

As winter approaches, homeowners know they must do certain things to ready their homes for the coming months. Wrapping up the grill and closing the pool are no-brainers, but homeowners also must prioritize winterizing their homes to ensure homes withstand the winter.

Winterizing tasks range from small to big, but each can protect a home and its inhabitants and some can even save homeowners a substantial amount of money. The following are four simple ways to winterize your home.

1. Plug leaks

Leaky windows and doors can cost homeowners money year-round, allowing cold air to escape on hot summer afternoons and letting cold air in on brisk winter nights. When such leaks aren't fixed, homeowners are more liable to turn up their air conditioners or heaters, unnecessarily padding their energy bills along the way. Before winter arrives, check areas around windows and door frames for leaks, as well as any additional openings, such as chimneys, that may allow cold air in. Use caulk or weather strips to plug these leaks, and enjoy your warmer home and lower energy bills as winter weather gets colder and colder.

2. Inspect your chimney

If your home has a chimney, chances are you have not used it since last winter. During that time, the chimney has likely accumulated some dirt and grime, and may even have



Trimming hanging branches and removing debris from their yards is one simple way homeowners can prepare their properties for winter.

served as home to some unwanted critters. As the season for fireside chats approaches, have your chimney serviced by a professional so it's ready for use and you are not greeted by some unwanted guests upon lighting your first fire.

3. Clear the yard

Autumn days, particularly late autumn days, can be gusty, and strong winds can cause branches to fall off trees. Branches big and small can cause damage to cars, siding and roofs, and smaller branches can get clogged in gutters, potentially causing gutters to back up and leading to leaky roofs that damage a home's interior. Take a walk around your property at least once per week during the fall, clearing any fallen limbs and trimming branches that appear one strong gust away from falling off of trees. Remove any branches that are

hanging over your home and driveway so they don't pose a threat to your house or vehicles.

4. Turn off outdoor water supplies

When temperatures get especially low, pipes with water still in them can freeze and burst, potentially leading to significant water damage. When you no longer need to water the lawn and when temperatures get too cold to wash your car in the driveway, be sure to shut off the water supply to outdoor spigots and sprinkler systems. Once you do that, drain them so no water is sitting in the pipes when temperatures dip.

There are many ways to winterize a home, and homeowners should take every precaution necessary to ensure their homes are safe and warm as the cold weather season approaches. FH158408

Make fall clean-up eco-friendly

Certain tasks become necessary once autumn arrives. Whereas spring and summer were spent tending gardens and maintaining a yard prime for entertaining, autumn is about preparing properties to survive the winter. Just as with other jobs around the house and yard, fall clean-up can be done in a manner that is respectful to the environment.

Leave plant stalks and leaves

It is tempting to want to cut back perennials and other greenery so a property looks neat. But as flowers and plants dry and drop to the ground, they help insulate the roots from the cold. They also provide a natural habitat and serve as a winter food source for birds and small animals.

Rake leaves sensibly

Power blowers and mulchers make fast work of leaves, but at the expense of the environment. Gas-powered devices discharge fuel exhaust into the air, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, reap the benefits of peace and quiet as well as exercise from manual raking.

While raking, do not feel the need to remove every leaf. A certain amount of organic matter can be beneficial to the soil and even insulate the lawn somewhat. A leftover leaf here or there also may provide protection for insects and small animals. For example, many native bees spend the winter in tunnels in the ground, cracks in mortar, holes in dead wood, or within hollow stems, and they need lawn and garden litter to survive.

Compost is a friend

Spread a thin layer of compost on the lawn and in garden beds. Compost prevents weed growth, insulates and protects the soil and provides nutrients that will be needed once the spring busy season begins. By using compost, homeowners can reduce dependence on chemical fertilizers and weed killers.

Check for drafts and leaks

Fall is an ideal time to check windows and doors for cracks where water, air or insects can enter. Seal up holes and cracks, and ensure there are no drafty areas. Drafts can cause home heating and cooling systems to work harder, expending more energy than necessary.

Collect and harvest

Be sure to gather any useable garden vegetables and fruits and prepare them for storage if they cannot be consumed in the next few days. Canning is a time-honored preservation method. Herbs and seeds can be dried and saved for use later on. Vacuum seal fresh basil and parsley.

Take inventory

Look at which items in the yard have seen better days and prepare to recycle or reuse them in different ways. Faded plastic planters can be used as impromptu bird baths in a garden. An old tire can be mulched and turned into soft

material to put around a playset. Inquire as to the proper way to recycle plastic lawn chairs that may be broken.

Autumn yard work should be performed in as eco-friendly a fashion as possible. TF189316

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Your guide to proper tree pruning

Trees may require pruning for a variety reasons. Storms may have damaged branches, necessitating a pruning. In other instances, trees may have outgrown their yards, overpowering the landscape.

Autumn and winter, when trees largely go dormant and fallen leaves make it easier to see the branches beneath, may be prime times to prune. Pruning during the dormant period also minimizes sap loss and stress to the tree, and can help cut down on the growth of fungi. In addition, insects are less likely to be problematic during the colder months of the year.

Trimming and pruning can be handled by do-it-yourselfers if the branches are smaller and more manageable. Practice on thinner branches before moving on to thicker ones, which may require extra help. Branches may be heavy, and it takes a guided hand to ensure the branches fall in a safe manner so they do not cause damage or injury.

Branches also need to be trimmed properly to facilitate good healing. Trees will form a callus bark covering over cuts to keep out disease and decay, much as a scab forms over a person's wound. Damaging the bark on a tree while pruning may interfere with that process, so do-it-yourselfers need to take the time to prune correctly.

According to Danny Lipford, home improvement expert and host of the radio pro-



Pruning is a job that may be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, but sometimes larger tasks are best left to a professional tree trimming service.

gram "Today's Homeowner," larger limbs may require three cuts instead of one. The first cut is a small notch in the bottom of the limb, around two to three feet from the trunk and about one-quarter of the way through. This helps prevent the bark from splitting. A relief cut is then made a few inches away from the notch cut, and goes all the way through. This removes the weight of the branch so that the final cut can be made without the branch splitting and falling. The final cut is made right where the limb extrudes from the branch collar, or the swollen bump that then forms into the tree limb. Follow the slant of the branch collar when making the cut. Smaller or thinner

branches may not require the same three steps, but every effort should be made to reduce injury to the tree.

When deciding how much to prune, less is usually more. All pruning can put some level of stress on the tree and increase its vulnerability to disease and insect infestation. A good rule of thumb is to never prune more than 25 percent of the crown. According to experts at TreeHelp.com, living branches should comprise at least two-thirds the height of the tree. In some instances, the rules may need to be bent if trees are interfering with utility lines or to meet community laws. However, always prune minimally to avoid damaging the tree.

The right tools also make the job safer and easier. Use a pole pruner and lopper, rope saws, folding pruner, and a bucksaw. A chainsaw can be used in some instances, especially when pruning larger limbs. Always disinfect pruning tools after you're done to prevent the spread of disease to other trees.

Consider hiring a professional tree service if pruning proves beyond your capabilities. Doing so is safe and often well worth the investment. FH168295



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