

FALL
Home &
Garden



Fall (Yes, Fall) Cleaning

It gets far fewer mentions, but fall cleaning is every bit as important as the kind done each spring.

Summer is for outdoor activity, and that inevitably leads to tracked-in dirt, mud and sand. Opened windows invite dust and other airborne particulates. At the same time, the looming cold usually harkens to a more settled time, with more time spent indoors. That's why it's best to take advantage of the autumn months to get your home in its best shape for winter.

GETTING STARTED

To begin your fall cleaning regimen, focus on decluttering your home and getting rid of items that you no longer need. Sort belongings into categories including things to be stored, donated, recycled, repaired or disposed of. Take the opportunity to organize your storage space and maximize its efficiency. The easiest way to approach things is to follow the so-called "20-20 decluttering rule": If you can replace any item for less than \$20 in 20 minutes, it's time to get rid of it.

DEEP CLEANING

Once things are downsized and organized, you're ready to deep clean. Create a list of tasks that you would like to tackle, focusing on things that aren't part of your regular



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cleaning routine.

Key areas to work on include carpets and baseboards, kitchen cabinets and walls. Set aside time to wash your windows inside and out, including the casings and sills. Move furniture and beds so you can better sweep or vacuum underneath.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Before it gets cold, replace filters and check your heating system to ensure everything is properly functioning. Schedule an appointment with a professional if concerns arise. Inspect and sweep chimneys if you have wood-burning fireplaces. Check all your batteries, espe-

cially those in carbon monoxide detectors, weather radios and smoke detectors.

OUTSIDE TASKS

Clean gutters prevent water damage, a key concern during winter storms. If you inspect and repair them yourself, follow recommended safety pro-

cedures including having a work partner. Clean and put away any outdoor furniture that won't be in regular use. Drain and then store your garden hoses. Check all weather stripping and caulking around windows and doors. Power wash any decking to prevent the growth of mildew and mold.

Get Planting

People associate planting with spring, but in many cases what you do during the autumn months is just as important.

Invest in the future of your garden right now to ensure a vibrant display of flowers as the weather warms. Take advantage of the cooler weather to prepare the soil for the season to come. You'll be creating the perfect environment for a stunning array of blooms.

SELECTING BULBS

When selecting bulbs, be prepared for a wide variety of choices. All will offer their own unique colors, blooming times and shapes. Popular options for autumn planting include tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, snowdrops and crocuses. To create a visually appealing garden, consider the sunlight requirements, height and bloom time of each variety. To increase the chances of success, choose bulbs that are free of blemishes, firm and — perhaps most importantly — suitable for your specific climate zone.

CONSIDER THE TIMING

Autumn is the ideal time to plant bulbs since this allows for the establishment of strong roots before the ground freezes. Aim to plant bulbs six to eight weeks



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before the typical freezing period in your particular area. The timing may vary depending on your climate zone, so it's smart to consult with local gardening resources. Talk to experts at your local extension office or nearby nursery to determine the optimal planting window for your region.

PREPARING THE SOIL

Proper soil preparation is essential for promoting healthy root development and vibrant blooms. To create the best conditions, choose a well-drained location that receives ample sunlight. Clear the planting area of any rocks, weeds or debris. Loosen the soil and enrich it with organic matter

or compost to bolster its fertility and overall health. This can help with drainage.

READY TO DIG?

Different types of bulbs require different planting depths, so always follow the specific guidelines for each variety. As a general rule, bulbs should be planted at a depth

that is two to three times their particular height. Encourage proper growth and air circulation by spacing bulbs according to the recommendations provided on the package. Consult with a local gardening expert if you're unsure about this. For a more natural and visually appealing effect, consider planting in clusters.

Before You Pressure Wash

Summer can be hard on the exteriors of our homes. If you're ready for deep cleaning, pressure washing is the easiest and most thorough option.

It can give you a clean slate if you're considering any touch-ups. Still, safety can be a concern with these powerful machines. Here's a checklist to consider before you pressure wash.

ELECTRICAL DANGERS

Washers with over 100 pounds per square inch of pressure can be extremely dangerous, potentially causing severe injuries. Test the ground-fault circuit interrupter before using the machine. Pressure washers must be plugged into a properly grounded receptacle. Never remove the third prong from the power cord. This is designed to protect you by providing proper grounding. Wear rubber-soled shoes that provide insulation. This will protect you from any potential electrical shocks.

If you must use an extension cord, make sure the connection is kept away from standing water. Always use a heavy-duty extension cord that is specifically rated for use in wet locations. Never attempt to splice or cut the machine's power cord or any extension cords. This poses a



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serious risk since it can lead to electrical malfunctions. Those who have gas-line-powered washers should avoid air intakes and enclosed spaces, since the exhaust can be toxic.

OPERATOR ERRORS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reminds users to refer to the

safety instructions in their owner's manual. In general, avoid pointing the pressure washer at yourself or others. Be cautious with the high-pressure spray since it can move objects around, potentially causing harm to bystanders or yourself. Never allow children to operate a pressure washer, and keep them away while the equip-

ment is in use. Many operator errors happen in situations where there is a lack of adult supervision.

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

If you injure yourself with a pressure washer, remember that even seemingly small wounds can be more serious than they might appear at first.

For more manageable mishaps, it's recommended to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and clean water, removing any dirt or debris. This will help prevent potential infection. Cover the wound with a bandage or clean cloth to protect against contamination. Otherwise, seek immediate medical treatment, as needed.

The Roof Over Your Head

Winter brings its own special stresses to a roof.

Extreme amounts of moisture, freezing and thawing cycles, and the weight of snow itself can put an unmanageable amount of stress on aging structures. That's why fall is such a smart time to repair or perhaps even totally replace your roof, as recommended. Begin with a thorough inspection.

GETTING AN INSPECTION

The American Society of Home Inspectors recommends getting a professional roof inspection twice a year. You can perform your own spot checks in the meantime. Look for any cracked or curling shingles on the outside, while noting stains or damp areas in the attic. Address these issues before the coldest months since they may become more challenging and costly to fix in the wintertime.

During a professional inspection, experts will thoroughly examine your roof from the exterior and interior of your home. They'll assess the condition of the shingles, paying close attention to any ice dams. The inspector will evaluate the overall state of the chimney, if you have one. Once inside, they'll look for signs of moisture, mold and ventilation problems, while evaluating the insulation.

MAKING REPAIRS

Conduct repairs in autumn to ensure the best outcomes. For



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instance, treatments for moss and lichen may require up to 180 days to take full effect. Installing new shingles in cold temperatures can lead to failure. Finally, repairing icy roofs is extremely hazardous work, so issues identified too late may

have to wait until spring before they can be properly resolved.

KNOW THE RISKS

The inspector will draft a comprehensive report detailing any identified issues, their level of urgency, and a proposed

course of action. If you live in a region with lots of winter precipitation, they'll note that your roof may be susceptible to collapse due to the sheer weight of snow. Even a well-maintained roof can only withstand approximately 20 pounds of snow per

square foot, according to insurance experts. That's why regular fall inspections are so crucial. In some instances, snow removal may even be necessary during the winter season. Talk to an expert today to find out more.



Leave Those Leaves Alone

Raking has long been part of our autumn rituals. But leaves actually play a vital role in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem around us.

Here's why leaving those leaves alone is the best idea, with tips on how to use them instead.

PROVIDING SHELTER

Leaves serve as shelter for insects during the fall and winter seasons, including butterflies and other pollinators that keep our flowers and food supply vibrant and strong. By leaving the leaves in flowerbeds and other areas away from the grass, you can provide a safe haven for these very beneficial insects. As they flourish, you'll also be ensuring the health of

green and growing things everywhere. Move leaves from grassy areas into beds and garden areas. They will serve as insulation during the colder winter season. You can mulch it all to provide additional nourishment for your lawn.

MULCHING OPTION

Instead of simply removing leaves by raking or blowing them away, consider turning them into mulch to create a natural fertilizer. Most people simply run a lawnmower over them, breaking down leaves into smaller pieces. That prevents your grass from dying in the dark. It allows leaves to more quickly decompose, enriching the soil with valuable nutrients.

Some lawnmowers come with a built-in mulch setting, or you can purchase a mulching kit to attach to the mower. They're typically used on the highest setting of the mower, but follow suggested manufacturer guide-

lines when using these kits. In the case of taller drifts of leaves, it may be necessary to make multiple passes. You can more evenly distribute mulched debris by raking it across the yard.

OTHER USES

Leaves can suffocate your lawn, creating dead patches of grass.

Remember that the next time you have weeds. Cover them with leaves as an aid in eliminating weeds during the autumn and winter months, while avoiding pesticides altogether. If you have large bare areas on your property, leaves or mulch can help prevent weeds from taking root.

Another option for dealing with leaves is to relocate them to a designated area in your yard for composting. If your accumulation of leaves is so large that it doesn't decompose by spring, simply transfer it all to the compost bin.



Time for Insulation

Dropping temps are one of the surest ways to discover insulation problems around the home.

Cold breezes begin slipping in under doors and around windows. You may find cold spots in your home, or notice a drastic change in your utility bills. These are signs that your insulation and weather stripping require inspection, repair or replacement:

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Up to 10% of air leakage in a home happens in gaps around windows, according to air conditioning experts. Try applying window film to seal these gaps, simply by heating it with a hair dryer. If temporary fixes are unsuccessful, consider investing in new windows. Look for replacements with higher Energy Star ratings to reduce your monthly expenses.

For additional advice, consult a professional repair technician or staff at your local hardware store.

Some drafts may not be so easily noticed. To identify less obvious drafts, walk around doors and windows with a lit candle. Place the flame around the edges. If it flickers, that's an indication of the presence of a draft. In some cases, you may need the assistance of a professional inspector to locate other hard-to-find areas where cold air is seep-



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ing in. Inspectors will pay close attention to attic access points, insulation and fireplace dampers.

EASY SOLUTIONS

Depending on the size of the gaps, you may be able to use simple foam tape or weather stripping as a solution.

Additionally, new sweeps can be installed to seal gaps between thresholds and the bottom of the door. For smaller points of entry, weighted socks – sometimes called “door snakes” – can be used as a barrier. Some smaller leaks may be solved by using cost-effective caulking.

IMPROVING INSULATION

With winter weather setting in, fall is a smart time to assess your insulation needs. Ensure that the insulation has proper ventilation to the exterior of your home, including soffits, gable vents or ridges. Batt or blown-in insulation can impede the necessary dis-

sipation of heat, posing a fire hazard. The typical insulation depth for most attics ranges from 10 to 14 inches, depending on the material used. Check to ensure that vents are clear to avoid any moisture-related issues. Do not place new insulation over old insulation.

Planning Ahead: What's Next

Look ahead now to make sure that you have all the supplies needed for another long winter.

You don't want to be snowed in or experience a sudden power failure only to realize that you need some crucial item. Start preparing in the fall when the demand for these things isn't so high, and you might save a little money, too.

STAYING WARM

Make your home winter-ready by ensuring that you have enough cozy items like extra blankets, thick jackets, hats, gloves and space heaters. Consider installing a programmable thermostat to maintain the perfect indoor temps. You'll be inside more as conditions turn colder, so consider a purifier to improve the air quality in your home. If you have fireplaces or wood-burning stoves, stock up on properly seasoned firewood. If you rely on other fuel sources, purchase an amount that's adequate to last throughout the winter.

LOSING POWER

Unfortunately, winter storms can lead to power failures. To avoid being caught off guard, create an emergency kit in advance. Include essential items such as batteries, flashlights, a first aid kit, a battery-powered radio and plenty of bottled water. Stack



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your pantry with non-perishable food items. If your area suffers from prolonged outages, consider purchasing a generator as a backup power source.

STAYING HEALTHY

Fall and winter typically bring an increased risk of colds, flu and other illnesses.

Take necessary precautions like practicing good hygiene, staying current on your vaccinations, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle to help minimize your chances of getting sick. Update and fill your prescriptions and keep an ample supply of over-the-counter medications to alleviate common symptoms — including

cough syrup, fever reducers and sore throat lozenges.

GETTING READY

If you live in a place with harsher winters, stock up on all the essential snow removal tools like snow shovels, de-icing agents and ice scrapers. Regularly inspect and maintain your tools to ensure they

are in optimal working condition. Maintain a winter car kit, with emergency items such as extra blankets, an ice scraper, jumper cables, a flashlight, shovel and non-perishable snacks. Get ready for the cold with a new patio heater. Depending on how much you get, purchasing a snow blower might make sense.