

A woman with short grey hair, wearing an orange textured sweater and blue jeans, is smiling while holding a shovel. She is standing in a garden with lush green trees in the background. The image is framed by vertical strips of blurred foliage on the left and right sides.

Fall Home & Garden

Protect Your Home From Storms

Fall weather can be unpredictable, and thunderstorms are often part of the season's changing patterns.

Preparing your home now can help minimize potential damage and give you peace of mind when the next big storm rolls in.

CHECK YOUR DRAINAGE

One of the first steps in storm preparation is ensuring water can flow safely away from your home. Clean out gutters and downspouts to remove leaves, twigs and other debris that can block water and cause overflows. Clogged gutters can lead to roof leaks and foundation issues.

Check that downspouts are extended several feet away from your home's foundation. If pooling water is an issue, consider grading the soil around your home or adding splash blocks and extensions.

Inspect basement window wells and outdoor drains to make sure they are clear and ready to handle heavy rains. Proper drainage is one of the best defenses against water damage.

SECURE OUTDOOR ITEMS

Outdoor furniture, grills, garden tools and decorations can become dangerous projectiles in high winds. Before a storm hits, secure loose items by bringing them indoors, storing them in a shed or anchoring them securely.

Patio umbrellas should be closed and secured, and lightweight furniture can be tied down or moved to a protected area. Take a walk around your yard before a storm is forecast to spot



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anything that could blow away or cause damage.

TRIM TREES AND SHRUBS

Trees and large shrubs add beauty and shade to a property, but they can also pose a risk during fall storms. Strong winds and saturated ground can cause weakened branches to break or trees to topple.

Inspect trees around your home for dead or overhanging branches. Hiring a certified arborist to remove

dangerous limbs or assess tree health is a worthwhile investment. Keeping trees properly trimmed helps reduce the chances of roof damage, broken windows or power outages during storms.

PROTECT WINDOWS AND DOORS

While full storm shutters are rarely necessary outside hurricane zones, it is smart to check the seals and weatherstripping around your windows and doors. Repair any cracks or gaps that

could let in water and wind.

For extra protection, keep sheets of plywood on hand if you live in an area prone to high winds. Even temporary coverings can help protect vulnerable windows during an unexpected severe storm.

Taking a little time to prepare can help ensure your home weathers the season's thunderstorms safely. With a few proactive steps, you can reduce damage risks and enjoy the beauty of fall without worry.

Affordable Fall Home Touches

Fall is a great time to freshen up your home, especially before colder weather keeps everyone indoors.

The good news is that a seasonal refresh does not have to break the bank. A few simple upgrades can add warmth, boost curb appeal and make your home feel ready for the season ahead.

START AT THE FRONT DOOR

The entrance to your home sets the tone for visitors and gives you a welcoming view every day. Swapping out an old door mat for a fresh, seasonal one is a quick and affordable upgrade. Look for mats with autumn colors, natural textures or a cheerful fall greeting.

While you are at it, consider updating your house numbers. New, stylish numbers are an inexpensive way to boost curb appeal and make your home easier to find on darker evenings. Choose numbers that are bold, modern or complement your home's style.

A fresh coat of paint on the front door can also do wonders. Deep reds, warm oranges, or classic navy blues are popular fall choices that still look great year-round.

COZY UP INSIDE

As temperatures drop, it is time to add some warmth inside as well. Swapping out



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lightweight summer textiles for heavier, cozier fabrics creates an inviting atmosphere without major changes. Look for chunky knit throws, flannel sheets or velvet pillow covers in rich fall colors like burgundy, gold or forest green.

Area rugs can be rotated for the season. Adding a thicker rug to living rooms or bedrooms changes the look of the

space and helps keep it warmer. Updating lighting is another easy upgrade. Consider adding a few warm-toned bulbs or swapping out lampshades to create a softer glow that matches the coziness of the season.

TACKLE EASY TOUCH-UPS

Fall is an ideal time to

tackle small maintenance jobs before winter sets in. Touching up chipped or faded paint around trim, doors or fences can instantly refresh your home's appearance. Filling cracks, tightening loose hardware and replacing worn-out caulking are small fixes that make a big difference.

Even organizing mudrooms or entryways for the

upcoming coat-and-boot season can feel like a major upgrade.

Adding hooks, baskets or a small bench creates a welcoming and functional space for the colder months.

With just a few budget-friendly changes, your home can feel fresh, cozy and ready for everything fall has to offer.

Choose the Right Mulch for Fall

As the seasons shift and temperatures cool, fall becomes an ideal time to protect and nourish your garden with mulch.

Adding a fresh layer now can help insulate plants, retain soil moisture and suppress weeds through the winter months. Choosing the right mulch for your plants and climate ensures your garden stays healthy and vibrant into spring.

WHY MULCH MATTERS IN THE FALL

Mulch acts like a protective blanket for gardens during colder months. It helps regulate soil temperature, keeping roots warmer during early frosts and preventing heaving caused by freeze-thaw cycles. Mulch helps trap moisture during dry autumn periods and continues to block out weeds that could take root before winter sets in.

Organic mulches, such as bark, straw, shredded leaves or compost, break down over time and add valuable nutrients back into the soil. This natural process can give plants a boost when they emerge from winter dormancy.

Applying mulch in the fall prepares your garden for a strong start once warmer weather returns. It is a simple but powerful way to invest in the long-term health of your landscaping.



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BEST MULCH OPTIONS FOR FALL

Different gardens call for different mulches, depending on climate, soil type and the plants being protected.

- **Shredded bark:** Popular for perennial beds and around trees, shredded bark breaks down slowly and provides excellent insulation. It works well in most climates and helps enrich the soil over time.

- **Straw:** A lightweight option perfect for vegetable gardens,

straw keeps soil temperatures more stable and is easy to rake away in spring. Make sure to choose clean, seed-free straw to avoid introducing weeds.

- **Compost:** For gardens needing a nutrient boost, compost offers both insulation and fertilization. A thin layer can be topped with another mulch type to prevent it from washing away in rain.

- **Shredded leaves:** Fallen leaves are a free and readily available mulch option.

Shredding them first helps prevent matting and promotes faster breakdown into rich organic matter.

Gardeners in colder regions may want to prioritize thicker mulch layers, while those in milder climates can use lighter coverings to prevent excessive moisture buildup.

TIPS FOR APPLYING FALL MULCH

When mulching in the fall, timing matters. Wait until the

first hard frost but before the ground freezes completely. This helps protect dormant plants without encouraging pests to settle in. Aim for a layer about 2-4 inches thick. Keep mulch a few inches away from the base of trees and shrubs to prevent rot and discourage rodents from nesting close to plants.

Choosing the right mulch and applying it properly gives fall gardens a head start on a healthy, beautiful growing season.

Extend Patio Season

As temperatures dip, there is no need to pack away the patio furniture just yet.

With a few thoughtful touches, it is easy to transform any outdoor space into a warm and inviting nook perfect for fall evenings. From heating options to layered textiles, these ideas can help extend the outdoor season well into the crisp months ahead.

WARM THINGS UP

The key to enjoying outdoor spaces in cooler weather is adding warmth. Fire pits remain a popular choice, offering both heat and ambiance. Whether it is a classic wood-burning pit or a modern propane model, a fire feature can anchor a space and create a natural gathering point.

Outdoor heaters are another option, available in freestanding, tabletop or wall-mounted designs. Some models use propane while others run on electricity, making it easy to find one that fits the space and budget. Even a small heat source can take the edge off chilly air and make patios, porches or decks comfortable deeper into the season.

LAYER WITH COMFORT

Once the heat is sorted, it is time to add layers of comfort. Cozy textiles turn an outdoor space into an extension of the living room. Start with weather-resistant rugs to define the area and add a layer of insula-

tion against the cold ground.

Plush outdoor cushions, thick blankets and soft throws invite guests to linger. Look for fabrics labeled for outdoor use, which are designed to resist moisture and fading. Storing extra blankets in a covered basket or nearby storage bench keeps them handy

when the temperatures drop.

LIGHT THE WAY

As daylight hours shrink, lighting becomes even more important. String lights add instant charm and can be draped across railings, pergolas or trees. Lanterns filled with battery-operated candles offer a

safe way to bring a soft, flickering glow to tabletops and steps.

Solar-powered stake lights or ground lights are another way to define walkways or highlight garden beds. For a rustic look, mason jars with fairy lights can be tucked into corners or hung from branches. Good lighting makes outdoor spaces more

functional and sets a cozy mood perfect for fall nights.

By combining heat, soft textures and welcoming lighting, homeowners can easily create an outdoor nook that feels like a private autumn retreat. A little creativity can keep outdoor living going long after the first leaves begin to fall.



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Decorating with Fall Elements

Fall is the perfect time to bring the beauty of nature indoors.

Pinecones, acorns, colorful branches and dried flowers offer endless inspiration for cozy, eco-friendly decor. Using natural elements celebrates the season's textures and colors and creates warm, welcoming spaces without relying on store-bought decorations.

BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

One of the simplest ways to start decorating with natural elements is by taking a walk. Parks, trails and even backyards are full of seasonal treasures during autumn. Look for vibrant maple leaves, sturdy pinecones, seed pods, ornamental grasses and interesting branches.

Be sure to collect responsibly. Only take what has already fallen and avoid gathering from protected areas or private property without permission. Shake or brush off debris before bringing items inside to avoid bringing in unwanted pests.

Natural materials can be used alone for a minimalist look or combined with other decor pieces for added effect.

IDEAS FOR ECO-FRIENDLY FALL DECOR

- **Pinecones:** Arrange pinecones in clear glass vases, bowls or wooden trays. Add a few small candles for a rustic



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centerpiece. Pinecones can be used to create wreaths, garlands or place card holders for fall gatherings.

- **Acorns:** Fill decorative jars or scatter acorns along a mantel for a subtle autumn touch. Acorns can be painted gold, copper or white for a more refined look while still staying true to their natural roots.

- **Branches:** Tall, colorful branches placed in large vases make striking entryway pieces.

Birch, dogwood or maple branches with vivid leaves add height and drama to any room. Bare branches can be strung with tiny lights for a cozy glow.

- **Dried flowers:** Harvest late-summer blooms like hydrangeas, lavender or sunflowers and dry them for long-lasting arrangements. Dried grasses and seed heads, such as pampas grass or cone-flowers, lend an earthy elegance to fall decor.

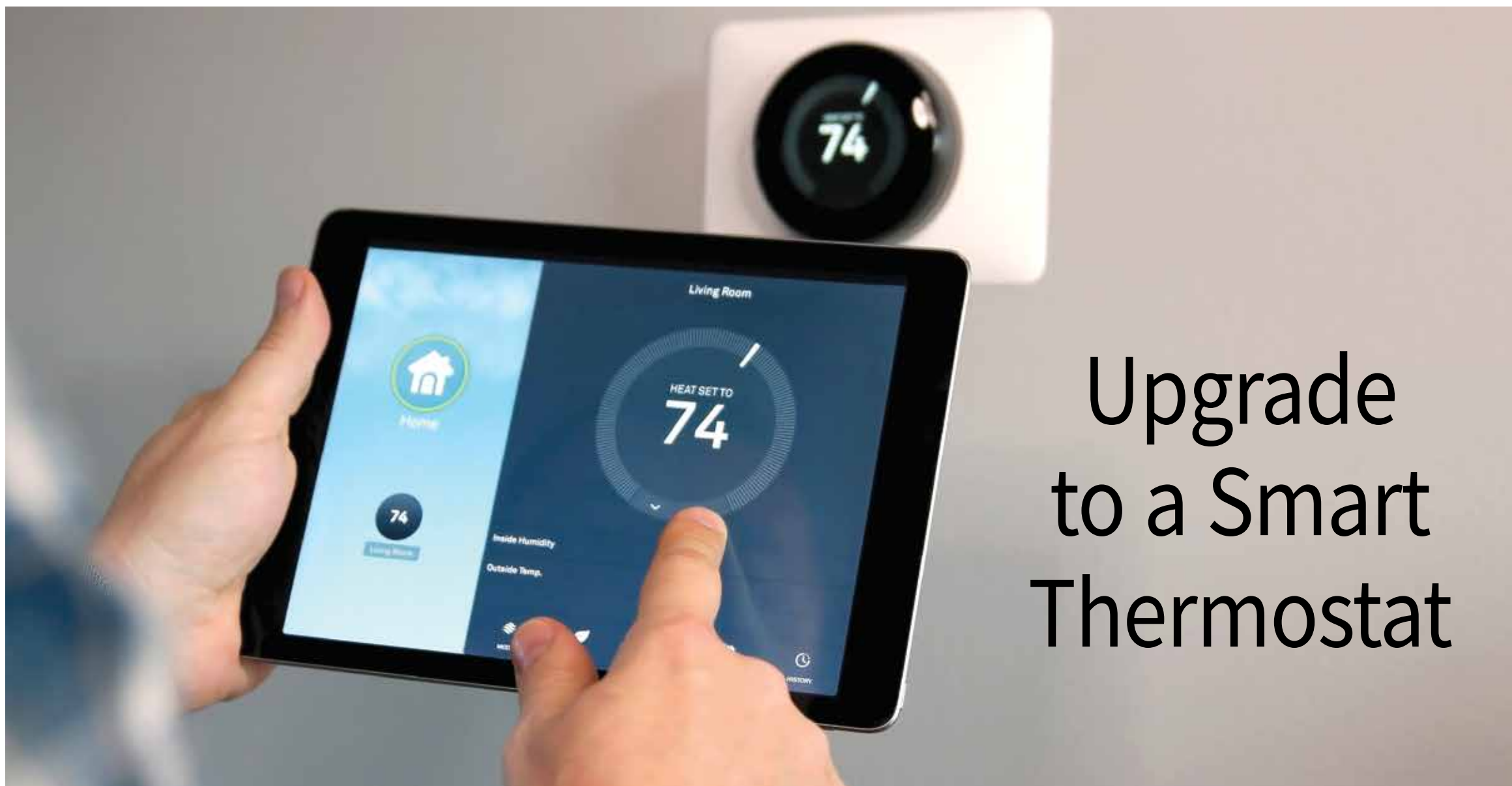
Mixing and matching natural elements can create dynamic displays that change throughout the season. Add fresh finds as you discover them or swap out arrangements to reflect shifting colors outdoors.

SUSTAINABLE AND STYLISH

Decorating with nature's bounty is beautiful and sustainable. It reduces waste,

minimizes reliance on synthetic materials and often costs little to nothing. At the end of the season, many natural items can be composted or reused for winter projects.

Natural fall decorations bring authenticity and charm to homes, creating spaces that feel both festive and grounded. With just a few simple finds and a little creativity, it is easy to celebrate the season's beauty indoors.



Upgrade to a Smart Thermostat

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As summer fades and cooler days start to settle in, homeowners turn their focus to heating systems.

Fall is the ideal season to install or upgrade to a smart thermostat, a simple change that can lead to significant savings and improved comfort during the winter months.

SAVE ENERGY, SAVE MONEY

Smart thermostats are designed to help homeowners reduce energy use without sacrificing comfort. Unlike traditional models, smart thermostats learn household patterns and automatically adjust the temperature based on when people are home or

away. Many models allow users to control settings remotely through a smartphone app, offering greater flexibility and convenience.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, households can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling costs by simply turning the thermostat back 7-10 degrees for eight hours a day. Smart thermostats make this easier by handling the adjustments automatically, optimizing settings for maximum efficiency.

FALL INSTALLATION MAKES SENSE

Installing a smart thermostat in the fall allows homeowners to get familiar with the system before winter arrives.

It provides time to program schedules, learn the features and trouble-

shoot any issues without the pressure of freezing temperatures.

Some energy providers offer rebates or discounts for installing smart thermostats, especially in the fall, when heating season looms. Checking with local utility companies can reveal hidden savings that help offset the initial purchase price.

Additionally, many smart thermostats offer features like maintenance reminders, weather monitoring and energy usage reports. These tools help homeowners spot potential heating problems early and make informed decisions about energy use throughout the colder months.

COMFORT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Beyond the cost savings, smart thermostats offer a big boost in comfort.

Coming home to a cold house can be a thing of the past with programmable settings that warm up the space before arrival. Many systems integrate with voice assistants, making it easy to adjust the temperature with a simple command.

Advanced models can even monitor humidity levels or suggest energy-saving tips based on usage habits. Whether someone prefers a toasty living room in the evening or cooler bedrooms for sleeping, smart thermostats make it easier to customize comfort to individual preferences.

Upgrading to a smart thermostat this fall is a smart investment in both home comfort and long-term savings. A little effort now can pay off with a cozy, energy-efficient home all winter long.

Squirrel-Proof Your Garden

Squirrels may be charming with their acrobatic leaps and fluffy tails, but they can quickly become a backyard nuisance once fall arrives.

Newly planted bulbs, ripening produce and festive outdoor decorations are all at risk from these energetic visitors. Fortunately, a few simple strategies can help keep fall gardens and displays safe without harming local wildlife.

MAKE YOUR GARDEN LESS INVITING

The first step to squirrel-proofing a garden is removing easy temptations. Pick up fallen fruit, nuts and seeds regularly. Use closed containers for compost and secure trash can lids. Feeding birds can draw in squirrels, so consider using squirrel-proof bird feeders or offering seed blends less attractive to them, such as safflower.

Mulching fall plantings can be another useful tactic. A thick layer of mulch protects bulbs from winter freezes and masks their scent, making them less tempting to squirrels on the hunt for easy meals.

PROTECT PLANTINGS AND DECOR

Physical barriers are one of the most effective ways to prevent squirrel damage. Covering newly planted bulbs with wire

mesh, such as chicken wire, keeps squirrels from digging them up while still allowing plants to grow through. Simply lay the mesh over the planting area, stake it down and cover it with a thin layer of soil or mulch.

For garden beds, raised containers with protective netting can be a smart alternative, especially for tender young plants. When it comes to outdoor fall decor, anchoring

pumpkins and decorative items securely can discourage curious squirrels from nibbling or carrying them off.

Repellents offer another layer of defense. Many gardeners have success with commercial squirrel repellents that use natural ingredients like capsaicin. These sprays can be applied around gardens and on outdoor decorations but may need reapplication after rain.

ENCOURAGE NATURAL DETERRENTS

Nature can lend a helping hand in the battle against squirrels. Motion-activated sprinklers and ultrasonic repellents can startle intruders without causing harm. Some homeowners report success using garden statues of natural predators, such as owls or hawks, to keep squirrels wary and away.

Plant selection can play a role too. Squirrels tend to avoid

daffodils, hyacinths and alliums, making them ideal choices for fall bulb plantings. Incorporating these into garden designs can help protect more vulnerable plants nearby.

With a few adjustments, it is possible to enjoy a thriving fall garden and festive outdoor displays without sharing everything with the local squirrel population. A little prevention now can save a lot of frustration later in the season.



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