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FALL MAINTENANCE GUIDE

FALL IS HERE!

When tree leaves and temperatures begin falling around most of the country, it's a sign of what's ahead: Old Man Winter. Before a deep freeze hits, it's essential that you tackle some home and vehicle maintenance tasks to avoid the damage that often comes from cold, snow and ice. It's also the ideal time of year to prepare your lawn and landscaping for spring. Follow our fall checklist to protect your assets and prevent costly repairs.



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lawn care



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to find lawn and
yard work deals
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service providers
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yard cleanup/storage

- Rake leaves, remove branches, and clear flower beds.
Move cans of paint indoors to keep the paint from freezing.
- Clear leaves from the yard. Fallen leaves will deprive your grass of crucial sunlight during the fall months.
- Leaves can also accumulate and get wet, leading to mold growth and attracting pests, such as termites. If your lawn is properly winterized, it has a better chance at surviving the colder temperatures and it will be more likely to flourish when spring arrives.
- Cover the grill and any patio furniture.



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lawn care checklist

AERATION

- **Aerate your lawn** in the fall for good root development. Aeration allows for air, moisture and fertilizer to travel to the roots of the grass more efficiently.
- If you intend to plant grass seed, the best time to aerate your lawn is in early fall.

LAWN TOOLS

- Put away lawn equipment and hoses. Drain gasoline and **dispose of properly**, or run lawn equipment until gasoline is empty. It can gel up over winter and cause start failure.

MOWING

- Mow grass until it stops growing and keep it about 3 inches tall to minimize weed growth.

PLANTING

- Plant flower bulbs in late fall to establish a strong rooting before winter. Add a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch around your plants.
- Transplant shrubs and plants if desired.

SEEDING/OVERSEEDING

- Sow grass seed to fill in bald spots. Overseed to produce a healthy lawn for spring.

TREE CARE

- Fall is the best time of year to plant trees. Water newly planted trees and bulbs with 1-1/2 inches of water every week. Trim tree branches away from the roof and gutters.



LAWN CARE

HOW TO

fertilize your lawn



For cool-season grasses, fall **lawn fertilization** helps promote healthy roots, which translates to a more verdant and pest- and disease-resistant lawn for spring. If you're not interested in doing the job yourself or are concerned you'll kill your grass, consider hiring a lawn care treatment professional to spruce up your greenery for you.

NEEDED:

- Fertilizer
- Fertilizer spreader
if using granular fertilizer
- Gloves

1 Find out what type of grass you have. Check your local county extension or do some online research to determine your grass type. Most cool-season grasses can be fertilized in late spring or late fall. Warm-season lawns are best fertilized in the late spring or summer.

For cool-season grasses, experts generally recommend fertilizing twice in fall: Once in early fall with a high-nitrogen fertilizer to strengthen blade growth and again in late fall with a high-phosphorus fertilizer to promote

root growth. Fertilizers high in potassium can help grass better withstand winter weather conditions.

2 Choose a fertilizer. Read the labels on the fertilizer packaging carefully to make sure they're compatible with your grass type. Also pay attention to the three-digit formula code on the bag. For example, a label that reads "25-5-10" means that if the bag weighed 100 pounds, it would contain 25 pounds of nitrogen, 5 pounds of phosphorus and 10 pounds of potassium. For best results, always follow the application instructions included on the label.

3 Avoid the heat. Spreading fertilizer on a hot day or during a dry period increases the chance the treatment will burn the grass. If possible, wait for a cool day and some rain.

4 Spread the fertilizer. Use gloves to protect your skin from chemicals in the fertilizer. If using a granular fertilizer instead of liquid, use a fertilizer spreader, which you can buy at your local hardware store.

Make sure the spreader setting matches the fertilizer you use (this info can be found on the fertilizer label). Walk behind the spreader at a normal pace and move systematically so you cover all areas once.

5 Water after fertilizing. Most dry fertilizer products require water to be effective, but you can usually wait a few days for rain after fertilizing. However, if kids or pets will use the lawn soon after treatment or temperatures are above 85 degrees (which can increase the chances of fertilizer burning the lawn), water the lawn shortly after fertilizing.

6 Maintain your lawn. Fertilizing will cause your grass to grow faster, so it will require more frequent mowing.

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EXTERIOR PROJECTS



foundation cracks

Foundation cracks can lead to moisture problems and more significant structure damage. Walk around your home's exterior and look for cracks, usually formed in a stair-step pattern.

Foundation repairs can be done easily and for little money – **if the problem is addressed early on**. Left to linger, structural repairs can cost several thousand dollars.

garage door inspection

You probably won't think much about your garage door this winter, **unless it freezes**. Have your garage door inspected before the cold weather hits.

An inspection should include adjusting of springs and cables, lubricating of moving parts, tightening of all hardware, track and hinges, inspecting the safety sensors and opener gears.



SPIGOTS & SPRINKLERS

Wrap outdoor spigots with insulation to prevent freezing. **Winterize your irrigation system.**

EXTERIOR PROJECTS



HOW TO

winterize your deck

Fall is the perfect time to take stock of your wood deck, make needed repairs, and stain or reseal as needed. **Getting deck maintenance** done now means the deck will be better prepared to weather winter temperatures and provide you with a head start to enjoy your deck again come spring.

- 1** Keep it clear. Make sure leaves and other debris don't build up. Moisture can get trapped under leaves, which can lead to mold, mildew or water damage.
- 2** Put 'em up. Store deck furniture, grills and accessories when you're done using these items for the season. Move them off the deck and into storage or cover them.
- 3** Spray it down. Wash away visible dirt and grime with a garden hose. Using a pressure washer is more effective way to deep clean a deck, but it's also an easy way to ruin it by splintering the wood if you use too much pressure. Leave the job to a pro if you're unfamiliar with using a pressure washer.

- 4** Inspect the deck. Spot problem areas now and get them repaired. Look for the following:
 - Split or decaying wood: Check the ledger board (where the deck attaches to the house), support posts, joists, boards, railings and stairs for wood rot, cupping, splitting and splinters. Use a screwdriver to test moisture-prone areas for soft or spongy wood.
 - Hardware: Tighten loose screws or anchors, hammer popped nails and replace corroded fasteners.
 - Railings and banisters: Check to see if railings or bannisters are loose, wobbly, sagging or flex too much when pushed. Make needed repairs to keep the deck safe.



Not sure if your wood deck needs to be resealed? Sprinkle water on the surface. If the water beads, the seal is good. If water seeps into the grain, it's time to reseal.

- 5** Stain and reseal. Professionals recommend restaining and sealing wood decks every 2 to 5 years as needed to promote durability and minimize damage from water and UV rays.

Staining a deck is hard work, especially if you go it alone. For best results, hire a pro who has the tools, staff and experience to do the job right the first time.

EXTERIOR PROJECTS

HOW TO

clean your gutters

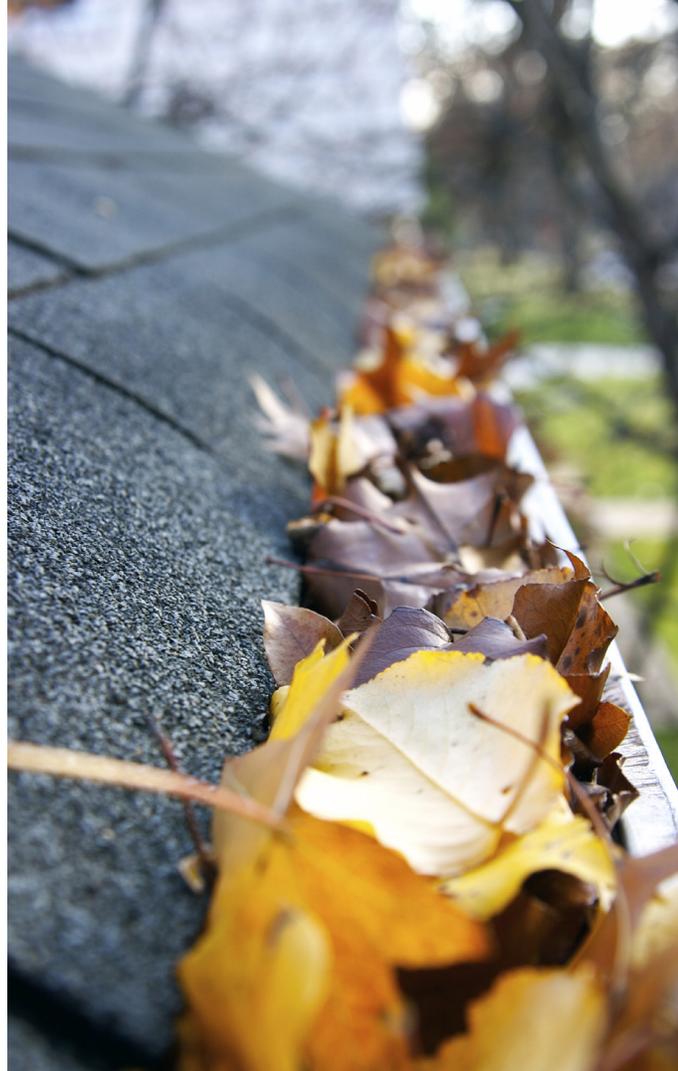
Gutters are one of the most vital components of our homes. Without them, water from rain and snowmelt would roll off the roof and pool around the foundation. That creates pressure that can lead to cracks in the foundation, walls and floors, and eventual water damage inside the home.

That's why cleaning your gutters at least twice a year is critical. Gutters clogged with leaves and debris leave no room for water to flow to the downspouts and away from your home. During the winter, snow and ice buildup can cause gutters to pull away from the fascia board and can cause roof damage.

Roofing experts recommend fall as an ideal time of year to clear your gutters. Follow these steps to ensure your gutters run clear when it matters most.

NEEDED:

- Heavy-duty gloves
- Safety goggles
- Plastic gutter scoop
- Garden hose
- 5-gallon bucket
- Trash bags
- A friend



1 When in doubt, hire a pro. Cleaning gutters can be dangerous work. Ladder accidents contribute to about 240,000 ER visits each year. Be mindful of the ladder position and any overhead electrical wires. Save yourself the time and hassle and consider hiring a professional. The nationwide average for a routine gutter cleaning is \$143, according to recent reviews on Angie's List. A professional can do the job right and spot potential problems before they lead to expensive repairs or worse – replacement, which can cost thousands of dollars.

2 Look for problem areas. Before cleaning your gutters, inspect them for areas where leaks or other issues prevail. Go outside on a rainy day and look for spots where the gutters are overflowing.

3 Gather your supplies. Access the gutters from a walkable roof or sturdy ladder. Inspect the ladder prior

to use for any potential safety issues. Be sure to position it in a stable area and so the top leans against the house, not the gutters. Put on gloves and safety goggles to protect your hands and eyes from sharp objects or animals that might be hiding in the gutters. Keep your supplies nearby and accessible. Ask a friend to hold the ladder. Hanging a bucket from the shelf of the ladder will allow both hands to be free.

4 Remove the debris. Use your gloved hands and the scoop to clear debris from the gutters. Place it in the bucket and empty the bucket into trash bags as needed.

5 Flush the downspouts. Once you're done clearing the debris, run water from a hose through the downspouts. Check that the water runs freely from the downspouts and remove any blockages.

6 Rinse the gutters. Once you've established the downspouts are clear, rinse any remaining dirt and debris from the gutters.

7 Address maintenance issues. Fix any problem areas discovered during your initial inspection, like damaged fascia boards, broken gutter connections or damaged shingles.

8 Consider gutter covers. If you have many trees near your home and have to clean your gutters more than twice a year, consider protective covers or screens to help keep debris out. Note that gutter protection systems don't eliminate the need for a gutter cleaning, and some work better than others. Consult multiple qualified gutter experts for an honest assessment of options for your home.



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interior projects



PLAN FOR HOLIDAY HELP

Plan to be away for the holidays? Schedule that pet or house sitter now before they fill up. Do the same if you need a holiday housecleaning service, caterer or want someone to hang your decorative lights.



windows and doors

Caulk, seal and weatherstrip doors and windows where drafts are detected. Find drafts by walking through your home with a lit stick of incense. Drafts will pull the smoke in that direction, making it easier to determine where the cold air is seeping in.

Sealing up those drafty areas is one of the cheapest and easiest ways to save on heating costs. If your windows are drafty, it's a great time to buy new, energy-efficient models that will help lower your energy costs. Remove screens and install storm windows.



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CONSIDER AN ENERGY AUDIT

Schedule a home energy assessment in the fall to determine where cold air is entering your home. Assessors use infrared cameras and other high-tech tools to find air leaks and stop them. Contact your utility company to see if they offer free or discounted home energy audits.

INSULATION

Check attic **insulation levels** to ensure the R-value meets recommendations for your region. Having your home properly insulated will maximize the efficiency of your heating system, keep your family warm and provide savings on your monthly energy costs.



HOW TO replace your HVAC air filter



BRIGHT IDEA

Buying air filters in multiples usually nets in cost-per-unit savings and saves you a trip to the store for the next filter replacement.

The average American family spends more than \$600 each year heating their home. By changing your furnace filter regularly (every 1-3 months), you will improve airflow, increase furnace efficiency, and prolong the life of your furnace. Your furnace starts working overtime when temperatures plummet, so make sure you're getting the best bang for your buck by changing the filter.

Not comfortable with HVAC equipment? Call a highly rated HVAC service provider. An annual professional inspection and checkup, including a filter change, will help keep your HVAC operating at peak performance. A skilled professional will spot any potential problems before they become emergencies that lead to expensive repairs.

1 Buy a new filter. The first step to replacing your furnace air filter is purchasing its replacement. Most hardware stores carry a large **variety of replacement filters**. Two numbers to keep in mind:

- Filter size – Not sure what's the right fit? Check your current filter and jot down the measurements.
- MERV rating – A number between 1 and 20, higher numbers indicate greater filtering efficiency, but MERV ratings between 5 to 8 are generally adequate for residential use.

2 Remove the old air filter. It should slide easily out of its slot in the furnace. Note: If your furnace is in a hard-to-reach area, like the attic, the filter may be located in the main cold air return vent leading from the duct. TIP: Have a trash bag handy to prevent a mess from accidentally knocking or brushing off dust and debris that's accumulated on the old filter.

3 Slide in the new filter. Note the airflow direction markings on the new filter and slide it into place according to the furnace specifications. Enjoy cleaner air and a more efficient furnace!



FIREPLACE & CHIMNEY

Have your fireplace and **chimney inspected** to avoid potential fire hazards as a result of creosote buildup, which can diminish your chimney's ability to direct toxic gases and smoke out of your home.

INTERIOR PROJECTS

HOW TO

drain and flush your water heater



NEEDED:

- ▶ Protective gloves
- ▶ Garden hose
- ▶ Flathead screwdriver
- ▶ Adjustable pliers
optional
- ▶ 5-gallon bucket
optional

Like a fading romance, are those long, hot showers getting shorter and less steamy? Chances are, your water heater is losing some of its potency. Before you work yourself into a lather, you may be able to restore at least some of its vigor with a **DIY drain and flush**.

Minerals build up over time in your water heater, especially if you have hard water, and it can reduce its heating effectiveness. Drain and flush it at least once a year – fall is a good time – and you can extend the length of your water heater’s useful life to avoid the cost of replacement.

1 Power down. Always follow your manufacturer’s instructions. If it’s a gas heater, turn the gas control knob to the “Pilot” position. If it’s electric, turn off the circuit breaker at the main breaker panel and disconnect the electrical power supply.

2 Shut off the water supply. Close the cold water supply valve to the water heater. This usually involves manually turning the valve 90 degrees.

3 Turn on hot water. Turn on the hot water from a faucet or two in the house.

4 Hook up the hose. Put on your protective gloves. Attach a hose to the drain valve and run the hose to a

drain, driveway or empty bucket. If you notice leaks at the connection, use adjustable pliers to tighten the hose.

5 Drain the tank. Open the drain valve (which may require a flathead screwdriver) and allow the water to flow until it stops.

6 Flush the tank. Next, flush any remaining sediment from the tank by reopening the cold water supply valve. Opening and closing it several times can help stir up lingering sediment.

7 Close the valve. Once the water runs clear and you no longer see sediment coming from hose, disconnect the hose and close (tighten) the tank drain valve.

8 Fill it up. Open the cold water supply valve. Turn on hot water faucets in all fixtures and run to remove air bubbles until the water flows as it should. Turn off each hot water spigot.

9 Power up. Follow your manufacturer’s lighting instructions to relight your heater. For gas heaters, directions are typically located next to the gas control knob. For an electric heater, be sure to fill the heater with water before turning back on the electrical connections. When in doubt, contact a professional licensed plumber.



SAFETY NOTE

The water in your heater, and many of the pipes connected to your water heater, will be very HOT. Proceed with caution and protect yourself when inspecting your water heater.



PLUMBING

Have your plumbing looked at and water lines insulated. Cleaning all lines can help remove clogs. Clogs cause back ups, which can freeze, causing weakening and bursting of pipes.

Wrap your pipes – like those located outside, in garages and under sinks – with **insulation designed for plumbing**. In many situations, insulation will be all you need to protect your pipes.



vehicle care

fall tune-up

- Most miles are put on a car over the summer, and that can take a toll. You'll need your car working at its optimum performance when winter rolls around.
- **Schedule a tune-up now** to avoid being stuck on the side of the highway in freezing temps. Be sure to check the air filter, spark plugs, fuel filter, distributor cap, and the battery.
- Fill all of your fluids, including power steering, transmission, wiper and brake fluid. Also, have your coolant and freezing point tested.
- Make sure your lights and brakes are in good working order and that your heating and ventilation system is working properly.
- Replace your oil filter and wiper blades.

EMERGENCY KIT

- Keep your vehicle supplied with an emergency kit, which should include a cell phone and charger, ice scraper, blankets, flares, a flashlight, a shovel, jumper cables, sand or kitty litter, tire repair tools, gloves, boots and a knit hat. Also, keep a couple bottles of water, some high-energy snacks and a first-aid kit handy.



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LUBRICATING LOCKS & DOORS

- Lubricate all locks, door hinges and latches, weather strips and window channels.

TIRES

- Check your tire pressure and tread depth. If you have to replace your tires, replace all four.