

FALL Home & Garden



Getting Rid of Leaves

As fall moves in, it brings crisp temperatures, bonfire weather and leaves changing to beautiful colors. When the trees lose their cover, the result on the ground can be a nightmare to adults but a wonderland for kids.

If you have many trees on your property, your once-luscious lawn will soon be replaced with leaves littering your yard. Leaf removal can be a chore for many yards in the country, luckily there are tools available to make the job easier.

BUILD YOUR LEAF-REMOVAL ARSENAL

For many yards, a traditional rake just isn't enough to efficiently eliminate the leaves that fall. Consider equipping yourself with these helpful tools to make the process easier.

- Leaf blower: This self-explanatory tool allows operators to blow leaves into a certain area on their property. They make quick work of problem areas. You can find these tools in battery-, gas- or electric-powered options.

- Lawn mower: A quality lawn mower is still useful even after the grass stops growing. Consider adding a mulch bag to your mower to quickly collect fallen leaves.

- Tarp: Once you have the leaves in a neat pile, then what? If you position them on a tarp while you make your pile, you can easily bundle them up and dispose of them responsibly.

SAFE BURNING

For some, using leaves as compost is a fall tradition. They



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are packed with nutrients that other plants rely on to flourish. You can add grass trimmings, organic manure and surprisingly, dryer lint into this pile.

For many others, the preferred method of disposing leaves is to burn them. When starting a fire, follow these safety tips from the American Red

Cross:

- Clear leaves away from the home and other buildings and only burn in accordance to your local laws and guidelines.

- Be prepared for a fire to get out of control. You should always keep an extinguisher, rake, ax and bucket available when burning leaves.

- Install smoke alarms on every level and in every room of your home. In case a fire spreads to your structure without warning, your loved ones inside will be alerted.

FOR THE KIDS

For kids, there isn't a better part to fall than collapsing in a

giant pile of leaves. Before disposing of them, allow the little ones to play for a while. You can even find fun-themed garbage bags which resemble silly characters once filled. This is a great way to provide the kiddos with entertainment while getting a little help clearing the leaves.

Fall Landscape Tips

Even though temperatures may be chilly during autumn, there is still plenty to do outdoors to ensure your lawn will look great next spring. Break out your sweatshirt and get outside to take care of some important lawn maintenance.

KEEP MOWING

Don't skip mowing your lawn just because the temperatures aren't ideal. Once grass grows too long, it acts as a cover to surrounding blades. Sunlight is crucial to the well-being of a healthy lawn. When snow falls, long grass is easily packed down and promotes snow mold. The University of Minnesota Extension defines this type of mold as a fungal disease that appears in early spring as the snow melts. It is known to cause circular, straw-colored patches once the weather begins warming up.

FIX DAMAGED CONCRETE

If you notice your driveway or walkway has cracks in the concrete, fall is the time to correct them. Once it is cold enough for water to freeze, it will cause further damage to any defects in the concrete on your property. Consider applying a sealant to fill the cracks or contact a professional to ensure your walkways won't suffer even further during any upcoming cold weather.

FIND A DEAL ON NEW PLANTS

While each region may see different success stories when planting trees, the Morton Arboretum states fall is a great time to get the plants in the ground because:

- Temperatures are typically moderate to cool, giving trees the chance to grow without becoming stressed by extreme

heat.

- Transpiration is low and root-generation potential is high.

Local nurseries will likely have awesome sales on their plants that are left over from the summer. Talk to them to

see which species can survive being in the ground during the winter, or how to preserve them until next spring.



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Insulate Drafts

Cooler temperatures reveal places where cold air is sneaking in your home. Blocking off these areas can save you money and add to your comfort once winter comes in full force.

An easy way to find obvious issues is to walk around entrance points in your home with a lit candle. Place it around the frame of doors and windows and watch for the flame to flicker. Sometimes, a professional inspection is required to find the hard-to-find draft points. Some common ones can be attic holes, access hatches and fireplace dampers.

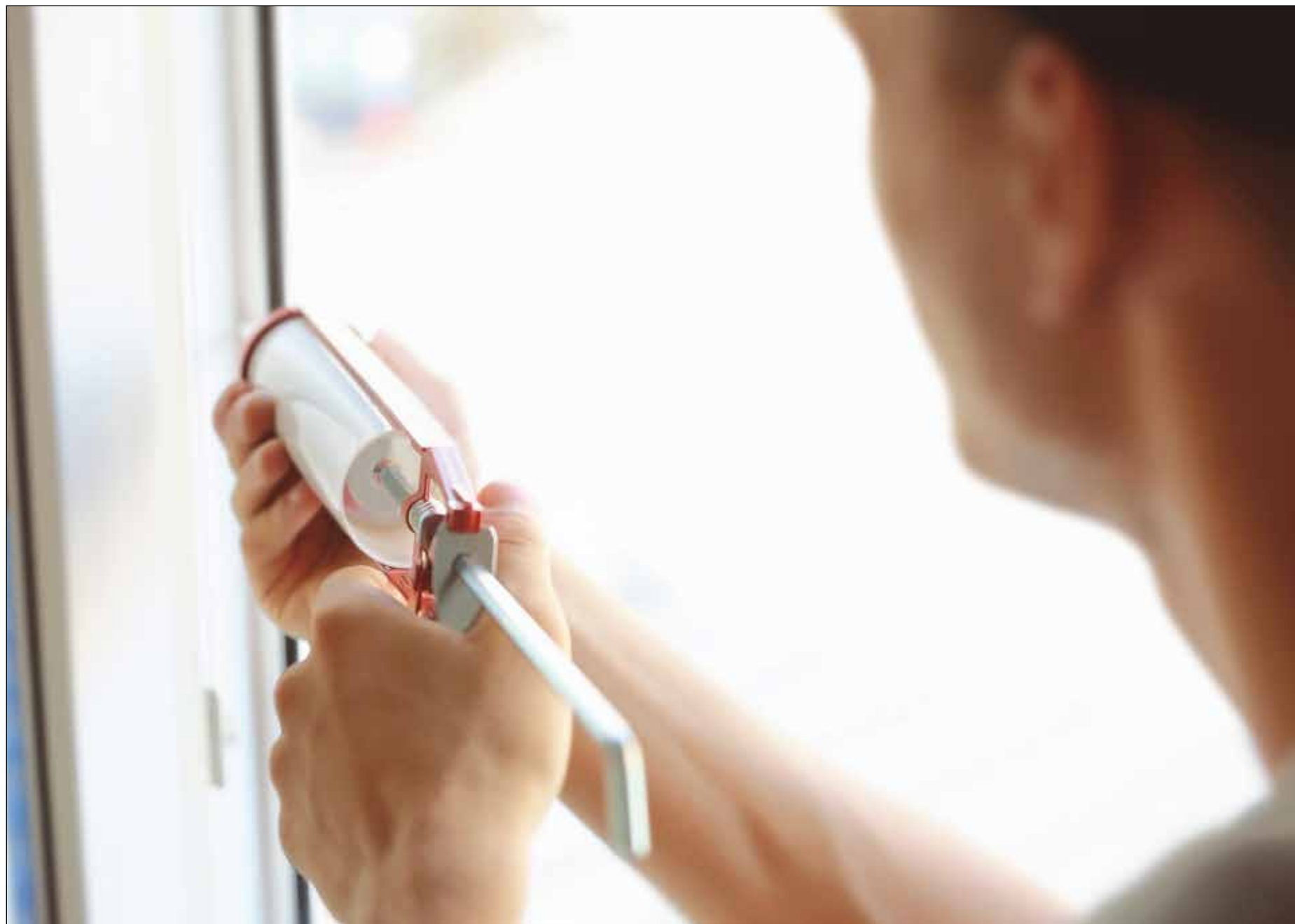
FIX YOUR DOORS

If you notice drafts coming in through an exterior door, there are several ways to correct the issue. Depending on the size of gap allowing cool air inside, here are some methods you can use to alleviate them.

- **Install new sweeps:** A door sweep seals gaps between the bottom of a door and its threshold. If your old one has been battered or appears dented, it may be time to install a new one to provide ultimate sealing.

- **Use foam tape:** If your door is warped or doesn't fit its frame snug, the answer can be to insulate it with foam tape. It's easy to use. Simply cut to size and secure it to drafty areas, per the manufacturer's instructions.

- **Use a door snake:** These weighted socks are available for the floor or to hang around the perimeter of a door. They are effective when trying to



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block small draft points.

WINDOW MAINTENANCE

The United States Department of Energy reports that air leaks through gaps around windows are responsible for 10 percent of a home's

leakage. If the issue isn't too far gone, it can be easily resolved.

An affordable option is to apply window film. This wrap is meant to be put in place and heated with a hair dryer. It works to quickly shrink and seal the drafts let in by win-

dows. Caulk is inexpensive yet highly effective. If you notice your windows can use a touch up, visit your local hardware store and choose a type that is meant for the exterior of your home.

If you've tried to resolve

window drafts alone but are getting nowhere, it may be in your best interest to replace them completely. A professional can point you in the direction of Energy Star windows which will help lower your monthly utility bill.

An Exterior Paint Makeover

It's amazing what a little paint can do to change the appearance of the exterior of your home. Whether you choose to touch up your trim or cover the entire exterior of a building, fall is a great time to get this job done.

FALL CONDITIONS COOPERATE

Since most regions don't experience much humidity during autumn, the chance that paint will dry evenly and adhere to surfaces are greatly enhanced. High levels of humidity can cause moisture from the air to get between the surface and paint, causing flaking and a dull color.

According to real estate experts at Zillow, spring is the time of year when buyers face the most competition, resulting in homes selling faster and for higher premiums. If you're considering going to market after winter has passed, a fresh coat of paint can add value and curb appeal to attract homebuyers.

TOUCHING UP OR MAJOR OPERATION?

When planning your exterior paint job, ask yourself if you are only focusing on a small area or aiming to coat your entire home. Small jobs are easy for a homeowner, but ensure you are using the correct paint for your region's conditions and stay safe if you'll be on a ladder.

Those who will be painting their entire home should consider hiring a contractor. Especially for those with larger homes, getting those hard-to-reach areas can be extremely dangerous; a professional is well-trained and experienced. Plus, during the fall, the



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demand for painters may not be as high as it is in other seasons, meaning there shouldn't be a long wait list.

REFRESH TRIM

Don't ignore the trim of your home when painting the exterior. A fresh coat of paint

to highlight your doors and windows can make a drab entrance area pop. To add an even more attractive ambi-

ance, consider hanging shutters which match your trim color to surrounding windows.



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Home Security Systems

Looking for ways to increase the value of your home? Consider installing a home security system. According to SafeWise, an independent review site, buyers are more willing to pay more for a house that makes them feel secure, and a home security system can go along way toward creating that feeling.

Home security systems can also reduce the cost of home insurance for you and your potential buyers; according to SafeWise, many insurance companies offer discounts of up to 20 percent with the addition of a security system. SafeWise suggests the factors you should consider as you're considering a purchase or shopping for different systems.

CONSIDER YOUR GOALS FOR A SECURITY SYSTEM

Whether it's to deter potential burglars or to notify you about potential flooding or give you the ability to elec-

tronically check in on children, what do you want to get out of the system? What will potential buyers want? If you live in a neighborhood with low crime rates, the focus may be different. Think about what would encourage you to buy the house.

LOOK AT THE AVAILABLE FEATURES

Security systems offer different levels of features. Some systems can connect smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to the system, which will contact emergency services in the event the alarms go off. You can also install wired and

wireless surveillance cameras inside and outside your home. Depending on the system, it can do more than deter burglars; many systems now allow you to keep watch on your house via smartphone apps or alert you to someone trying to access gun or liquor cabinets or other sensitive areas.

DETERMINE WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD

Security systems can be expensive. The installation can cost anywhere from \$250 to \$1,000, according to SafeWise. More cameras and monitoring options will cost more to install.

Additionally, you have a monthly payment to the security company, which varies depending on the plan and levels of monitoring. Plans can be as inexpensive as \$20 to \$30 a month up to several hundred dollars a month for round-the-clock monitoring or regular security patrols.

LOOK AT OTHER SAFETY-ORIENTED FEATURES

Hardwood or reinforced exterior doors, commercial grade deadbolts on exterior doors, strong locks for windows that open and motion detectors on outdoor lighting.

Tackling Fall Chores

Fall is a great time to be outside for winterizing chores, as temperatures are much more tolerable. Don't forget these important duties to ensure your investments will be protected during the bitter cold.

CLOSE THE POOL

Depending on how you feel about the upkeep required with your swimming pool, closing season can either be a little sad or a total relief. The process involves critical procedures to ensure it will be ready to go when the warm weather returns. If you have a permanent pool, getting help from a professional can take

most of the stress off your shoulders.

Here are a few other good reasons to let a pro complete the job for you.

- **Knowledge:** Closing a pool requires much more than throwing a cover on it and letting it sit until next season. A professional service will guarantee your investment is protected by employing a certified staff with training.

- **Safety:** Any time water is present, there is a risk of drowning. Especially when handling heavy equipment involved with closing the pool, you could potentially injure yourself and fall in. An expert will have a qualified team to ensure their safety and insurance to protect you if injuries occur on your property.

- **Save time:** Allow your pool to remain a place of leisure by not dreading the upcoming closing process. Spending a little money for an expert ensures your pool is closed properly and efficiently.

PROTECT YOUR DECK

Fall is the perfect time to winterize your deck or make repairs ignored during summer. The cooler weather makes it easy for the DIY handyman or an experienced contractor to protect your deck before the cold arrives.

Winter weather can wreak havoc on wood thanks to moisture caused by snow and ice. Warping, chipping the paint with snow shovels and impacted dirt are all common issues experienced during the cold. It is a good idea to pressure wash the surface during autumn, so it will be clean before the wet stuff sticks. Before washing, make sure all furniture and decorations are removed so the entire area can be cleaned.

Your deck can also benefit from applying a protective stain. Not only will it be appealing visually, it helps create a barrier between the wood and moisture.

Bring Fall Indoors

The beginning of fall is a fun time of the year for both children and adults. Exciting holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving are right around the corner. Spruce your home up with accents related to this festive time of year.

PUMPKINS AS A CENTERPIECE

If you have ever walked through a grocery store or watched commercials during autumn, you have witnessed America's obsession with pumpkin everything. From coffee to cereal, there is no doubt that pumpkins are a staple during fall.

Of course, the most popular way to use a pumpkin as a centerpiece is by carving a face into it. Traditionally, a small candle is placed inside to illuminate it in the dark. For extra safety points, consider using a battery-powered LED light instead. Take carving up a notch by trying out advanced patterns. Find artwork online for inspiration, it's amazing what you can do with a little patience and practice.

A few other good ideas to make a statement with pumpkins are to add them to an attractive display featuring baskets, accent flowers and painting them different colors. Or, consider covering mini pumpkins with a clear dome and showcase them on a fireplace mantel.

PINECONES

Another way to tell fall is here is seeing the ground littered with pinecones. Even if you don't have a cone-producing tree in your yard, you



shouldn't have any problem finding a neighbor or family member would be thrilled to let you take them home.

Get your whole family involved to participate in engaging crafts like:

- **Pinecone roses:** Paint the outer shell in different colors

and attach them to stems from the tree for a standout display.

- **Make a spider:** Googly eyes and pipe cleaners can make anything look humorous, even a pinecone spider.

- **Bird feeder:** Cover a pinecone with peanut butter and

stick bird frame to its outer shell. Hang it from a tree and enjoy the new wildlife in your yard.

For most crafts involving pinecones, a hot glue gun will be your best friend. Check with your local hobby store for the right tool to fit your

demands.

HAY, FALL!

Hay bales are another staple during fall decorating. With a few bales of straw, attractive flowers and cornstalks, you can create a display that makes your front entrance stand out.