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Knowledge and preparation make wood heat more efficient and safer

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

With cold weather not far away, many homeowners scramble to replenish their firewood, clean out their wood stoves and inspect their chimneys. For basic information about burning wood, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has expert advice and resources from the Statewide Wood Energy Assistance Team (MESWEAT) at maine.gov/dacf.

According to the 2019 National Fire Protection Association's (nfpa.org) Standard 211, "Chimneys, fireplaces and vents shall be inspected at least once a year for soundness, freedom from deposits and correct clearances. Cleaning, maintenance and repairs shall be done if necessary."

Even if homeowners don't use their chimneys often, birds and squirrels build nests, and other types of matter can block the flue.

Homeowners can find experts who build and repair chimneys, sell and install wood and pellet stoves and deliver wood to provide the heat. Sometimes the chimney needs more than sweeping, said Jay Leland, owner of Sidney-based Leland's Masonry. He started doing masonry in his teens, and with more than two decades of experience, he and his team have faced nearly every type of chimney building, maintenance and repair challenge. This time of year is always busy.

"Usually, I get a call after something has happened," he said.

That first chimney inspection can require some complicated detective work, he said. For example, an older but well-built and lined chimney might only need some repointing, which is the process of replacing deteriorating mortar between the bricks or stones. Aged flashing, which seals the chimney where it exits the roof, also can loosen and deteriorate and allow water to leak in. Leland said some seemingly insignificant cracks, holes and leaks are a warning sign of a failing chimney that could lead to a devastating house fire.

"I always inspect the mortar for holes or deterioration, the liner for cracks or other damage, and I check the flashing around the chimney and the roof," Leland said. "I can usually tell whether the chimney has been maintained properly and if it need some basic work or if it's time to replace part or all of it."

James Haskell and Mark Pearson, co-owners of J & M Logging in Augusta, have supplied firewood for customers in central Maine for more than two decades. Mark's wife Laurie said her office phone has been



Contributed photo

Sidney-based Leland's Masonry's team has faced nearly every type of chimney building, maintenance and repair challenge that a homeowner could ask them to solve. "Usually, I get a call after something has happened," said owner Jay Leland. Problems might require some complicated detective work, he said. For example, an older but well-built lined chimney may only need some occasional repointing, which requires removing and replacing deteriorating mortar that seals the brick or stone. Some seemingly insignificant leaks could be the first sign that a failing chimney is ready to start a devastating house fire.

ringing steadily as the nights get chillier and shorter. The company is working long days to fill orders as fast as they come in.

"We sell split green and seasoned wood and ash in lengths from 15 to 23 inches," she said. "That's all year-round, but this time of year is especially busy."

Last year's winter season started in October, she said. Later, logging contractors

faced a combination of deeper snow than usual and a warmer and wetter spring, which severely limited the available supply for everyone.

"Last year, we had the winter that never ended, so everyone wants to be ready in advance for this one," she said.

Standard wood stoves and pellet stoves have become more efficient and afforda-

"I always inspect the mortar for holes or deterioration, the liner for cracks or other damage, and I check the flashing around the chimney and the roof. I can usually tell whether the chimney has been maintained properly and if it need some basic work or if it's time to replace part or all of it."

**JAY LE LAND, OWNER
LELAND'S MASONRY**

ble. Becky and Wayne Tibbetts, owners of Somerset Stone & Stove in Oakland, sell both types of stoves. The company also cleans and services stoves and sells premium softwood pellets and stove accessories.

"We care about the safety of our customers, which is why we've extended our services to include licensed chimney cleaning and inspection services," Wayne Tibbetts said.

Rocky's Stove Shoppe & Chimney Services on Route 3 in Augusta also provides chimney cleaning and inspections by National Fireplace Institute-certified technicians, said co-owner Ashley Goslin.

"Creosote (unburned residue) can stick to the inside of the chimney, and that can catch fire," she said.

Creosote buildup is tied to the firewood's density and water content.

Andrew Allen, owner of A. W. Allen Firewood in Farmingdale, said that the denser and drier the firewood, the better it will burn and the more heat it will produce. Hardwoods generally make better firewood than softwoods. Since a tree can have up to 50 percent moisture, burning green wood wastes money, creates creosote and provides inadequate heat.

"If you see moisture coming from the end grain, your wood is still wet," he said.

Seasoned wood has less moisture because it has been cut and covered to air dry for at least six months. Kiln-dried firewood, even though it's more expensive than seasoned, is still less costly than oil.

HEAT VALUES OF COMMON SPECIES OF FIREWOOD:

HIGH (one cord=200-250 gallons of fuel oil):

beech, maple, ash, oak, yellow birch

MEDIUM (one cord=150-200 gallons of fuel oil):

elm, cherry, fir, red and silver maple, white birch

LOW (one cord=100-150 gallons of fuel oil):

aspen, cottonwood, hemlock, spruce, alder, pine

Why not move colorful garden plants indoors this fall?

BY WANDA C
Correspon

Summer is coming to an end and weather is lurking around the corner. However, that doesn't mean all the beautiful gardens must come to an end. Instead of watching plants shrivel up and die, why not move some indoors to brighten the house during the winter months?

According to Longfellow's Greenhouses in Manchester, many plants can be moved indoors, especially those grown in containers. Anna Longfellow Brown said that it's much more difficult to move plants indoors that have been planted in the ground. She recommends growing plants in pots all summer if you want to move them indoors in the fall.

"Don't try to dig those out of the ground because the roots will be damaged and be able to support top growth," said Brown.

Although it's best to keep plants indoors in the fall, Brown cautioned that potted plants dry out more quickly so it's important to keep potted plants in a protected outdoor location away from strong winds and baking hot sun.

Before moving any plant indoors, Brown said that it's important to inspect each plant carefully for pests. Once indoors, pests can proliferate or spread to other houseplants. She recommends segregating outdoor plants for a couple of weeks before moving them near the other houseplants.

"If any pests are detected, treat them right away and repeat as needed or discard the plant and don't take a chance," said Brown. "Some people prefer to use an organic treatment like Neem Oil before transferring plants inside regardless of visible pests."

In regards to plants that do well inside, Brown said that old-fashioned potted geraniums do fine near a sunny window and will usually bloom all winter. Many people have fond memories of Grandma's geraniums in shades of red, pink and white, she said.

"If pruning is needed, do so in late winter to encourage



Brown. that often de, said a tropical hi-se can't toler-cold weather ould be one of plants to be ht indoors.

r need at st a couple ours of direct unlight to keep flower-ing and warm out not hot water.

"They prefer nsistently it soil but llow the old water i few hours," np out

When watering most plants, Brown advised that it's best to water when the top of the soil gets dry. Water plants slowly and thoroughly to make sure that the entire root ball gets saturated, then let the plant dry out again but water it before the plant wilts.

It's not necessary to fertilize plants as often during the fall and winter, said Brown. Some experts recommend not fertilizing plants at all during those months because the plants aren't actively growing, especially during the winter. She said that an occasional light feed might help plants to stay healthy.

"Use a well-balanced houseplant fertilizer such as 1-1-1 (nitrogen (N) - phosphorus (P) - potassium (K)) for leafy plants," said Brown. "If you are promoting blooms, as with hibiscus, use one that is higher in phosphorus such as 5-1-5."

Coleus can also grow well in a bright window indoors and provide leaf color all year long. It's important not to move those back outdoors in the spring until all danger of frost is past.

More PLANTS, **PAGE 5**



Contributed photos

Above: Potted geraniums on a sunny windowsill may bloom all winter long.

Top right: Hibiscus may bloom inside during the winter months if they get at least a couple hours of direct sunlight each day.

Right: Coleus will grow well in a bright window and may provide leaf color all year long.





Plants

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Some annual flowering plants may also survive indoors, according to Brown, such as begonias, fuchsias and New Guinea impatiens plants. She said those plants may flower all winter in a bright window with a bit of regular fertilizer. If the plants have grown too much during the summer months to fit them indoors, cut them back, she said. As with the other plants, it's important to inspect

and treat for pests before bringing flowering plants indoors.

In addition to flowering plants, Brown said, that small varieties of tomatoes (like patio tomatoes) peppers and long growing greens like Swiss chard that have been grown in pots may survive in a warm location inside the house. Vegetable plants will need as much light as possible and providing artificial light may be beneficial. It will be necessary to hand pollinate the flowers since there won't be any bees or wind to do the job. She recommends fertilizing indoor vegetable plants every week or two. It's also important for vegetable plants to have good air quality so

Contributed photos

Left: Some flowering plants like begonias, fuchsias, and New Guinea impatiens plant can be moved indoors at the end of summer. Those may flower all winter if placed in a bright window and occasionally fertilized.

Right: Patio tomatoes may be moved indoors at the end of summer and may continue to produce fruit if placed in a bright location. It will be necessary to hand pollinate the flowers since there will be no bees to do the job.



it's important to grow them in a room where there's no cigarette smoke.

Some herbs such as oregano, sage, tarra-gon, thyme, mint, chives, and lemon balm may also grow for a long time on a sunny windowsill during the winter months. However, Brown said that those do need a dormant period in the winter just like they would growing in the garden. Only those herbs which have been grown in pots should be moved inside.

"Cutting celery, which looks more like parsley than celery, is an easy culinary herb for bright windowsills," said Brown.

Another herb that makes an easy house-plant is bay. She said that it tolerates indoor

conditions well if it has good light. Rosemary is more challenging because it requires lots of light. A south window is preferable and the plant should have soil that drains well. Soggy soil will kill the plant. However rosemary must also be watered frequently enough to prevent wilting which can also cause the plant to die.

"Unglazed clay pots with drainage holes work well," said Brown.

With any plant that's moved indoors at the end of the summer season, Brown said, it's best to move plants indoors gradually to allow time to acclimate to the new environment.

"If you have time to do this, perhaps only overnight at first," she said.

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Anna Peterson, Student



Take steps to reduce home energy costs before winter sets in

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

Falling leaves and chilly mornings are reminders that winter is just around the corner. That may generate concern for some people because of high heating and electric bills often incurred during the winter months. It's not too late, however, to begin planning to reduce those costs. There are many ways to reduce heating and electric bills without making expensive renovations.

ENERGY STAR APPLIANCES

According to the website *energy.gov*, one way to decrease electric bills is to purchase energy efficient products and operate them efficiently. Fortin's Home Furnishings in Winslow sells a number of Energy Star rated appliances which are independently certified and built to standards that make them energy efficient. Fortin salesman John Hachey said that Energy Star washers, refrigerators, and dishwashers all are more energy efficient.

"Energy Star rated washers use about 25% less energy and about 30% less water," said Hachey. "Energy Star rated refrigerators are approximately 8-10% more energy efficient. Energy Star rated dishwashers are approximately 10% more energy efficient and will save, on average, 3500 gallons of water over their lifetime. Efficiency Maine is currently offering a \$50 mail-in rebate on the purchase of an Energy Star washing machine."

HEAT PUMPS

Another suggestion for decreasing electric bills offered on the website *energy.gov* is to invest in a heat pump. The authors of that site report that heat pumps can result in significant savings on electric bills. Heat pumps take heat from the air or in the ground and move it indoors. Rather than producing heat like some types of heating systems, the heat pump transports existing heat, which requires less energy. During the summer months, heat pumps can be used to extract warm air from the inside of the home, which helps to keep the home cool.

One of the owners of Dave's Appliance in Winthrop, Mike Ketchen, manages their heat pump division. Ketchen said that heat pumps can heat for 30-40% less cost than other petroleum-based heating systems (excluding natural gas) in



optimal conditions. He said that once the outdoor temperature reaches minus 15 degrees the efficiency of the heat pump decreases. He said that many homeowners are investing in heat pumps as a supplement to their existing heating system to decrease overall heating costs.

In regards to the cost of a heat pump, Ketchen explained that heat pumps can be used to heat one section of a home or an entire structure. The cost of the heat pump depends on the size of the zone that will be heated.

"Prices for installed heat pumps range from \$2800 to \$4500 for a single zone unit," said Ketchen. And, he added, "We service everything that we sell."

According to Ketchen, heat pumps are operated with a remote control, are very easy to use and require little maintenance. His employees install about 350 systems each year and the number keeps growing.

"We've been selling heat pumps since 2004," said Ketchen. "Technology has greatly improved during the past 10-15 years and heat pumps can now operate very efficiently in a climate like ours. We're riding the wave of technology and selling a lot of heat pumps. Efficiency Maine is currently offering a \$500 rebate to homeowners who install a single unit in their home and a \$750 rebate to homeowners who install more than one unit."

"Technology has greatly improved during the past 10-15 years and heat pumps can now operate very efficiently in a climate like ours. We're riding the wave of technology and selling a lot of heat pumps. Efficiency Maine is currently offering a \$500 rebate to homeowners who install a single unit in their home and a \$750 rebate to homeowners who install more than one unit."

MIKE KETCHEN, PART OWNER
DAVE'S APPLIANCE



Staff photo by David Pierce

John Hachey, from Fortin's Home Furnishings in Winslow, says they offer many Energy Star rated appliances, which are independently certified and built to standards that make them energy efficient.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO REDUCE HOME ENERGY COSTS

In addition to using Energy Star rated appliances and heat pumps, there are other steps that can be taken to reduce energy costs.

- Unplug televisions, microwaves, blenders, mixers, microwaves and printers when not in use.
- Unplug power strips when the devices plugged into the power strip aren't in use.
- Unplug battery chargers once batteries are fully charged or it's not in use.
- Turn off lights when leaving a room.
- Wash clothes in cold water with cold water detergent. Use appropriate water level settings for the size load that is being washed.
- Wash and dry full loads. Clean the lint filter in the dryer after every load to improve air circulation.
- Inspect the dryer vent periodically to keep it from getting plugged.
- Air dry clothes whenever possible.
- Insulate your home. That prevent heat loss in the winter and keep the home cooler in summer.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows that leak air.
- Cover kitchen exhaust fans when not in use to prevent air leaks.
- Keep the flue damper on the fireplace tightly closed when not in use.
- Insulate your water heater tank with blankets designed for that purpose to cut heat loss and save electricity. Check with the power company to see if they offer insulating blankets for free or at a low cost.
- Use thermal curtains or drapes at windows and close them at dusk.
- Plant shade trees to keep the home cooler in the summer and to serve as a wind barrier during colder months.
- Replace old windows with energy-efficient windows.
- Install solar panels.
- Install a programmable thermostat that can reduce the temperature when you're asleep or away from home.

“Because there are more buyers than sellers and houses are moving quickly, buyers must be more aggressive in looking for a home.”

**BILL SPRAGUE, PRESIDENT AND OWNER
SPRAGUE AND CURTIS REAL ESTATE**

A few words of wisdom for today's potential homebuyers

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

The real estate industry in Maine and across the nation is booming this year. After a plunge between 2008 and 2009, the market continues to rebound. Inventory remains low but houses are selling quickly and for higher prices than last year.

Bill Sprague, President and owner of Sprague and Curtis Real Estate in Augusta, said that the Maine market is currently really hot with lots of people looking for new homes.

“The last 3-4 years have been very active,” said Sprague. “A lot of people are moving around. Interest rates are historically low. It’s a great time to walk into a long-term mortgage.”

According to Sprague, the current trend is representative of what takes place in the real estate market every 10-15 years. He said that when the economy is strong, the demand for housing is strong and there are more buyers than sellers. He said that when the market slows up, then the inventory can build back up.

“There’s never a perfect balance (between buyers and sellers),” said Sprague. “Because there are more buyers than sellers and houses are moving quickly, buyers must be more aggressive in looking for a home. They need to keep on top of what’s coming on the market and get out and look. They need to act quickly.”

Sprague advises homebuyers to become well educated regarding their options by looking at a number of homes rather than just a few. He said that they will learn, as they look, what’s available. He recommends that buyers also find a good realtor who can help them become well educated and it’s important to ask a lot of questions. “No question is a dumb question,” said Sprague.

When looking for a home, home buyers must narrow down what’s most important to them in a home. They must decide how important a certain style or size home is versus having a deck or a garage or living in a particular neighborhood, he said.

“They need to set priorities,” said Sprague. “If they set their priorities and have a lot of patience, most of them can find a great buy.”

Michael Byrne, President and owner of Century 21 Surette Real Estate in Waterville, advises that the first step potential homebuyers should take is to get pre-qualified with a financial institution to determine how much they can spend for a home. They should also find out what types of lending programs are available to them because that will affect the type of home they’re able to buy.

When considering how much they can afford, Byrne said it’s important for homebuyers to not only consider what their monthly mortgage payment will be but keep in mind the cost of property taxes, homeowners insurance and maintenance.

Byrne also stressed the importance of finding a good real estate agent. Find an agent, he said, who is readily available to show homes and get information about properties because homes are moving quickly. He said that no transaction is ever totally smooth but that an experienced agent can help homebuyers overcome some of the hurdles they may encounter when buying a new home.

“It’s important to be comfortable with the real estate agent that you’ve chosen to represent you,” he said.

Byrne agreed that homes in general are selling more quickly than usual partially due to the low inventory and the local economy is strong. Homes that are selling the most quickly today are those that are ready to move into with little or no maintenance or repairs needed.

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Plant a tree, save the planet

Local greenhouses offer suggestions

BY TERRI HIBBARD
Correspondent

A tree is a wonderful thing. It gives us shade in the summer, protection from winter winds, a place to hang a child's swing, a home for birds and other little creatures. Some trees even give us food. Mature trees can add thousands of dollar of value to a home.

But trees are even more valuable than that. If enough trees are planted on land that is now available—without taking over cities or agricultural lands or grasslands—two-thirds of the amount of carbon released by human activities since the start of the Industrial Revolution could be captured, according to a study reported in the July Science News.

Maine greenhouse owners were on board and offered advice on how to become part of the solution by planting trees that fit the state's environment.

The study concluded that the earth has enough tree-friendly land available right now, mostly in Russia and the United States.

The researchers said that planting trees, lots and lots of trees, could—for decades—prevent frying every living thing on our planet while we work to find permanent solutions. We don't even have to give up our cars, airplane travel or cows.

During one year, a mature tree will absorb more than 48 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and release oxygen in exchange, according to the Arbor Day Foundation. In one year, an acre of mature trees absorbs the amount of CO₂ produced by a car driven 26,000 miles.

But people should move quickly to plant this fall, because a tree needs moderate temperatures for the first few weeks to get established, according to owners of local greenhouses. Otherwise, they should research and plan tree planting now so they will be ready in early spring.

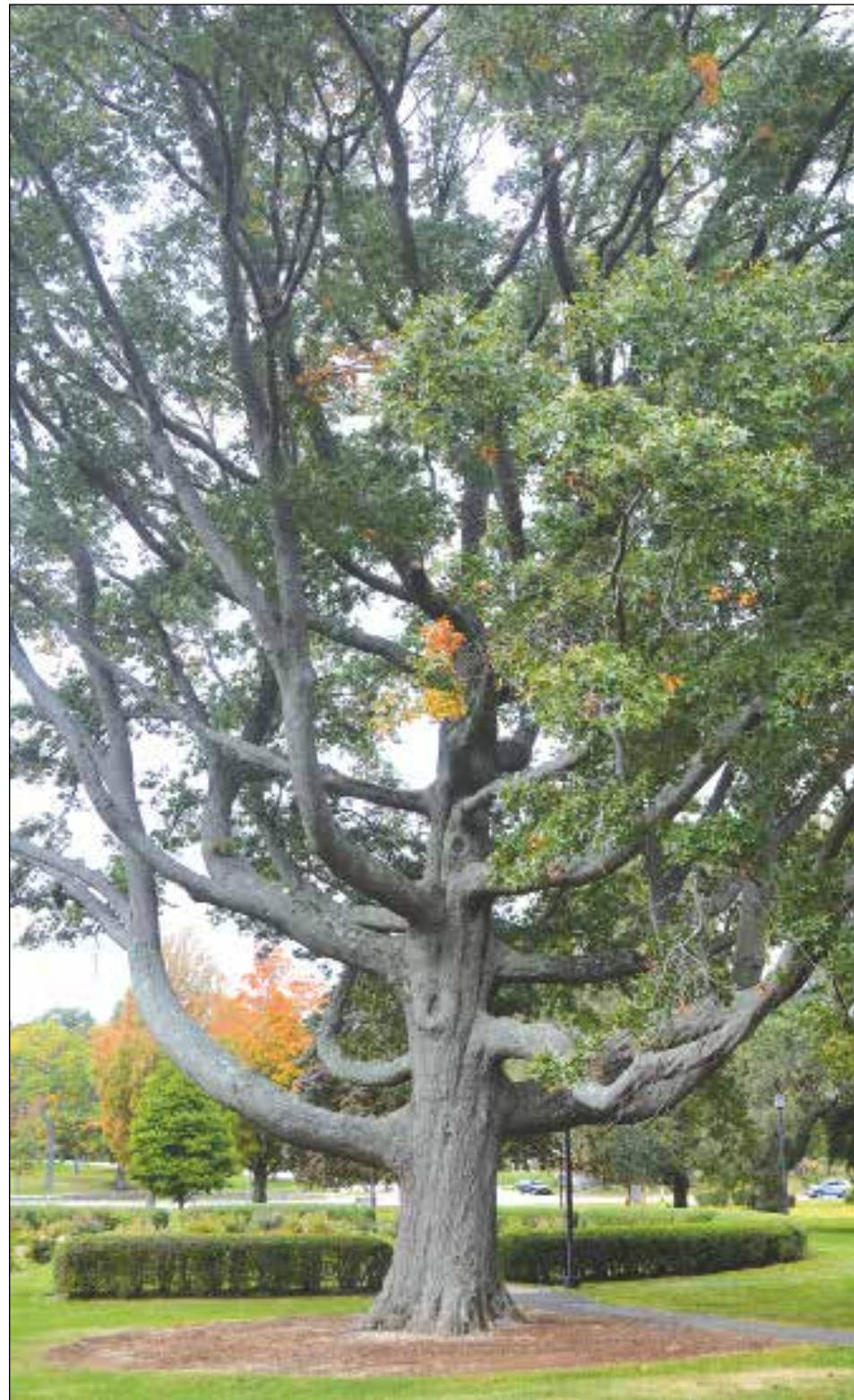
First, buy a tree or two or more locally, one Maine forester said.

"Local nurseries offer the best selection of trees hardy to Maine," said Jan Ames Santerre, Project Canopy Coordinator at the Maine Forest Service. What's more, "They are often Maine grown," she said.

To find a licensed nursery in the area, check maine.gov/dacf/php/horticulture/licensednurs-eries.shtml.

Local nurseries are ready to help home owners and communities choose the right tree for the Maine environment and the location. Some will even plant the trees for an extra fee.

"Everything we carry here is meant to grow here, in Zone 4," said Ken Ellis, co-owner with Cathy Hebert of Sunset Flowerland and Greenhouses on the Ridge Road in Fairfield.



This tree is a pin oak but often referred to as a candelabra tree because of its shape.

Maine Forest Service photo

Popular choices are maples and flowering crab trees, but to do the most for cleaner air, a big fast-growing tree such as a red maple would be best, he said.

"There are a lot of good choices. Oaks, for example, but they're slower growing," Ellis said. "Usually a customer wants to see a big tree fast. The fastest growing is red maple. It can grow a foot or more a year.

However, he said, "It depends on what kind of care you give. Don't plant it, water it once and forget it."

A tree, when first planted works to establish a strong root system and to do that, it needs regular watering.

"Another popular tree is white birch, also fast-growing," Ellis said. "But these are small trees, best planted in a group. One skinny tree is not that beautiful, Ellis said. "With smaller trees, you want three or four in a clump."

Trees in a clump can also protect each other with their intertwined roots.

Contact Sunset Flowerland and Greenhouses at 453-2367 or check the website watervilleme-florist.com for more information.

At Longfellow's Greenhouses in Manchester, Will Longfellow, general manager, said "Any tree is good for the environment in the sense that it will produce oxygen."

There are many varieties of trees available, but a recommendation on what tree to buy depends on the buyer's preference, he said.

"Do they want an evergreen that's going to be green all year or a deciduous tree that will change color in the fall and lose its leaves? Any tree is going to be an improvement on nothing," Longfellow said.

Trees in these greenhouses, he said, are approved by the state as either native or a safe-to-plant, non-native species. All are suitable for the area's zone.

"It's (Augusta) considered zone 5, but I like to tell people to consider it zone 4. If you want to plant in the fall, I wouldn't go much longer than the first or second week of October; you risk the roots freezing."

When planting a tree, Longfellow said, "Dig the hole about 1 1/2 to 2 times as wide as the root ball, but no more than twice the size of it. The bottom of the trunk should be just above ground level with a 1- to 2-inch layer of soil over the topmost roots. Mulch if you want, but don't mulch all the way up to the trunk; leave space around the trunk."

Compost isn't necessary, but will enrich the soil. Water the tree for the first season. Once the roots expand, it's not so critical, he said.

More TREES, PAGE 9

A recommendation on what tree to buy depends on the buyer's preference. "Do they want an evergreen that's going to be green all year or a deciduous tree that will change color in the fall and lose its leaves? Any tree is going to be an improvement on nothing."

**WILL LONGFELLOW, GENERAL MANAGER,
LONGFELLOW'S GREENHOUSES**

Trees

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

"If you see a big nasty web in your tree, it's the tent caterpillar, the most annoying pest every year," Longfellow said. "It's on cherry, apple, sometimes on deciduous trees."

Cut off the affected branch and soak it in a bucket of soapy water, he said.

Brown-tail moths are a non-native insect currently found in Maine. For information about controlling them,

search online for Brown-tail moths in Maine.

To contact Longfellow's Greenhouses, call 622-5965 or check longfellowsgreenhouses.com.

A lot of native tree information can also be found at extension.umaine.edu, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Trees are a bargain.

"A nice maple—small with a few limbs—sells for about \$60 (at Sunset Flowerland and Greenhouses)," said Ellis.

Sixty dollars for something that can last 100 to 200 or more years—What else can anyone buy that lasts so long and gives so much?

Tree advice from forester Jan Ames Santerre, Project Canopy Coordinator, Maine Forest Service

- **When to plant.** The best time to plant a new tree is when you have the time and interest to plant it correctly and maintain the tree. For most homeowners, spring is the most logical time. Nurseries and garden centers often have the best selection of trees and plants in the spring, so the choices are plentiful. Once the ground thaws and can be worked is a great time to plant.
- **What kind of trees to plant.** It depends on where it will be. Be aware of overhead and underground utilities, pavement and buildings that can be impacted. Find out if certain types of tree pests or diseases are a problem in the area. Trees that are native and hardy to Maine are best for our native wildlife, but if your home is in an area where Brown-tail moth is present, planting oak, apple, elm, birch and other susceptible trees isn't a good idea.
- **How to keep trees healthy.** After selecting the right tree for the right place and planting it correctly, watering, mulching to keep the roots cool and moist and keep mowers away, and light pruning for good branch structure are most important to keep your tree healthy and growing for decades, if not generations to come.
- **What are the biggest missteps in planting and keeping trees healthy?** Probably the most common mistake made when planting trees is planting too deep. Take time to excavate the top of the root system before digging the hole to make sure roots are not buried too deep. Trees planted too deep will struggle to grow as the roots will not have adequate aeration. Mulching too deep is also a problem, but can be easily corrected.
- **Mowers and string trimmers operating too close to young trees can quickly "girdle" thin bark.** Make sure to weed and mulch to a depth of 2 to 3 inches to keep mowers away. Even older trees with thick bark can be damaged by string trimmers if they are hit aggressively and often.
- **Also, make sure a tree won't outgrow its welcome.** Most tags refer to the size at 30 years of age, but many of our native trees will live to be 200 or even 300 years old. While considered "mature" at 30 years, they will continue to grow taller and wider far longer.

Jan Ames Santerre, Project Canopy Coordinator, Maine Forest Service

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Secrets to making your home look like you hired a design pro

Photo spreads in home design magazines can be awe-inspiring. Quite often homeowners wish they could lift the looks right off the pages of magazines and transform their own homes into picture-perfect retreats.

It takes an eye for design to pull a room together — even with inspiration — and make it both functional and attractive. While hiring an interior designer is one way to go, homeowners can use some of the tricks and techniques the designers employ to do a remarkably good job of improving the interiors of their homes without such help.

EMBRACE TEXTURE

The colors used in a home can add impact, but designers often utilize various textures to create aesthetic appeal. A single color scheme can be enhanced by various fabrics. Consider a leather sofa made more cozy with chenille pillows next to a rustic side table. Figure out ways to incorporate a

few different textures to add depth to the room.

BE CAREFUL WITH COLOR

Many high-end homes showcase neutral shades that are enhanced by pops of color. If you like a rich, royal purple, leave room for other colors as well. Add touches of purple in vases, throw pillows and other accessories.

Also, many designers work in shades of three for room colors. There may be one main color for walls, another color for larger accents, such as couches and chairs, and then a third color that pops in accessories such as flowers, pillows and collectibles. These can be any colors, but the most muted tends to be the more abundant shade.

ADD A BIT OF BLING

Glittery items and metallics can add a touch of luxury feel to any space. A shiny table lamp, mirrors, a sparkling chandelier, and the like are easy ways to produce a high-end feel. Reflective surfaces also will cast light around

the room, giving the illusion of a larger space.

CHOOSE A BIG STATEMENT PIECE

Many homeowners make the mistake of filling a room with several small pieces of furniture that only contribute to clutter. Instead, look for a statement piece, which can be a cabinet, armoire or chaise. Mix and match large and small elements for a sense of balance.

ACCESSORIZE

Finish the room with accessories and flowers. When placing and hanging knickknacks and wall art, odd-numbered groupings often look the most cohesive and interesting. Experiment with different scales and heights for even more dimension.

When inspiration hits, take some cues from interior design pros to make spaces look like they belong on the pages of your favorite magazines.

- Metro Creative

Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter's arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well.

Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening. But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

- Inspect the deck for problems. Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer. Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed before winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.

- Clear the deck of potted plants. Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and



plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.

- Store unnecessary furniture. Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a garage or shed for the winter. HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

- Remove snow, but do so carefully. Prolonged contact with

snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant. HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring.

- Metro Creative

How to keep a pet-friendly home clean

Sixty-eight percent of American households, or about 85 million families, own a pet, according to the a National Pet Owners Survey.

Dogs, cats and other companion animals can be wonderful to have around, breathing energy into a family. Despite all of the advantages pets can bring, they tend to be a little messy. However, that doesn't mean it's impossible to have a pet and maintain a clean home. Homeowners just need to take a few extra steps to help things along.

- **Manage pet fur.** One of the persistent issues pet parents face is fur. Grooming the pet regularly (preferably outdoors) will help tame some of its fur. Covering sofas and other places where pets like to lounge with an old sheet can contain some of the fur where it can be shaken off outdoors and laundered frequently.

- **Upgrade your vacuum.** You'll need a vacuum with strong suction to pick up fur, dirt, dander, feathers, birdseed and any of the other debris that can accumulate thanks to pets. A vacuum with a good brush action also can dig in deep to carpets and upholstery to really clean thoroughly, say the experts at House Beautiful.

- **Pause for paws at the door.** Keep a small container of water by the front door. When returning from walks, dip the dog's paws into the water and dry before entering the house. This keeps dirt (and salt in the winter) from being a nuisance.

- **Get the right cleanser.** Pet owners must contend with accidents. Look for an enzymatic cleanser that will treat stains and odors so that pets do not return to the soiled area again and again thinking this is an acceptable



potty location, says Modern Dog magazine. Test an area of the carpet or floor being treated for colorfastness before applying. Address accidents promptly.

- **Choose the right upholstery.** According to Martha Stewart Living, look for top-grain, semi-aniline leathers, as scratches are disguised on such pieces. In terms of fabric, microfiber or microsuede are better suited to pets because the fabric is tightly woven and may be more resistant to fur and soiling.

- **Launder pet items.** Regularly wash bedding and other belongings that pets use. This will help tame indoor odors.

- **Keep nails neat.** Clipping dog and cat and other small animals' nails may help avoid scratches on furniture and floors. If you do not feel comfortable doing it, take the animal to a groomer.

Pet owners can keep their homes clean regardless of how much dirt their pets track into the house.

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Exterior renovations that improve curb appeal

Neglecting a home's exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home's appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers' perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added value, as determined by the 2019 "Cost vs. Value Report" from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

- **Garage door replacement:** Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of \$3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

- **Manufactured stone veneer:** Replacing a portion of vinyl siding with stone veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

- **Wood deck addition:** A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners' ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners' initial investment.

- **Siding replacement:** Not only does old or weathered siding look unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly — at roughly \$16,000 — it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

- **New entry door:** Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn't all about good looks, either. A door that isn't well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.

- Metro Creative

Prevent growth of mold/mildew in colder months

Mold and mildew are not only unsightly, but unhealthy. These fungi grow readily in damp areas and are found in the air breathed both indoors and outside. If left unaddressed, mold and mildew can threaten the health of a home's inhabitants.

Mildew is a type of mold that remains relatively flush with the surface it grows on. Other molds can grow puffy in appearance. Molds serve the purpose of destroying organic materials, but in high amounts, these microorganisms can cause respiratory problems, sinus congestion, throat irritation, headaches, and other issues, particularly when mold grows unchecked indoors, says Better Homes and Gardens. As a result, it is essential to address mold before it becomes problematic.

According to Polygon, a drying technology and temporary climate solutions company, the wet season in winter is when molds often grow and expand. Mold can break down the integrity and strength of the surfaces where it grows.

Homeowners can employ the following strategies to prevent mold growth.

- **Keep all surfaces clean,** using proper cleaning products. Diluted bleach solutions are highly effective at killing microscopic



fungi, viruses and bacteria.

- **Reduce moisture and humidity** by ensuring sufficient air circulation in rooms, particularly bathrooms and kitchens. An exhaust

fan will help remove moisture quickly.

- **Fabrics covered in mildew that can be laundered** should be carefully removed and washed in chlorine bleach and hot water. An

oxygen bleach product also can be effective.

- **Invest in a dehumidifier** that can reduce moisture in the home in problem areas, such as damp basements or garages.

- **Fix plumbing leaks** as soon as possible.

- **Remove damp leaves and snow** from areas around the foundation of the home. Ensure that gutters and downspouts are clear of debris and can shuttle water away from the house effectively.

- **Replace cracked or defective mortar** in basements.

- **Make sure all seals on windows and doors are not compromised** and are in good working condition.

- **Be sure an HVAC in-line humidifier is adjusted to the right setting** and isn't pumping too much moisture into the heated air; otherwise, the added humidity can contribute to mold.

- **If there is a flood or water infiltrates a home in other ways, hire a professional service** to help clean and dry the home effectively.

Mold and mildew are problematic, but with diligence they can be kept at bay.

- Metro Creative

House powerwashing tips

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website *ImproveNet.com* says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray

away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home's exterior.



Powerwashing the exterior of the home can be an effective way to clean it in the spring and fall.

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How to store firewood the right way



A fireplace is a cozy and warm spot around which a family can gather. The home and real estate resource HomeGuides.com indicates that 60 percent of new homes have a fireplace, which is up from 36 percent in the 1970s.

Naturally, fueling a fireplace for the season may require homeowners with wood-burning units to keep an ample supply of wood at the ready. How that wood is stored is important, as properly stored firewood can prevent waste and other issues around the house.

Wood that is freshly cut has a water content of 60 percent or more. Yet, for best burning ability, wood should be near 20 percent in water content. Green wood is hard to ignite and will not burn nearly as well or efficiently as seasoned wood. Another concern associated with green wood is that it can contribute more to creosote accumulation in the flue of a fireplace. Creosote is a combustible material that may lead to fires if left unchecked.

According to BioAdvanced™, a science-based lawn, garden and home improvement innovator, seasoning wood typically takes six months to a year. Homeowners may opt to purchase seasoned wood that already has sat and dried.

Homeowners who have an abundance of firewood have to store it somewhere. Log Splitters Direct suggests choosing a dry, breezy area of the property that is about

20 feet from the nearest door to the house. This helps avoid hitchhiker pests from coming inside with the wood, such as termites, ants, spiders, and mice. Do not stack the wood flush against a structure. It should be at least a few inches away to allow airflow behind the stack.

Stick to organized rows of wood no more than four feet high. Log racks and pallets and posts will keep the wood up and off of the ground where moisture and rotting can develop. Placing the logs in an unorganized pile will impede air flow and cause the wood to rot rather than continue to dry and season even more.

Homeowners also should use a cover to protect seasoned firewood from the elements. Position a tarp or plastic sheeting so it blankets the top of the stack and extends a few inches down the sides. Keep the sides mostly exposed to air. Others prefer to stack it in a barn or shed or under an overhang.

Green wood is less expensive than seasoned wood. Those who prefer this method should do so in the early spring and let it season over the next several months.

Bankrate says that the cost of a cord of wood varies across the country, but in general one can expect to pay between \$120 and \$180 for a cord of hardwood that is split and seasoned. This price may be higher in mid-winter when demand increases.

- Metro Creative

How to create a winter-friendly outdoor living space

For many homeowners, the arrival of fall and winter marks an end to time spent lounging and dining al fresco on the patio. But cold air does not necessarily mean patio furniture must be packed up until flowers bloom anew in spring.

In its Home Design Trends Survey, the American Institute of Architects found that consumers continue to emphasize practical features that expand the functionality of their homes via heavy investment in outdoor living spaces. The survey found that the popularity of outdoor living spaces increased by 72 percent between 2012 and 2017, highlighting just how much homeowners enjoy spending time outdoors. By taking measures to make their outdoor living spaces winterproof, homeowners can enjoy these areas of their homes even more.

• **Cover your deck.** A covered deck may appear to make the space less enjoyable during spring and summer. However, covered decks can protect residents from the sun on especially hot days while also making the space more functional in winter. An overhead shelter on a deck can be outfitted with heaters (and fans to provide a cooling effect in summer)

and allow residents to sit outside and watch snow fall without getting wet.

• **Plant the right trees.** Coniferous trees prevent wind, which can be especially harsh in winter. Homeowners who are unsure about which direction wind typically comes from can consult a landscape architect to determine where to plant the trees to ensure they're most effective.

• **Fire up the patio.** A firepit or fireplace can warm up an outdoor living area, making such a space warm and cozy even on a cold winter night. A patio with a built-in firepit can cost a pretty penny, but such an addition can withstand winter weather better than a standalone firepit, which might be vulnerable to being tipped over by winter winds.

• **Install lighting.** The sun sets early in winter, so homeowners won't be able to rely on natural light to illuminate their outdoor living spaces well into the evening like they do in summer. Heat lamps can be used to both warm and illuminate a space, serving dual, budget-friendly functions.

With the right adjustments, outdoor living spaces can be enjoyed throughout winter.

- Metro Creative



Covering a deck or patio and/or adding a fire feature are two ways to make outdoor living spaces more winter-friendly.

Arrange furniture, design rooms more easily

Redesigning a room can involve several steps, from choosing a paint palette to taking down walls to buying new furniture. When it comes time to put the space back together, finding an appealing furniture arrangement or layout renovation that maximizes space efficiently can be challenging if it requires moving heavy pieces of furniture around. To make such tasks easier, homeowners can rely on a bevy of room-designing apps that enable one to manipulate a room in the digital realm.

Some people have great spatial reasoning and can work out designs in their head or by plotting items on graph paper. But many homeowners may need a little extra help. By figuring out a floor plan, anyone can start laying out their furniture and other design elements.

Room planners come in various forms, from free downloads available through popular furniture companies to pay-for-use, third-party software. The following are some of the more popular room planners homeowners can utilize.

- **Amikasa:** This app enables users to create room layouts using furniture and more from real brands. It features a walk-through mode so you can take a virtual tour



afterwards.

- **Autodesk Homestyler:** Brought to you by the company that produces professional design programs for architects and designers, like AutoCAD, Autodesk and Revit, this user-friendly technology allows you to create

3D renderings and move around furniture, decorative items, appliances, and other elements right in the app.

- **Floor Plan Creator:** Start with the basics by plotting out precise and accurate floor plans. This app enables you to create

multiple floor rooms in 3D and get automatic figures for perimeters, walls and more.

- **Ikea Home Planner Tools:** The free, easy-to-use home planner tool from the popular furniture giant enables you to see how items from the store can look in your space ñ before you bring it home. The Kitchen Planner from the company also makes it simple to enter Ikea components and see how much the proposed kitchen design may cost.

- **Magic Plan:** This is another popular feature-filled app for planning designs. The technology even allows you to take a picture of your existing room and create floor plans.

- **Planner 5D:** This is an extensive room-design tool that helps you design rooms down to the smallest architectural details. It also can be taken outdoors for landscaping and pools, utilizing 3D graphics.

- **Room Scan Pro:** This app draws floor plans simply by having you hold the phone up to a wall. The software will then scan the circumference and plot out the requisite measurements.

These are just a few of the room planners that can make it easier to see what a finished design product may one day look like.

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Protect your plants from winter weather

For the majority of gardening enthusiasts, gardening is a warm weather activity. While some people live in climates that make it possible to enjoy gardening year-round, those who don't often lament the end of the gardening season.

Winter might not be conducive to gardening, but the arrival of cold weather does not necessarily mean a gardener's work is done until the following spring. Taking steps to protect plants from winter weather is an important part of maintaining a healthy garden that thrives from year to year.

Timing is of the essence when winterizing a garden. The online gardening resource Get Busy Gardening!™ advises gardeners that the best time to winterize is after the first hard freeze in the fall. A hard freeze occurs when temperatures dip below freezing overnight. When that occurs, annual plants and vegetables are killed off and perennial plants, which grow back year after year, begin going dormant.

Better Homes and Gardens notes that perennials are the easiest plants to prepare for winter, as they require just a little cutting back and mulching to be safe from cold weather. But no two perennials are alike, so homeowners should consult their local gardening center for advice on how to prepare their particular perennials for the coming months.

The steps necessary to winterize annuals depends on which type of annuals, cool- or warm-climate, you have. Cool-climate annuals should be covered with polypun garden fabric when light frost is in the forecast. In addition, Better Homes

and Gardens recommends pulling dead annuals and adding them to a compost pile after a killing frost. Any annuals that developed fungal disease should be discarded. Mulch annual beds with a three- to four-inch layer of chopped leaves or similar materials, spreading the mulch only two inches thick over self-sown seeds you want to germinate in the spring.

Warm-climate annuals also should be covered with polypun garden fabric when light frost is expected. Seeds of cold-hardy annuals can be planted for extended winter bloom, while gardeners also can collect seeds of warm-weather plants that will breed true to type. Even though you're winterizing, Better Homes and Gardens recommends that gardeners continue to weed and water their plant beds and plants while also keeping an eye out for pests. If organic mulch has decomposed or thinned out, replace it with a new layer.

Get Busy Gardening!™ notes that the bulbs of tender plants like dahlias and tuberous begonias can be dug up and overwintered in their dormant state. All dead foliage should be removed after the bulbs have been dug up, and the bulbs should be allowed to dry out a little before being stored. Container gardeners can overwinter their tender bulbs in their pots inside, but be sure to remove their foliage and store them in a dark, cool place that maintains temperatures above freezing.

Winterizing may mark the end of gardening season, but it's an important task that can ensure a healthy, beautiful garden next spring, summer and fall.

- Metro Creative



Easy ways to clean up leaves

Autumn is marked by colorful foliage and plummeting temperatures. Once those leaves reach peak color, they fall from the branches and collect on lawns, necessitating cleanup projects. For homeowners with big yards, such a project can be tiring and time-consuming. However, there are ways to make leaf cleanup easier.

One of the easiest ways to clean up leaves is to reach for a lawn mower rather than a rake. The mower will cut leaves down to smaller sizes, creating an effective mulch that can add nutrients back into the lawn. Davey, a lawn and landscape solutions service, says that mowed leaves also can be collected in a mower bag and added to garden beds or compost piles.

For those who prefer manual raking, select a rake with tines that will not skewer the leaves in the process. Big rakes also can make faster work of gathering leaves into piles.

The home improvement resource The Family Handyman advocates for the use of a lawn sweeper.

This is a manual device that has a rotating sweeping brush that gathers up lawn debris and leaves into an attached hopper bag. Like mowed leaves, the bag can be emptied into a compost pile or distributed where needed.

Raking leaves onto a large tarp is another option. Once it's full, the tarp can be taken to the curb where many towns will collect the leaves seasonally. Otherwise, the tarp can be used as a funnel to put leaves into a gardening bag or another appropriate receptacle.

Leaf blowers remain a fast option for cleaning up yards, but they require electricity or gas and can be noisy. Still, they are a popular choice for large landscapes or when quick work needs to be made of leaf clean-up.

Leaves will fall in autumn, but luckily homeowners have various methods at their disposal to tame the mess.

- Metro Creative



Did you know?

Carpet can add warmth and texture to a room and also provide a little bit of soundproofing. Underfoot, carpeting can be more comfortable than other types of flooring, even though it may require more upkeep. Carpet comes in various forms, but here are the main material components.

- **Nylon:** This is one of the most durable and stain-resistant carpet fibers available and a popular choice among many homeowners.
- **Polyester:** Carpeting can be made from polyester, which is fashioned to feel and look luxurious.
- **Olefin:** Olefin is made from polypropylene or polyethylene. It is prized for its strength, resistance to staining and colorfastness. It is often suited well to loop pile or high, dense cut piles.
- **Wool:** Wool is durable, albeit less resistant to soiling than some other materials. However, because it is an all-natural material, it is prized by people who want natural beauty.



The threat posed by ice dams

Cold, snowy weather can present various issues for homeowners to contend with. One such problem, ice dams, can cause damage to walls, ceilings and other areas.

An ice dam is a ridge of ice that forms at the edge of the roof and prevents melting snow from draining properly. A complex combination of heat loss from a home, snow cover and outside temperatures can lead the formation of ice dams. An ice dam will be fed by melting snow above it and cause a backup at the edge of the roof.

Dams can cause gutters to tear off and loosen shingles and may lead to water backing up and pouring into the home, advises This Old House. Ice dams also can contribute to soggy insulation, making the insulation lose its protective R-value and becoming a magnet for mold and mildew.

Homeowners can do a number of things to temporarily prevent the formation of ice dams. Heated cables clipped to the roof's edge in a zigzag pattern can help prevent dams that lift shingles. Pushing snow off the roof can help. Laying an ice melt product in gutters to help melt the ice that forms also can prevent ice dams.

More permanent solutions involve keeping the entire roof the same temperature as the eaves by increasing ventilation, adding insulation and properly sealing air leaks that can warm the underside of the roof. This may involve calling in a professional contractor. Such an investment is well worth it, as it can prevent much more costly damage down the line.

- Metro Creative

What causes curled shingles?

No homeowner wants to look at the exterior of his or her home and see roof damage. Such damage may lead homeowners to think they need a new roof, a potentially costly expense that can quickly throw household budgets into a state of disarray.

According to the HomeAdvisor, the average homeowner spends a little more than \$7,600 installing a new roof. Various factors, including the size of a home and the type of roof homeowners prefer, will affect the cost of a roof replacement. In addition, homeowners who see roof damage can rest assured that not all roof problems will necessarily require a replacement roof to be installed.

Curled shingles are a problem many homeowners have encountered. This particular problem is not always indicative that a roof is on its way out. In fact, the home improvement resource This Old House notes that, as asphalt shingles age, their corners often begin to curl downward or upward. Homeowners who notice this early enough can glue down the curled section of each shingle that's beginning to curl.

Some shingles may be curling because they're defective. There are many local roofing companies that specialize in the repairing and replacing of various roofing configurations, advises homeowners to contact a local

roofing professional to diagnose the cause of the curling. Doing so quickly can prevent curled shingles from contributing to more widespread damage.

Moisture and poor ventilation may be contributing to curled shingles as well. Homeowners with attics in their home may see curled shingles on their roofs because moisture is building up in their poorly ventilated attics. In addition to causing damage such as curled shingles, a poorly ventilated attic allows moisture to build up, potentially contributing to mold growth. Mold presents a host of additional problems, including some that can adversely affect the health of a home's inhabitants.

Improper roof installation also may be the culprit behind curled shingles. When a roof is not installed correctly, shingles may not be aligned or nailed down in the right way. This might be what's causing shingles to curl on recently installed roofs.

Curled shingles are unsightly and can pose a significant threat to a home if not addressed promptly. Homeowners can protect themselves and their roofs by working with skilled roofing professionals, who can diagnose issues like curled shingles and offer the right solutions.

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Why homeowners should add more exterior light to their properties

Homeowners are increasingly realizing the benefits of improving the exteriors of their home, which can be just as valuable as improving the interior spaces. As individuals design picturesque garden beds and cultivate lavish lawns or revamp exteriors with architectural features, they probably want to spotlight these improvements. This is where exterior lighting can be put to great use.

Exterior illumination can cast a glow on various features, but there are many other reasons to increase lighting around the exterior of a home.

- **Safety:** Trips and falls can occur at night when trying to traverse walkways and landscapes in the dark, as it can be difficult to see rocks, stairs and uneven pavement. Outdoor lighting can illuminate pathways, entryways and other areas for safer access for homeowners and their guests.

- **Extend outdoor entertaining:** Ample lighting can increase the amount of time one can use outdoor spaces and make them the perfect gathering spot. As autumn arrives, days become shorter. However, patios, porches and more can get extended use with lighting.

- **Safeguard security:** A well-lit home may be less likely to be targeted by burglars than one swathed in darkness and shadows. Lights can remain on all evening or be motion-triggered. Setting lights on timers also ensures that the home is illuminated whether residents are home or not.

- **Create drama:** Landscape lighting designers can establish focal points around the landscape and highlight the best features of a property. Uplighting in trees, silhouetting techniques to showcase plants and spotlights to show off

architectural features are all options for homeowners to consider.

- **Add value:** The experts at Parker Homescape, a landscape design service, say that exterior lighting can add roughly 30 percent to the value of a home. They also indicate that 50 percent of all home buyers say that outdoor lighting is important when buying a home. If current residents are thinking about selling, now may be the time to invest in exterior lighting.

Improving a home's exterior may be as simple as adding more lighting to improve functionality and beauty.

- Metro Creative




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