



FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT



How to Prepare Your Yard for Winter

Changing seasons can be tough on a lawn. Always exposed to the elements, lawns can fare especially poorly upon the arrival of winter, a season known for its harsh and unforgiving weather. Even the most perfectly manicured lawn can suffer at the hands of winter weather, causing homeowners to sit idly by and hope spring arrives that much sooner.

But as punishing as winter weather can be on a lawn, homeowners are not without recourse. Much like homeowners can take steps to help their lawns survive sizzling summer heat waves during the warmer months of the year, they also can take steps to help their lawns make it through the often stormy weather synonymous with winter.

* Don't procrastinate. Putting off the process of winterizing a lawn can put that lawn in jeopardy. Lawns will turn dormant the closer you get to winter, and they may reject the nutrients found in fertilizer as a result. Those nutrients will prove valuable once spring weather returns, so start the winterization process in early fall so the lawn has sufficient time to absorb nutrients and strengthen itself for the seasons to come.

* Treat trouble spots. Summer can be even harder on a lawn than winter, especially for those lawns located in regions where heat waves and drought are common. In such instances, certain spots on the lawn seem to be hit harder than others, and those spots should get special attention when winterizing the lawn. Check the soil's pH levels before fertilizing or applying any treatments. Such a test will reveal which spots need the most attention, and treating trouble spots now will make spring lawn care that much easier.

* Aerate the property. Aerating can help a lawn recover after a long summer and help it survive the potentially harsh months that lie ahead. Aerating, which involves puncturing the soil or removing cores of soil from the ground, can restore a lawn to health by improving its



Removing debris, including dead leaves, from a lawn before the arrival of winter weather can help prevent suffocation.

drainage and allowing more water and air to reach the roots of the grass. Aerating also makes it easier for nutrients to penetrate the soil, which encourages a healthier lawn over the long haul. Aerators can be purchased or rented, but homeowners uncomfortable with the process may want to enlist a professional to tackle the job. Parents of small children who spend lots of time in the yard may need to aerate their lawn more than most, as heavy lawn traffic compresses the soil, a potentially harmful process that can be reversed via aeration.

* Take steps to strengthen the roots. Aerating promotes stronger roots, but homeowners might also want to find a winterizing product with potassium and phosphorous, both of which can strengthen roots. Different types of lawns will respond differently to certain winterizers, so discuss your options with a lawn care professional who can help you find the right fit for your property.

* Remove debris from the lawn. Debris left on a lawn over the winter can prove very harmful. Piles of debris left scattered around a lawn can suffocate the blades of grass, leading to long-term dam-

age and a potentially unsightly lawn come the spring. In addition, piles of debris might make good homes for organisms that can damage the lawn. As fall moves into winter, periodically remove all debris, including leaves and branches fallen from trees.

* Make the lawn off-limits once the temperatures dip below freezing. A lawn should be off-limits once the ground freezes. Stepping on grass that has frozen will leave noticeable footprints, and walking on frozen grass can kill the turf. When winter arrives, people should avoid using the lawn as a shortcut into and out of your home and stick to driveways and sidewalks instead.

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Home Improvement Projects You Might Want to Skip

While there are many ways a person can turn a home into their own unique oasis, some home improvement projects may not be worth the effort, especially when homeowners decide to sell. Some projects may prove a little too personal, making them less attractive to prospective buyers down the road. Though it's within every homeowner's right to make adjustments to their homes (as long as those adjustments are in adherence to local laws), the following projects might come back to haunt homeowners down the road.

Sports Complex

Sports fans often dream of erecting a backyard basketball court or adding a tennis court to their property. But such projects are among the more expensive additions a homeowner can make to his or her property, costing more than popular projects like kitchen remodels or room additions. What's more, real estate professionals note that homeowners can expect to recoup little, if any, of the cost of adding a basketball or tennis court to their properties at resale, while more popular projects tend to recoup a substantial amount of a homeowner's initial investment.

Luxury Shower

Installing a luxury shower, such as a multi-headed steam shower, can add a

splash of resort-style luxury to your home, but it likely won't add much to your sale price. Though costs for such additions can vary significantly depending on how grand you choose to go, real estate professionals warn that a luxury shower is unlikely to recoup much of its initial cost at resale. If you simply must give your bathroom a more luxurious look but still want to be a responsible homeowner, look for a low-cost addition. That can take some of the sting out of not recouping much of your investment at resale.

Fully Furnished Home Office

More and more men and women are working from home, and some homeowners might feel that transforming a room in their home into a fully functional home office is a great investment. But some buyers might be turned off by a room that can no longer function as an extra bedroom. The cost of converting a home office into a more traditional bedroom may compel prospective buyers to keep looking or make a lower offer on your home. While a home

office might be a good idea, avoid making an exclusive home office room during your renovation.

Home Theater

Few homeowners would scoff at installing a home theater in their homes, but the impression of home theaters as a luxury only the super wealthy can afford might turn prospective buyers away from your home. Potential buyers may be impressed by a fully functioning home theater complete with surround sound, lighting, a big screen, and all the other fixings synonymous with home theaters, but when they go home to discuss their options, they may feel the home theater is a luxury they can live without and opt for a more affordable home without a theater instead.

A dream home means different things to different people, so homeowners should keep in mind the reactions of potential buyers before adding too many personal accents and additions to their homes if they plan to sell down the line.

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