

Winter Home & Garden



Choosing a Snowblower

When winter storms hit, a reliable snowblower can turn back-breaking shoveling into a manageable chore.

But with so many models on the market, it can be tricky to know which one will serve your home best. From small driveways to sprawling walks, the right fit depends on both your space and your budget.

SINGLE-, TWO- AND THREE-STAGE OPTIONS

Snowblowers come in three main types. Single-stage models are lightweight and compact, making them a good choice for smaller driveways or sidewalks where snowfall isn't too heavy. They work best on paved surfaces and can typically handle snow up to about 8 inches deep.

Two-stage snowblowers are more powerful, using an auger and an impeller to cut through deeper snow and throw it farther. These models can tackle gravel driveways and heavier storms, making them a solid option for suburban homes.

At the top of the line, three-stage snowblowers chew through packed, icy snow with ease. They're designed for large properties or areas with frequent heavy snowfalls, though they come with a higher price tag and bulkier build.

KEY FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

Once you've narrowed down



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the type, think about features that make winter's work easier. Electric start saves you from wrestling with a pull cord on frigid mornings. Heated handgrips add comfort during long clearing sessions, while headlights make early morning or evening work safer.

Consider the clearing width and intake height; a wider machine will clear faster but it might be harder to maneuver

in tight spaces. Look at the throwing distance too, especially if you need to keep heavy drifts away from walkways or cars.

For homeowners with limited storage space, folding handles and compact designs can be a big advantage.

ELECTRIC VS. GAS CHOICES

Today's snowblowers come

in both electric and gas-powered options. Electric models are quieter, lighter and require less maintenance, but they're generally best for lighter snowfalls and smaller areas.

Cordless battery-powered options are becoming more popular, though run times can be limited.

Gas-powered models offer more strength for tackling

heavy snow and larger driveways, but they require regular fueling, oil changes and off-season storage care.

Choosing the right snowblower means balancing size, power and convenience. By considering the typical snowfall in your area and the space you need to clear, you can invest in a machine that keeps winter manageable and your back pain-free.

Decorating with Greens

When temperatures drop and flowers fade, evergreens and hardy plants step into the spotlight.

Decorating with pine, holly and berries adds color and beauty to outdoor spaces, and creates a festive, natural look that celebrates the season.

ADDING TEXTURE AND COLOR

Pine branches, cedar boughs and spruce tips offer a lush, green base that hold up well against the cold. Their varied textures — needle clusters, soft sprays and structured sprigs — make them versatile for planters, wreaths and garlands. Adding holly branches introduces glossy leaves and pops of bright red berries that contrast beautifully against the greens. Other plants, such as winterberry or crabapple branches, can provide striking accents with their clusters of berries that remain vibrant even in frost.

For those seeking variety, mixing evergreens with dried seed pods, ornamental grasses or magnolia leaves creates depth and adds a rustic touch. The combination of colors and textures can complement both modern and traditional homes.

CREATING WELCOMING OUTDOOR DISPLAYS

Entryways, porches and garden beds are natural stages



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for winter greenery. A simple evergreen wreath adorned with pinecones and ribbon makes a warm first impression on the front door. Large outdoor planters can be filled with soil and packed with pine branches, holly, birch logs and berry stems for a bold seasonal statement.

Garden beds and borders benefit from added evergreen clippings, which enhance curb appeal and provide ground cover to protect roots from

harsh weather. Window boxes, often bare during winter, can be transformed into lively displays with a mix of greens, twigs and berries that stay attractive well into January.

CARING FOR NATURAL GREENS

To extend the life of natural decorations, keep greenery moist. Spritzing arrangements with water every few days and placing them in shaded or cooler spots helps prevent

drying and browning. Outdoor displays typically last longer than indoor ones, since colder temperatures slow the drying process.

For added longevity, consider using floral preservatives or anti-desiccant sprays designed to reduce moisture loss. Avoid placing fresh greens near heat sources if used indoors, as warmth accelerates drying.

Using natural greens is an eco-friendly alternative to

synthetic decorations. Once the season ends, most branches and clippings can be composted or chipped into mulch, returning nutrients to the soil.

Decorating with pine, holly and berries brings vibrancy to an otherwise muted landscape. With a little care and creativity, homeowners can embrace the beauty of nature and keep outdoor spaces inviting throughout the winter months.

Make Your Own Draft Stoppers

When winter winds blow, even the tiniest gaps around doors and windows can let in cold air, driving up heating costs and leaving rooms uncomfortable.

Draft stoppers, also called draft snakes, are a budget-friendly solution that anyone can make at home. With a little creativity, you can block chilly breezes while adding a decorative touch to your space.

WHY DRAFT STOPPERS WORK

Draft stoppers are long, fabric-filled tubes that sit snugly at the base of doors or windows, preventing cold air from sneaking in and warm air from escaping. They work much like weatherstripping but don't require installation or tools.

Because they are easy to move, homeowners can use them wherever drafts are most noticeable, whether that's along a basement door, a sliding glass door, or an old window frame.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, drafts can waste as much as 30% of a home's energy.

Stopping them with simple solutions like draft stoppers helps conserve energy and can lower monthly heating bills.



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MATERIALS YOU ALREADY HAVE

The good news is you don't need to buy expensive supplies to make a draft stopper. Many people repurpose old materials, turning this into an eco-friendly project.

- Fabric base: Old jeans, socks, pillowcases or leftover fabric scraps work perfectly.
- Fillings: Uncooked rice, dried beans, kitty litter, or even

old T-shirts can serve as stuffing. Heavy fillers help keep the stopper in place, while lighter ones make it easier to move.

- Closures: A simple stitch with needle and thread, fabric glue or even rubber bands can seal the ends.

For extra convenience, some crafters add Velcro closures so the covers can be removed and washed. Others sew in handles or use decorative fabrics to

match seasonal decor.

SIMPLE STEPS TO GET STARTED

Making a basic draft stopper takes less than an hour. Cut your chosen fabric to the desired length — slightly longer than the door or window you're covering — and about six inches wide. Fold the fabric lengthwise with the patterned side facing in, then sew or glue

along the edge, leaving one side open. Turn the fabric right side out, fill with your chosen material, and seal the end.

If sewing isn't your style, you can even make no-sew versions by filling a long sock with rice and tying off the open end with string. For sliding doors or large windows, try using two connected draft stoppers, one inside and one outside, to block air from both directions.

Winter Care for Wood Floors

Hardwood floors bring beauty and warmth to a home but the dry air of winter can take a toll on them.

When the furnace is running constantly and humidity drops, wood can shrink, leaving gaps or even cracks. With a few preventive steps, you can keep your floors looking their best all season.

UNDERSTAND WHY WOOD REACTS TO DRYNESS

Wood is a natural material that expands and contracts as humidity levels change. In summer, extra moisture in the air often makes boards swell. In winter, the opposite happens. Low humidity and heated indoor air cause boards to lose moisture and shrink. While small seasonal changes are normal, extremely dry air can make gaps between planks more noticeable or lead to cracking.

The first step is to know what's typical for your flooring. Most manufacturers recommend keeping indoor humidity between 35-55% to protect hardwood. Anything lower, especially below 30%, can be stressful for the wood.

ADD MOISTURE BACK INTO THE AIR

One of the simplest ways to prevent dry-air damage is to balance your home's humidity.



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A whole-house humidifier attached to your furnace can automatically keep levels steady, but portable units are also effective for individual rooms. If you'd rather go natural, you can place bowls of water near heating vents or use houseplants, which naturally release moisture into the air. Even something as simple as drying laundry indoors can add

a little extra humidity.

For extra peace of mind, consider investing in a hygrometer, a small device that measures humidity levels. That way, you can monitor conditions and adjust as needed to protect your floors.

CARE HABITS FOR WINTER

Beyond humidity control, a few daily habits go a long way

in preserving hardwood during the heating season. Place mats at entryways to trap snow and salt, which can scratch surfaces. Sweep or vacuum regularly to keep grit from grinding into the wood. Use area rugs in high-traffic areas to reduce wear and add warmth underfoot.

If gaps do appear, resist the urge to fill them right away.

Often, boards will expand again once spring humidity returns. Instead, keep up with gentle cleaning and monitoring. When the season changes, your floors will likely settle back into place.

With just a little attention, you can help your hardwood floors weather the dry winter months without lasting damage, leaving them strong and beautiful for years to come.

Winter Humidity Control

Winter brings cold air outside and dry, heated air inside, a combination that can make your home uncomfortable and even unhealthy.

Low humidity levels are linked to dry skin, irritated sinuses, static electricity and an increased risk of respiratory illness.

By maintaining the right balance of moisture in the air, you can protect both your health and your home.

WHY HUMIDITY MATTERS

Experts say indoor humidity levels should stay between 30-50%. When air becomes too dry, it can cause wooden furniture and floors to crack, paint to peel and wallpaper to loosen. Dry air makes people more vulnerable to colds and flu, since viruses thrive in low-humidity environments. On the other hand, too much humidity can create problems of its own, such as mold growth and dust mites, which trigger allergies and asthma.

A simple hygrometer — a small, inexpensive device available at most hardware stores — lets you measure humidity levels in any room. Once you know your numbers, you can make adjustments to stay in the healthy zone.

HUMIDIFIERS

Humidifiers are the most

direct way to increase moisture levels indoors. Portable units can humidify a single room, while whole-house systems connect directly to your heating system for wider coverage. Ultrasonic and evaporative humidifiers are popular options, each with its own advantages.

For example, ultrasonic models operate quietly and use less electricity, while

evaporative types are self-regulating, adding moisture only until the air reaches a comfortable level.

No matter the type, regular cleaning is essential to prevent the growth of mold and bacteria inside the machine. Manufacturers generally recommend changing the water daily and giving the tank a thorough scrub every few days.

NATURAL WAYS TO ADD MOISTURE

If you'd rather skip appliances, there are simple, natural methods to increase humidity at home. Placing bowls of water near heating vents or radiators allows moisture to evaporate into the air. Cooking on the stovetop, boiling water for tea or leaving the bathroom door open after a shower can also raise humidity levels.

Houseplants are another natural helper, as they release water vapor through a process called transpiration.

For best results, combine these natural solutions with a humidifier in the rooms you use most. By paying attention to humidity, you'll create a home environment that is more comfortable, healthier and better protected against the wear and tear of dry winter air.



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Making a Reading Nook

There's nothing quite as comforting as curling up with a good book in a warm, inviting corner of your home, especially when the wind outside is howling.

The good news is you don't need a lot of space or a big budget to create a cozy reading nook that will make winter days feel brighter. A few small decor choices can transform an unused corner, window seat or even part of your bedroom into a retreat you'll look forward to spending time in.

FIND THE RIGHT SPOT

Start by identifying a quiet corner that offers some natural light, if possible. A spot by a window works beautifully, especially if you can layer

in heavy curtains or insulated drapes to keep the chill out. If window seating isn't available, consider repurposing a corner of the living room or even a wide hallway. The key is choosing a place that feels tucked away from daily activity so you can truly unwind.

LAYER ON COMFORT

Comfort is the cornerstone of any reading nook. Add a plush chair, beanbag or even a pile of oversized floor cushions. Throw blankets in warm fabrics like fleece or knit add instant coziness, while pillows provide back

support for longer reading sessions. A small rug underfoot adds warmth and texture, especially if your floors are tile or hardwood. For an extra touch of indulgence, add a heated throw or place the nook near a fireplace for built-in ambiance.

PERSONALIZE THE DETAILS

Once the basics are in place, let your personality shine through. A small side table provides space for your current read, a cup of tea or a candle.

Good lighting is essential, so add a floor lamp or a clip-on reading light with warm-toned bulbs that reduce eye strain. Consider using fairy or strip lights to add personality. If your nook is near a window, take advantage of natural light by using sheer curtains or planting bushes outside your window

so you have light and privacy. Strategically place a mirror to reflect natural or artificial light.

Houseplants or a vase of winter greens can bring life to the space, while artwork or framed photos make it uniquely yours.

If you're short on room, wall-mounted shelves are a clever way to store books without cluttering the floor. Or get creative. Transform vintage suitcases, old wooden ladders or stacked crates into unique and budget-friendly bookshelves.

Creating a reading nook is less about square footage and more about intention. By carving out a special space and filling it with textures, light and personal touches, you can create a retreat that makes even the coldest winter days feel warm and inviting.

Keeping Heat Inside

As winter temperatures dip, homeowners often see their energy bills rise.

Windows can account for up to 30% of a home's heating loss, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. The right window treatments, however, can help retain warmth, lower utility costs and create a more comfortable living space.

CURTAINS THAT INSULATE AND DECORATE

Thick, insulated curtains are one of the most effective ways to keep cold air out and warm air in. Draperies with a thermal lining act as a barrier against drafts while adding a layer of style to a room. Floor-length curtains hung close to the window frame maximize coverage, and homeowners can choose from a wide range of fabrics and colors to match decor. For extra efficiency, experts recommend opening curtains during the day to let in natural sunlight and closing them at night to trap heat inside.

BLINDS THAT BLOCK AND REFLECT

Blinds offer flexibility for managing both light and heat. Cellular shades, sometimes called honeycomb blinds, are among the most energy-efficient options. Their layered design creates air pockets that reduce heat transfer through



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windows. Some come with top-down, bottom-up mechanisms that allow natural light to enter while still covering part of the window. In addition, reflective blinds or shades can help bounce radiant heat back into the room, reducing the need to crank up the thermostat. One Stop Decorating calls them stylish and compact in addition to being a great winter option for window treatments.

For those wanting a more modern aesthetic, One Stop Decorating recommends

cellular roller shades which offer the same benefits as regular cellular shades, but they blend seamlessly with contemporary interiors.

FILMS THAT ADD AN INVISIBLE LAYER

For homeowners who prefer a less visible solution, window films can be applied directly to the glass. These transparent sheets add an insulating layer that reduces heat loss while still allowing sunlight to filter in. Some films provide UV protection, helping prevent

furniture and flooring from fading. Installation is relatively inexpensive compared with replacing windows, making it a cost-effective option for renters and homeowners alike. While films are not as effective as curtains or blinds in extreme cold, they can be a useful addition to an overall energy-saving strategy.

COMBINING TREATMENTS FOR MAXIMUM SAVINGS

Experts note the best results often come from combining

treatments. For example, pairing cellular shades with insulated draperies can dramatically cut energy loss, while giving homeowners control over light and privacy. Small changes can add up to big savings over the course of a long winter.

Picking window treatments with great insulation potential can lower your energy bills, make your rooms more cozy, provide light filtering and greater privacy and reduce the detrimental effect you have on the environment.