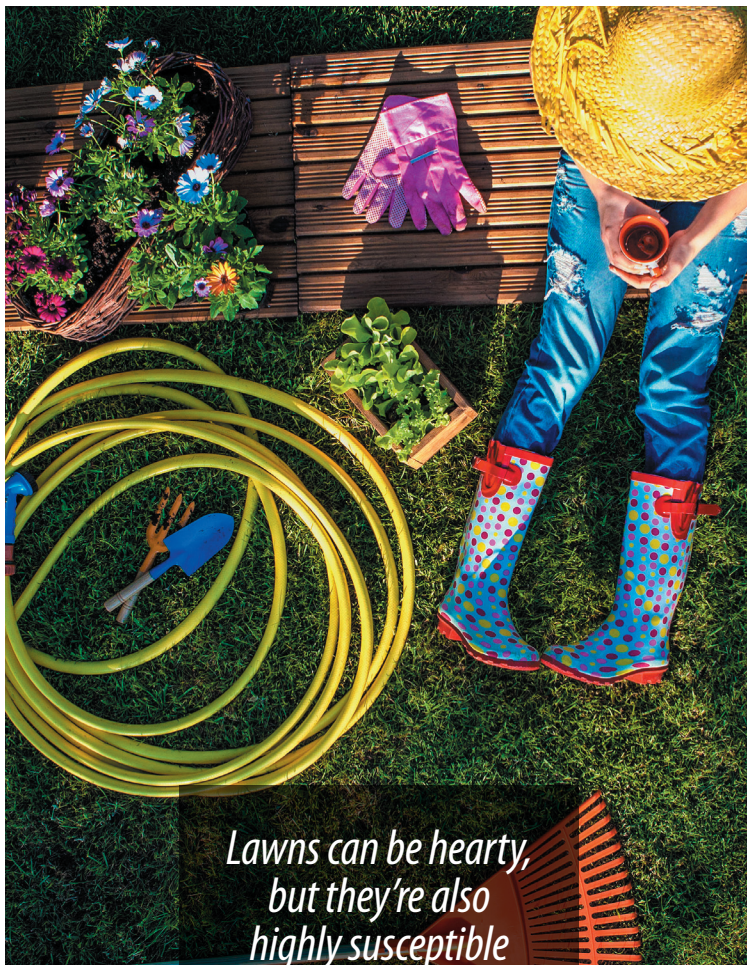
All plants need the proper ratio of sunlight to grow. Too much sunlight and plant blades can scorch. Too little sunlight and grass may turn brown and die. Although there are shade-tolerant varieties of grass, homeowners also can explore alternative landscapes. Work in a garden bed or create a design that utilizes gravel or mulch. Avoid aggressively pruning back trees to give the lawn more sunlight in that area, as this may just damage the trees.

## CHEMICAL SPILLS:

Gasoline and fertilizer spills and pesticide applications in high concentrations can cause the lawn to yellow or brown in spots. Carefully refill lawn gas tanks and fertilizer spreaders on the sidewalk or driveway to avoid overflow onto the lawn. If spills occur, flood the area promptly with water to dilute.

## FOOT TRAFFIC:

Lawns can take a pounding from



*Lawns can be hearty, but they're also highly susceptible to damage.*

*Even seemingly harmless things can compromise the integrity of a lawn. Understanding the causes of lawn damage can help homeowners protect their lawns.*

foot traffic, leading to compaction and spots of dead lawn. Try to redirect the traffic elsewhere to give worn down areas a break. Aeration can relieve soil compaction. If a certain area has become the de facto pathway, install a paver, gravel or concrete walkway in that spot.

## DEBRIS:

Leaving a tool, kids' toys, piece of wood, or any debris on the lawn can quickly suffocate the grass beneath and cause the lawn to die quickly. Make sure that no items are left on the lawn for an extended period of time.

## MOWING PATTERNS:

Running the mower in the same pattern over and over can cause ruts in the grass that lead to damage, so avoid mowing in the same direction on consecutive cuts. Avoid mowing on very hot days or when the lawn is soggy. Both can cause tracks to form in the lawn.

## MOWERS:

Dull lawn mower blades can damage lawns, as can mowing too fast. Grass blades can be torn, snapped and more, resulting in brown spots.

## WILDLIFE:

Animals and insects can destroy turf roots. Animals or insects may feed on the grass from underneath its surface, compromising the lawn's ability to procure nutrients and water. Animals like moles or raccoons may feed on grubs in the lawn, and treating for grubs can alleviate torn-up turf.

## DID YOU KNOW?

*One of the ways homeowners can keep their lawns looking lush and green is to aerate the turf when the need arises. Aerators perforate the soil with small holes. These holes allow air, nutrients and water to penetrate all the way to the roots, helping them grow deep and strong. Deep, strong roots are essential to healthy, lush lawns. While aeration can help many lawns, not every lawn will necessarily need to be aerated. Lawns that get heavy use, such as those that are often played on by children or pets, will likely benefit from periodic aeration. Feeling the lawn also can help homeowners determine if it needs to be aerated. Lawns that dry out quickly or feel spongy may be overcome with thatch, which can prevent lawns from getting the air, water and nutrients they need to thrive. Lawncare professionals recommend aerating lawns that contain thatch that is more than one-half inch. Thatch also can foster grub infestations, providing another benefit to removing it and aerating a lawn. When to aerate depends on the type of grass. Homeowners should consult with a lawncare professional about the best time to aerate their particular lawns, but it's generally recommended that cool-season grasses be aerated in early spring or fall, while it's best to aerate warm season grasses in late spring.*



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# CREATE DRAMA WITH BOLD PAINT COLORS

Painting is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to transform the look of a space. Paint colors can dramatically change the mood and the design of a home. And depending on a homeowner's goals, paint can make a statement or blend into the background.

Many people are now looking to bold colors to make spaces stand out. But choosing a paint color can be challenging. Homeowners looking to update walls and complement decor may want to look at some of the more impactful colors that Pantone indicates will be popular for the 2017 season. Primrose Yellow, Lapis Blue, Flame, Pink Yarrow, and Greenery are some of the more eye-catching selections. Once colors are selected, consider these guidelines for using bolder colors in room designs.

- **Decide how big an impact you want to make.** Are you looking for color overload or just a small focal point of vivid color? Remember, using bold color doesn't mean every wall must be lathered in that hue. Instead, select one wall to serve as an accent point and use that spot as your bold color display. Otherwise, rely on bold colors to dress up otherwise mundane areas, such as the back wall of a cupboard or moldings and trim.

- **Try bold in a small space.** Many people are sur-



prised at how well bold colors work in small spaces. Powder rooms can be an ideal spot to experiment with paint colors. Try deep colors that can make the area seem intimate and even exotic. Dark, bold hues can be toned down by different accents, such as neutral colored fixtures and towels.

- **Go bold in the kitchen.** Incorporate a splash of color in the kitchen without going overboard. Try

an appliance or design fixture in a bright shade. Or paint the inside of the cabinets in your favorite color and install glass inserts in the cabinet doors so that everyone gets a peek of the color beyond. A neutral kitchen also can be brightened up with the use of silverware, dishes, pots and pans, and other kitchen items featured in bold hues.

- **Stick to boldness on interchangeable items.** Those who like to experiment with color may find that they like to switch out the colors now and again. Instead of having to repaint every few months, use decorative items in bright shades to make swapping out color that much easier. For example, replace area rugs, throw pillows and draperies. Paint over terra cotta flower pots when the mood strikes.

- **Establish balance.** Rely on neutral furniture, rugs, moldings and baseboards if you decide to take bold colors up a notch. This will help create a sense of balance in the room.

Painting is a fun way to experiment with color. Many homeowners are not hesitant to use bold shades of color when they learn the right techniques. And because paint is an inexpensive option for making over a room, homeowners who find they do not like a particular color can easily paint over it with a new color.

## How does solar electricity work?

Solar panels are seen more and more on roofs of residential homes and even some businesses. Due in part to more aggressive marketing by solar energy companies, as well as greater awareness by customers, solar energy has become increasingly popular in recent years.

The Solar Energy Industries Association® reports that solar energy in the United States is booming. The association offers that, since the passage of The Solar Investment Tax Credit in 2006, solar has experienced a compound annual growth rate of more than 60 percent.

While many might assume that environmental preservation is the driving force behind the growing popularity of solar energy, it's

actually the financial benefits of solar energy that are leading the way. One Block Off the Grid polled nearly 200 solar homeowners to learn more about their motivations for going solar. Roughly 75 percent would not have gone solar if there was no economic benefit to doing so. A number of people who have switched to solar say they are getting a high rate of return on the investment. The average electricity bill a person saw prior to solar energy hovered around \$177 a month. After the conversion, bills were now as low as \$55.

Those who are still pondering the decision to go solar may want to know more about how it works. Although the guidelines vary depending on location and the energy company issuing the bill, here are some of the basics.

### GENERATING SOLAR ELECTRICITY

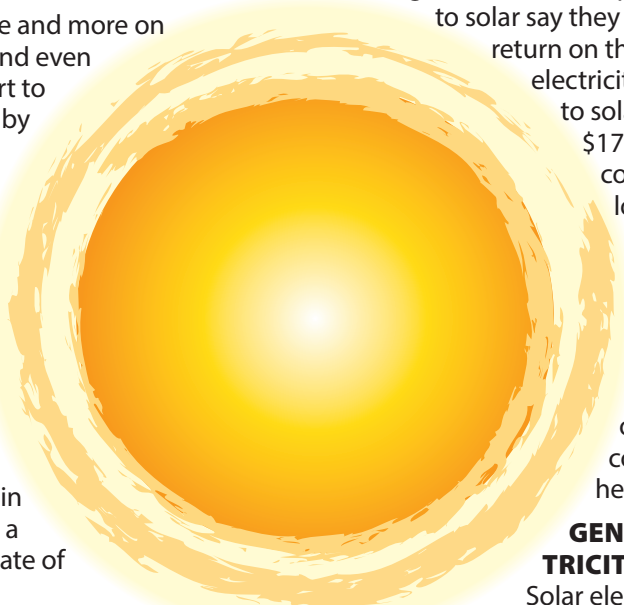
Solar electricity is generated through a process known as the photovoltaic effect. Sunlight shines on solar panels, which are mounted on the roof of the home or in

another prominent location. Each panel typically has between 60 to 72 solar cells strung together. These photovoltaic cells use the irradiation in sunlight to stimulate the flow of electrons in the semiconductor material, which creates direct current, or DC, electricity. Systems that directly convert the DC to alternating current, or AC, the type of power voltage used in a house, do so by way of an inverter. The inverter feeds power to the circuit board.

### DEMAND AND EXCESS

When the demand from a home or business is equal to the amount of solar power being generated, the system is working optimally. When solar power falls a bit short, grid power will make up the deficit. There's also the possibility that excess electricity will be produced.

In a grid connect system, certain areas may operate with a 1:1 net metering policy, states Solar Reviews, which offers consumer reviews of solar products. This means that the utility company will credit a homeowner 1 to 1 for every kilowatt hour produced in excess because the excess energy goes back into the grid system. This is called "back-feeding" the grid. It's handy for powering homes at night with standard electricity at no additional cost. If the production of kWhs exceeds what is purchased from the utility each year, some utility companies will continue to credit for the excess.







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# 6 easy spring cleaning projects

Warmer days are here and what better way to spend them than ... cleaning? Although enjoying the great outdoors is probably high on many a to-do list come spring, by the end of winter, homes can probably do with a much-needed overhaul. Owners and renters can rely on temperate days to throw open the windows and engage in some easy spring-cleaning projects. The earlier one begins spring cleaning, the more quickly he or she will be able to head outside and bask in the warm spring sun.

Spring cleaning tasks can be stretched out across several days to make the jobs more manageable. While certain spring cleaning tasks can be time-consuming, many projects can be started and completed in 30 minutes or less.

## 1. LOOK UP

Start by looking up at ceilings, molding and ceiling fans. Chances are strong that some cobwebs and dust have formed in these areas. Always begin cleaning by working from the top downward so you don't have to clean any tables, countertops or floors twice. Static-charged dusting cloths work well to catch and contain dust. Use a pillowcase on ceiling fan blades to clear the dust and keep it from cascading to the floor.

## 2. BLINDS AND CURTAINS

Heavy window treatments can be removed and replaced with more gauzy fabrics. This lets in more light and warmth from the sun. Many curtains can be freshened up right in the laundry, but blinds may require a bit more effort. If the blinds can be snapped out of the brackets, place them in a tub full of vinegar, dish soap and water. Allow them to soak and then rinse with the shower nozzle. Stationary blinds can be cleaned with using an old sock over your hand dipped in a vinegar-and-water solution.

## 3. CHANGE LINENS

Remove and launder bed linens. While the linens are in the wash, thoroughly dust all furniture and vacuum the carpets. Move furniture so you can reach areas where dust gathers, such as under the bed or dresser.

## 4. GROUT CLEANER

Grade school science lessons can be put to use as you look to remove stubborn dirt. Combining baking soda and vinegar produces a reaction that causes the formation of gassy bubbles. These bubbles can help to break up dirt that clings to crevices, such as grout between tiles. Some light scrubbing and then subsequent rinsing can rid surfaces of hard-to-remove dirt.

## 5. VACUUM VENT INTAKES

Many houses are heated by forced-air systems. The air intake vents can become clogged with dust and other debris. Vacuum these vents so that air flow is

not impeded. Let the heat run for a few minutes to catch any small particles that become dislodged, and then change the furnace filter.

## 6. CLEAN OUT THE REFRIGERATOR

Now is a great time to remove any of those mystery containers growing fuzzy experiments in the back of the refrigerator. Take the food out of the refrigerator and use a food-safe cleaner to scour the shelves and inside of crisper drawers.



## TACKLE SPRING CLEANING PROJECTS IN A SINGLE WEEKEND

### 1. ENLIST THE WHOLE FAMILY.

Chances are everyone who lives in the home can lay claim to some of the dirt, grime and clutter that built up over the winter. So it only makes sense that everyone then pitches in to clean the home come springtime. Parents and heads of household can delegate tasks to everyone, incentivizing cooperation with the promise of rewards if the cleaning is completed in a single weekend.

### 2. CLEAR YOUR SCHEDULE.

Another way for homeowners to ensure their spring cleaning projects are started and finished in a single weekend is to clear their schedules for the entire weekend. Homeowners who expect to spend part of their day away from home and still finish their spring cleaning projects will likely find the job unfinished come Sunday night. When planning a spring cleaning weekend, schedule projects for a weekend when you have no prior commitments or plan far enough in advance that you can avoid making plans on a given weekend. While it might not make for the most eventful weekend, it will greatly increase your chances of getting everything cleaned and cleared out in two days.

### 3. DO YOUR HOMEWORK.

Homeowners who want to complete their spring cleaning in a single weekend should do their homework with regard to finding local recycling centers or charitable organizations to whom they intend to donate items. Many charitable organizations will come to private homes to pick up donations, but such pickups often must be arranged in advance rather than on the morning of the day homeowners want items to be taken away. In addition, if recycling will be a part of your spring cleaning efforts, familiarize yourself with the weekend hours of nearby recycling plants so you can drop items off on your cleaning weekend instead of leaving them lying around to be donated later.



# Is it time to update your home's electrical system?

The invisible systems in a home often are taken for granted. When such systems are working as expected, daily life moves along smoothly. However, when a system goes awry, it can negatively impact routines and may create a dangerous home environment. This is especially true when something goes wrong with a home's electrical system.

Faulty wiring is a leading cause of residential fires. Many homeowners, particularly those who live in older homes, might be living in properties that have outdated electrical systems. The experts at Lowes ProServices state that having old wiring and/or insufficient amperage in a house can endanger residents. It also may damage appliances and make it difficult to sell a property in the future.

It can be difficult to gauge exactly when to overhaul an electrical system. Unless circuits routinely trip or lights often dim, homeowners may put off the work. But degrading wires or overextended circuitry can pose a fire risk, so it is best to address electrical systems promptly.

Home inspections may uncover electrical problems. Some homeowners may discover potential trouble while making renovations that require opening up walls or tearing them down,

exposing the wires. Still other homeowners learn about electrical systems when they're adding new, large appliances or other gadgets that consume more power than existing items. These devices may continually cause power outages in the house, such as tripping the circuit breaker or popping a fuse.

When it comes time to update the electrical system, it is always best to work with licensed and bonded electricians who have the expertise to work with electrical wiring without getting injured. This is not a do-it-yourself type of job since it requires specialized training.

Electricians likely will recommend upgrading the electrical panel to bring more power from the utility poles into the home. This can include replacing the existing meter and circuit breaker box to allow it to handle more power or replacing items that are obsolete or dangerous.

Many older homes are only capable of handling a minimum number of amps, utilizing just a few circuits. But nowadays, when homeowners have far more electronics in their homes than they once did, increased demand on electricity can overload a circuit (all of the outlets linked on one wire). Tripping a circuit breaker is a safety measure to prevent the

wire from becoming overheated and causing a fire. However, in some old systems, the circuit breaker will not trip, and this can be problematic.

Rewiring a home is another step. Wire insulation can deteriorate over time, and new wires may be needed. This can be messy and time-consuming, but it's a small price to pay for safety. When rewiring an electrician also may suggest new outlets. Many home building codes now require outlets with ground fault interruptors, or GFIs, in kitchens, bathrooms and other rooms exposed to moisture. Some older homes may not even have three-pronged outlets, so this will necessitate an update as well.

Electrical systems are the heart of a home, delivering power where it is needed. It is essential to keep such systems up-to-date so they can handle the power demands of everyday life.



## Factors to consider when choosing carpeting

When the time comes to choose flooring for their homes, homeowners may be overwhelmed by the vast array of options at their disposal. The choice between carpet and hardwood flooring, laminate or tile is a matter of personal preference. People have long extolled the virtues of hardwood flooring, but carpeting can be just as stylish and provides a host of other benefits as well.

Carpeting insulates rooms in the summer and winter, adding that extra level of protection against the elements. Carpeting also absorbs sound in a home. Many appreciate the warmth and cozy feeling of carpet, especially when stepping out of bed. Carpeting also can increase the level of safety at home. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute, carpeting makes areas of play safer and may also reduce the severity of an injury in the event of a fall.

Today, there are many different types of carpeting available. Selecting the right carpeting for a room comes down to identifying the level of traffic in a particular room, the attributes homeowners would like the carpet to have and any other needs that fit with their lifestyles. The following guidelines can make carpet shopping a bit easier.

### TYPE OF CARPETING

There are many different types of carpeting, some of which are best suited to certain situations. For example, plush and saxony carpets are better in low-traffic areas. These carpets may show footprints and also vacuum tracks and dirt, but they're higher on the comfort spectrum than other types of carpet. Berber, which is more flat and dense, helps mask stains and tracks. It is durable in high-traffic areas. Textured carpets like frieze are cut from fibers of different heights, so they



mask stains and are also softer on the feet than berber.

### PADDING

Padding can impact the way carpeting feels and how long it lasts. It isn't always necessary to purchase the most expensive or thickest padding. However, it is wise to pick a pad that matches the type of carpeting you're selecting and one that aligns with how you plan to use the room. You may be able to go with a thinner pad in low-traffic rooms and beneath dense carpeting like berber. In high-traffic rooms, choose a thicker, more durable padding. Padding prevents carpet

backing and fibers from coming apart over time. It pays to invest in a padding that will last as well.

### INSTALLATION

Select a reliable carpet retailer and installer for your business. Competent installers will lay the carpeting in the correct manner so that it will look beautiful and maintain its durability for the life of the product. Shop around to find the right installer or even do the work yourself if you feel capable.

Take time when shopping, carpet is a substantial investment that can last for many years if the right material is chosen and installed correctly.



# How to find the right replacement windows

Replacing old windows is often a worthwhile investment for homeowners. Energy-efficient windows can prevent heating and cooling loss and keep homes more comfortable throughout the year. Such windows also can improve a home's resale value, proving a good return on investment for homeowners who want to upgrade their homes before putting them on the market.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, homeowners might find it more cost-effective to replace very old and/or inefficient windows to improve their energy efficiency. Such an upgrade can save homeowners substantial amounts of money on heating and cooling costs.

Window replacement projects can be costly, so it pays to get the job right the first time. Before beginning a window replacement project, homeowners should research which windows will meet their specific needs, learning the subtleties between finishes and features, as well as comparing prices for the windows and installation.

## CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME OF YEAR

The best time of year to plan window replacement is when the weather will be warm, ideally in the spring or early summer. However, homeowners do not want conditions to be too warm, as each room where new windows will be installed will temporarily be exposed to the elements. Furthermore, caulk adheres better in warmer weather and will dispense easily.

## CONSIDER AVAILABLE FEATURES

When replacing windows, homeowners may want to install the same style windows they currently have. But the problems that led to the need



*Replacement windows can be a smart investment in comfort and design appeal of a home.*

to replace windows may still exist even when new windows are installed. When replacing windows, consider energy performance ratings based on the locations of the windows in the house. To make sure they make the most educated decision, homeowners can investigate the solar heat gain coefficient, U-factor, visible transmittance and light-to-solar gain. Explanations of these ratings are available at [Energy.gov](http://Energy.gov).

## DON'T IGNORE

### MAINTENANCE NEEDS

Maintenance costs involved with cleaning, repairs and painting can add up. When shopping for windows, consider the amount of maintenance they will need. Wood-framed windows may require more upkeep than aluminum, fiberglass or vinyl. Also, consider if certain window types, such as double-hung windows, casement windows, awning windows, or slider windows, would be practical.

### KEEP HOME STYLE IN MIND

A poor match between windows and the style of the home can produce unwanted changes in the appearance of the home. Replacement windows should match the style and appearance desired.

### EXPECT MINIMAL DISRUPTION

When homeowners hire professionals who are good at their craft, window replacement projects should not be a terrible inconvenience. According to American Window Products, Inc., seasoned professionals will be able to complete a replacement window upgrade in a short amount of time depending on the size of the home and the number of windows being replaced.

# Remedy landscape drainage problems

Homeowners understand that reaping the rewards of beautiful lawns and gardens requires hard work. But sometimes even hard work won't be enough to prevent problems in a lawn or garden.

Drought can be very harmful to lawns and gardens, but so, too, can excessive amounts of water and precipitation. Soggy properties can make it difficult for lawns and gardens to thrive. According to Lowe's, in addition to killing lawn and other plants, standing water on a property can be a health hazard. That's because standing water makes a prime breeding ground for mosquito larvae and other pests.

While homeowners cannot control precipitation, they can affect the impact that rainwater has on their properties.

## Replace/repair downspouts

Gutters and downspouts are designed to move rainwater away from the home. Too often, however, gutters and downspouts become clogged or do not work effectively. Overflowing gutters will transfer rainwater down the side of a home, where it can puddle at the foundation. This water can ultimately suffocate a lawn, and it may cause interior damage to the home as well.

First, inspect and clean all gutters. Leaves, nests, sticks, and even dead animals can block the flow of water in a gutter. Test downspouts by running hose water from the top of the gutter.

Downspouts should be pointed

away from the home and may need to be extended so they direct water away from the dwelling.

## Plant water-loving trees or shrubs

In some instances, whether it's a byproduct of poor property grade or sloping land, water can pool regardless of how well the gutter system is working. Determine where the problem is and speak with a landscaper to see if there are any plants that thrive in moist conditions. The roots of these plants can protect against soil erosion and may absorb enough water to guard against puddling. In addition, amending the soil with organic matter, pea gravel or another coarse aggregate can prevent water pooling.

## Consider a drainage system

When confronted with drainage issues that cannot be remedied by other methods, homeowners may need to install drainage systems. Such systems often employ French drains that are built through or around the perimeter of a property. French drains are typically a trench that contains perforated plastic pipe and is back-filled with gravel. Water runs into these channels and gets swept away by the piping. Do-it-yourselfers may want to try installing drainage systems themselves. However, because excavation is necessary, it's often best to have the property inspected and marked for utilities, then have the drainage system installed by professionals.



*Homeowners who must wear rain boots to traverse their lawns could benefit from a drainage overhaul.*



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