

A photograph of a fireplace with a warm, glowing fire. In the foreground, several pairs of feet are visible, wearing various styles of patterned socks. The socks include grey and white geometric patterns, and black and white houndstooth patterns. The person's feet are resting on a dark surface, possibly a sofa or rug. The overall atmosphere is warm and cozy.

**HOME &
GARDEN**
WINTER 2014

Caring for Trees

Just because your trees have packed it in for the winter doesn't mean you should ignore them. The colder months, in fact, provide the perfect time and temperature for some critical maintenance.

Pruning during dormancy is the most common practice for tree owners, according to the Arbor Day Foundation.

WHY WINTER?

Winter pruning can result in a dynamic blossom of new growth by spring. The Arbor Day Foundation recommends that you wait until the coldest part of the winter has passed. This will set up your tree for maximum springtime health.

Trees and shrubs that flower in the middle or latter parts of summer should be pruned in the winter, as well.

This will enhance flowering and lead to a beautiful springtime display.

YOUNG TREES

Proper trimming of your young trees can have a major impact on shape, strength and even life span. It also can lead to less expense and maintenance throughout the years as your tree grows, considering you will not have to buy any replacement trees or expensive supplemental treatments.

A tree that is well cared for in its initial stages of life will have a better chance of surviving extreme conditions like wind, ice and drought. Pruning helps strengthen the branches, readying it for these



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harsh circumstances.

While leaving as much as possible of the entire leaf surface for food manufacturing purposes, tree owners should trim broken or swollen branches, as well as ones competing

with the "leader" branch.

PRECAUTIONS

The Arbor Day Foundation identifies maple, walnut and birch as trees that may

"bleed" when the sap begins to flow during pruning. This is considered normal tree behavior and will cease when it produces new leaves.

The fall is a good time to leave your pruning tools

hanging in the garage. This is because decay fungi spread their spores heavily in the fall, according to the Arbor Day Foundation. This means that the healing of pruning cuts can take longer in the fall.

Dirty Ducts?

While ductwork cleaning has never been shown to actually prevent health problems, there are specific circumstances that may warrant looking into the service for your system.

You may consider having your air ducts cleaned as part of a spring cleaning routine every few years simply to rid your system of dust buildup. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that you have the system cleaned only as needed. Provided the cleaning is executed properly, the EPA says, no evidence suggests that it would be detrimental to either the ductwork or your health.

ORDERING AN INSPECTION

The EPA says it's time to call a credentialed heating and cooling inspector if any of the following occurs:

- There is substantial visible mold growth present in hard surface ducts or on other components of your heating and cooling system. If you or an inspector spots mold, it is crucial to have it corrected to keep the issue from recurring.

- Ducts are infested with rodents or insects.

- Ducts are clogged with excessive amounts of dust and particles are actually being released into the home from your supply registers.

- The insulation in your ducts gets wet or moldy. This is a major issue since it cannot be effectively cleaned, and instead should be im-



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mediately removed and replaced.

A TRUE PROBLEM?

While studies have not conclusively proven that dust par-

ticle levels in homes increase because of dirty air ducts, it is important to note that dirty air ducts can definitely be a possible source of particles that are present in homes.

The EPA says cooking, cleaning and smoking cause greater exposure to contaminants than dirty air ducts.

A light amount of household dust or other particulate matter

in ducts doesn't necessarily pose any risk to your health, but of course you should have your system checked if you feel you are being affected by contaminated air.

The Perfect Mantel

A warm holiday fire enjoyed by laughing loved ones and loyal friends. Is there a better way to spend a winter night?

In the center of that heart-warming experience is your fireplace mantel, decorated for the season.

The mantel is a versatile design piece in any room. It offers extra space for displaying photos or decorations. It can be painted to match your décor.

You can even lay its surface over with brick or other materials that really make it stand out.

LESS IS MORE

One of the best designs you can execute with your mantel is one of simplicity. Around Christmastime, you can sprinkle your mantel with small, elegant holiday decorations to put you and your guests in a perpetual holiday state of mind.

Stockings have, of course, been the most long-standing design pieces associated with the mantel, so choosing decorations that match your stockings' color scheme can magically pull the entire design together.

BRING IN NATURE

Designing your mantel with

touches of pinecones, evergreen or even fallen leaves can bring nature indoors. Fill a vase with alternating layers of dried leaves, cranberries and faux snow to create an innovative nod to the winter elements.

Using tree forms made out of leafy garland above or around the mantel is a great way to blur the lines between the inside and outside world.

In addition, fresh fruit and its vibrant colors can bring cheer to your fireplace, no matter if it is the holiday season or not.

WRAP IT UP

Any item you use to wrap your presents this year also can be easily transformed into a sophisticated design for your mantel.

You can even choose to display miniature versions of presents atop your mantel. Adorn small empty boxes with bow and ribbon to give them the appearance of gifts. These stylish touches can be brought out of storage year after year for some holiday cheer.



Prepare Your Perennials

After you have enjoyed the blooms and colors of your perennial flower garden, it is time to prepare it for next year. Simple steps taken in the early winter can lead to a better garden next spring and summer.

There is specific care you can give both your bulbs and bed that will optimize their health during the dormant winter months.

Gardeners in warm-winter areas that don't face the onslaught of frost and snow need only to clean and maintain their beds throughout the winter. Replacing diseased or worn-out plants before the blooming season is also critical to your garden's overall health.

THE BULBS

Ready your pruners after the first frost has struck, because it is time to cut back the foliage at the onset of it yellowing and dying. Cut back your stems and avoid watering your plants during the late fall and early winter.

This will help them naturally harden off in preparation for winter. In dry-winter areas, it is still recommended to water your perennials once per month to maintain their vitality.

The National Gardening Association recommends special care for your more tender perennial bulbs, such as dahlias and gladiolus, that cannot survive in the ground during colder weather. Carefully dig them up without causing damage to the bulb and store them indoors for the winter.

THE GROUND

Fall is a good time to feed perennials, according to the National Gardening Association, by working in a four- to six-inch-thick layer of compost around the beds. This compost mixture – which you can produce yourself throughout the year by saving certain food scraps and dead vegetation – slowly breaks down to release valuable nutrients to the plants and improve the soil structure.

After the ground freezes, your garden bed needs an extra layer of protection. Remove your old mulch and replace it with hay or floating row covers. The protective covering will hold snow and provide insulation for the bed.



A Leak-Free Winter

What is the forecast for your location this winter? Freezing rain? Record cold? A few feet of snow? If your roof could shudder, it would be doing so at the thought of these extreme weather conditions.

Some types of roofing systems, both commercial and residential, are susceptible to damage from the thermal shock and below-freezing temperatures that accompany winter.

While you may be resigned to spending most of December through February indoors, winter weather does not plan on taking a break. And whatever time you have left to ready your roof for the elements can be put to good use.

PREPARATION IS KEY

Call a roofing expert to your home to inspect your roof and help formulate a plan of action. A contractor will be able to quickly identify any structural deformities or possible pain points across your entire roof. Once he or she does, it will be time for you to decide your budget for different repair options.

No roof lasts forever, but you will get the longest life out of yours by scheduling regular inspections and routine maintenance throughout the year. It is best to correct the smaller issues with your roof now before they snowball into leaks that can damage both the exterior and interior of your home.

THE ELEMENTS

In areas that receive harsh winter weather, heavy snows present a clear danger to the health of roofs. While fresh snow can add up to 20 pounds of weight per cubic foot, if the snow partially thaws and refreezes, the weight can increase to as much as 60 pounds per cubic foot, according to University of North Dakota research.

Signs that heavy snows have exceeded your roof's safe load include loud popping noises and cracked wooden supports. Professional snow removal services are available at a cost, and you may be better to leave the chore to trained service pros.

Besides the potential damage to your roofing materials and structure, you also risk sliding off your roof, falling off a ladder or physical overexertion if you choose to remove the snow yourself.



Keeping Kids Safe at Home

If you're a child, the winter months are full of excitement and fun activities. From holidays and family get-togethers to sledding and ice skating, there is plenty to partake in when the temperatures begin to drop.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges parents to exercise caution throughout the winter to make sure fun is balanced with safety.

THE YOUNGER KIDS

The following tips from the AAP will help you keep your infant and young children adequately dressed throughout the winter months.

Dress infants and children warmly for outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them dry and warm, and don't forget a comfortable pair of warm boots.

The rule of thumb for older babies and young children is to dress them in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.

Keep blankets, quilts and pillows out of an infant's sleeping environment because they can be associated with suffocation deaths and may contribute to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). One-piece sleepers or wearable blankets are recommended by the AAP.

OLDER KIDS

While older kids are more adept at caring for themselves in the winter months to a certain extent, they still come with their own set of challenges. The AAP offers this advice for ensuring a safe, healthy winter for your not-so-little children.

Promote frequent hand washing and proper sneezing – into the crook of the elbow – to reduce the spread of colds and flu. Cold weather does not actually cause colds or flu, the AAP says, but the viruses that cause colds and flu tend to be more common in the winter, when children are in school and are in closer contact with each other.

Set reasonable time limits on outdoor play to prevent hypothermia and frostbite. Have children come inside periodically to warm up.

If your children enjoy ice skating, allow them to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local officials, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved.

