

Home Auto Garden

Protect Landscapes from Wildlife Over the Winter

Landscapes are vulnerable to the elements during the cold weather months. Everything from de-icing products to hungry animals to the weight of snow can affect trees, shrubs and other plants. Just because certain greenery will go dormant during the winter doesn't mean landscape maintenance ends when the mercury dips. Homeowners can take certain actions to winterproof their properties and safeguard landscapes, so they recover more readily when spring arrives.

Utilize barriers and deterrents

When resources are scarce, animals will be on the hunt for anything that's edible and that includes whatever greenery is growing on a landscape. Physical barriers in garden beds

and around trees can help prevent damage caused by moles, voles and deer. Line the bottom and sides of garden beds with garden cloth to prevent ground-burrowing animals from getting in from beneath.

Wrapping shrubs in burlap or covering them in temporary netting can deter deer, who will seek accessible food sources over the winter. Erect fencing around new trees to keep deer away from the bark and lower branches.

Make the yard less attractive to deer and burrowers by opting for fat-based suet cakes to feed birds rather than loose seeds and berries in feeders, which herbivores will enjoy. Also, don't overwater or mulch landscapes too early. The loose soil and warmth of the mulch may entice moles and voles and other rodents to stick around in those areas and feed on plants.

Use a safer melting product

Investigate options in snowmelt products, as traditional rock salt can injure buds and branches and kill lawns. In addition, avoid piling salted snow in one area of the landscape, as it will concentrate the salt in that spot. Spread out snow piles to help minimize the damage to delicate plants.

Secure saplings and juvenile plants

Harsh winds and battering snow can damage young plants. Use stakes and lattices to secure them so they'll be better able to withstand the weather, suggests Total Landscape Management, a commercial and residential landscaping company.

Promptly remove snow from branches to help trees and shrubs; otherwise, the weight of ice and snow can break off branches and cause irreparable damage.

Erect a snow barrier

Prior observation tends to educate homeowners about which areas of the landscape are most vulnerable to snow drifts and blustery winds. During the winter, winds often blow in from a northeasterly direction, but each homeowner can make his or her own assessment. Put up a tarp between two stakes to serve as a "snow fence" that protects vulnerable areas of the landscape from blowing snow.

Keep plants cozy

Wrap plants in burlap, garden blankets and plant domes to insulate them from cold weather and some animals. Move container plants into a garage or shielded area for the winter. Winter can place landscapes in peril. A few strategies can provide protection.



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A Beginner’s Guide to Fall Planting and Maintenance

Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to gardens.

The tree and bare root retailer Bower & Branch advises that soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year’s bounty.

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

• **Think about fall annuals and bulb planting.** Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer flowers fade. Also, it’s a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.

• **Sow salad seeds.** Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.

• **Take inventory of the sun.** Positioning a garden carefully means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.

• **Fill in landscaping gaps.** Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.

• **Clean up unwanted growth.** Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

• **Propagate plants in the fall.** As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.

• **Continue to water plants.** Water is essential in the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.

Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.

SIGNS A ROOF MUST BE REPAIRED OR REPLACED

The exterior components of a home, such as the siding and the roof, help to protect its occupants from the elements. While many roofing materials can last for decades, at some point in time homeowners will likely have to repair or replace the roof on their home.

Roof wear and tear may not always be so evident, particularly because most homeowners do not make it a point to get on their roofs very often. The first sign of roof damage typically is a leak that is noticeable from the indoors. It may include a browned spot on the ceiling or even pooling water in the attic. Leak from storm damage or something minor like a water intrusion through a nail hole or from a lost shingle typically can be repaired easily enough. However, additional indicators may necessitate a complete roof overhaul. Here are some signs a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

• **Sagging roof:** If the roof is sagging, it could be due to excess loads, such as water-damaged shingles or even weakened roof structure. A professional will need to restore the integrity of the roof.

• **Cracking and buckling:** It is likely that shingles will have to be replaced if there is cracking or if shingles are buckling and warping.

• **Exposed nails:** Exposed nails may rust and contribute to a leaky roof, says Family Handyman. How long the nails were exposed could indicate if the roof can be repaired or if everything should be redone.

• **Lost granules:** Asphalt roofing shingles have small granules on the surface. Over time these granules will slowly degrade and fall off. If there are many granules in gutters or if one can see that portions of the shingles are bare, it is likely time for a new roof.

• **Visible light:** Homeowners who can see light streams coming into the home need roof repair. This is indicative of holes, cracks or spaces in the roof.

• **Growth on the roof:** Mold and mildew on the roof is a sign that the roof needs to be repaired or replaced. Such growths contribute to rot that jeopardizes the integrity of the roof.

A durable roof protects a home from the elements. Various symptoms signal that it is time to repair or replace a roof.



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DIY Vehicle Maintenance Tasks

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, many people looked for ways to save money. One way to live a frugal life is to take on more projects. In addition to lawn and garden upkeep and minor home improvements, a number of people may be able to tackle some auto repair and maintenance jobs themselves.

Performing routine vehicle maintenance tasks on one's own is an ideal way to reduce automotive expenditures. The following are several vehicle maintenance jobs skilled DIYers may be able to handle on their own.

• **Replace the air filter.** An air filter should be changed annually or more frequently if you reside in a dry, dusty climate. A clogged filter can stress the vehicle's air conditioning system and reduce heat capacity in the winter. Check the location of the air filter in the owner's manual; pay attention to how it is placed before removing. Then replace it with a clean filter that can be purchased for around \$15.

• **Replace the wiper blades.** When wiper blades are worn out, visibility in rainy or snowy weather is reduced. Choose a quality wiper blade, as they usually are made with high-quality rubber, clean better and have more UV protection than manufacturer-provided blades. Follow the installation instructions on the package and be sure to refer to the particular manufacturer's buying guide to get the right size for your make and model of vehicle.

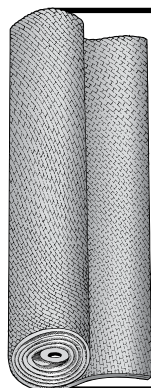
• **Replace spark plugs.** The money management site Money Crashers says spark plugs need to be replaced after around 30,000 miles or as indicated by your owner's manual. Vehicles will have four, six or eight plugs, depending on how many cylinders the car has. The plugs need to be changed in a certain order, so only remove the first wire and spark plug. Remove and replace plugs one by one with a spark plug socket, wrench or ratchet.

• **Change the oil and oil filter.** Because changing the oil in a vehicle requires jacking up the car or truck and getting a little dirty, some people prefer to leave it to an oil change center. However, at an estimated cost of \$20 versus nearly double or more what you'll spend elsewhere, it can save money to do it yourself. Never change the oil while the engine is hot. And remember to lubricate the rubber gasket on the new oil filter and allocate enough oil to fill the filter with about 2/3 of new oil in addition to what is put in the engine.

• **Replace headlight bulbs.** Replacing headlight bulbs is a fairly easy project and will only take around 10 minutes to do after you purchase the right bulbs for your vehicle. Each vehicle is different, but many bulbs are housed inside of a bulb holder, which is shaped like

a trapezoid with three wires coming out of it, advises U.S. News & World Report. Remove the old bulb and put in the new. Plug the wires back in and test to see if the headlight works.

The above automotive tasks are just some that people can try themselves to save time and money.



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Safely Decorate Your Home Exterior This Holiday Season

A person doesn't have to drive far or look too closely to be inspired by holiday decor come the month of December. Enthusiastic celebrants go to great lengths to express their holiday spirit and that typically includes decorating their home exteriors.

Home holiday decorations are a tradition in millions of households. Though the tradition helps make this special time of year even more festive, decorating a home exterior for the holidays is not without certain safety risks.

Homeowners must prioritize safety when decorating their home exteriors for the holidays. These tips can ensure the holiday season is as safe as it is special.

• **Never decorate alone.** The buddy system should be employed when decorating a home for the holidays. No fewer than two people should decorate a home. A second person can ensure a ladder remains steady while hanging lights and can help lift potentially heavy lawn decorations, thus reducing the risk for injury.

• **Use the appropriate decorations and tools.** The American Red Cross urges individuals to use only decorations designed for outdoor use when decorating their home exteriors. Indoor lights should never be strung outdoors, even on small spaces. In addition, the Red Cross recommends homeowners who intend to use nails or hooks to hang decorations first confirm they are insulated, which can help to avoid electrocution and reduce fire risk.

• **Plug decorations into the correct outlets.** The energy experts at FirstEnergy note that outdoor lights and inflatable decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Older homes may not be equipped with such outlets, particularly on their home exteriors. Replacing existing outlets with GFCIs is a quick and relatively inexpensive job that a professional electrician should be hired to handle before decorating for the holidays.

• **Utilize a timer for exterior lights.** Lights should be not kept on overnight, which can be costly and pose a safety hazard. Utilize a timer so lights come on at night and turn off around bedtime, if not earlier.

• **Inspect decorations.** Exterior string lights and other plug-in decorations should be inspected at the beginning of each season to ensure there are no frayed or cracked wires. Damaged wires pose a significant fire hazard, so any damaged strands should be discarded and replaced.

• **Pick the right day to decorate.** Consult the weather forecast prior to decorating the exterior of a home. Pick a day when efforts to decorate won't be compromised by wind,



rain, snow or other inclement weather. If it's already snowed, avoid decorating until the snow has melted, as there could be ice lingering beneath the snow. It's also unsafe to work on a snow-covered roof. Decorate on a day with ample daylight and pause decorating if weather takes a sudden, unexpected turn for the worse.

It can be fun to decorate a home's exterior for the holiday season. But homeowners must prioritize safety and take every step necessary to reduce their risk for accident or injury.



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