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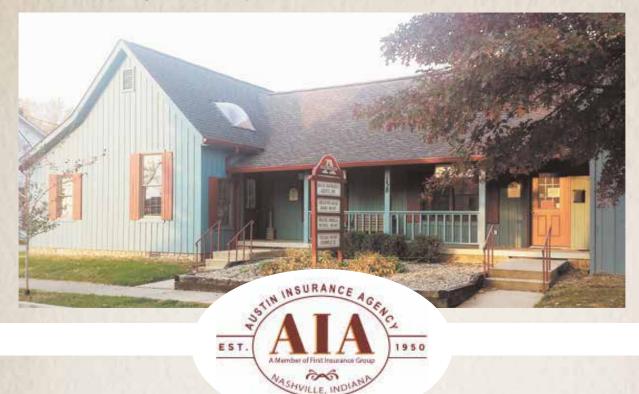
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How should I prep my home for fall and winter?

BY ASK ANGI/PAUL F.P. POGUE | PHOTO BY ADOBE STOCK



As the cold weather begins, you'll want to be ready to keep your house in top condition, inside and out. Here are some tasks that will help ensure a comfortable winter and an excellent start to the following spring.

MAINTENANCE TASKS

You'll want to pay attention to several elements in your home that are vital to staying in good shape this winter. If you haven't had an HVAC inspection already and live in an area where you'll be switching from cooling to heating, schedule one as soon as possible. Experts recommend an inspection and tuneup twice a year when the cooling flips to heating or vice versa. Even if you only use one or the other, it's a good idea to get regular HVAC inspections to ensure everything is in the best order.

Get your gutters cleaned by a professional. Such cleaning is vital to continued home health, especially rolling into winter. Clogged gutters can lead to basement flooding, foundation damage and damaging ice buildup on the roof.

Perform a winterizing inspection around your house. Check doors and windows for potential air loss, especially around the edges. Use caulking and weatherstripping as needed to keep hot and cold air on the right sides of the walls. While you're at it, keep an eye out around your foundation for cracks, nooks or crannies where pests can potentially get access to your home.

Make sure you shut down your irrigation system and clear out the water in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Verify that your attic has enough insulation. Poorly insulated attics can lead to roof damage and leaks during bad weather.

CHECK YOUR YARD

As long as new grass is growing, continue mowing regularly. Keep your blade height at its standard setting. Cutting your lawn too short as you go into winter will stress the

roots, reducing their ability to resist pests and weeds.

Fall is a great time to establish a compost pile, and it's not hard to get off to a good start. Find a shady and dry point outdoors near a water source. Set up a bin, or simply select a dropoff point. Create a several-inch layer of leaves, branches, wood chips and twigs as a base. Then, add grass clippings, coffee grounds, and vegetable or fruit scraps. Keep the layers slightly damp with water and rotate them a couple of times a month. By spring, your compost pile will have developed a dark brown, crumbly compost perfect for fertilizing.

Don't overlook mulch, either. You probably think of mulching as work to do in the spring, but mulching in the fall offers many benefits. Much provides insulation to plant roots and soil during the cold months and limits erosion from snow and rain.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column Visit at angi.com.



Managing winter damage to your home

BY MENARDS | PHOTO BY ADOBE STOCK

The winter season brings plenty of joy and beauty, but it can also wreak havoc on your outdoor plants and landscaping. Some of this damage is unavoidable, depending on where you live, the snow, wind and frigid temperatures are bound to affect your plants. However, there are some tips and trick to help your plants avoid the hazards of winter.

BRANCHES BREAKING, BENDING

After a heavy snowfall, you may notice branches falling off your trees or bending under the weight of the snow. If the snow is fluffy and easy to move, you may carefully brush the snow off the bending branches with a broom or other tool.

Do not attempt to brush the weight off branches from an ice storm to avoid further damage. Try to avoid blowing or shoveling snow onto landscaping plants

LEAF SCORCH

Applying de-icing salt is an effective way to protect walkways and roads. But, be careful not to expose plants to salt as this will turn needles brown or damage the edges of leaves. Plants with salt damage should be watered thoroughly in spring.

SUNSCALD

Most common among young trees with thin bark is sunscald, the result of unseasonably warm winter temps followed by a return to freezing temps. As trees are dormant during the cold winter weather, a brief warm spell essentially causes them to wake up, causing their bark to rapidly expand and contract. Wrapping vulnerable trees with reflective white tree guards or burlap can help.



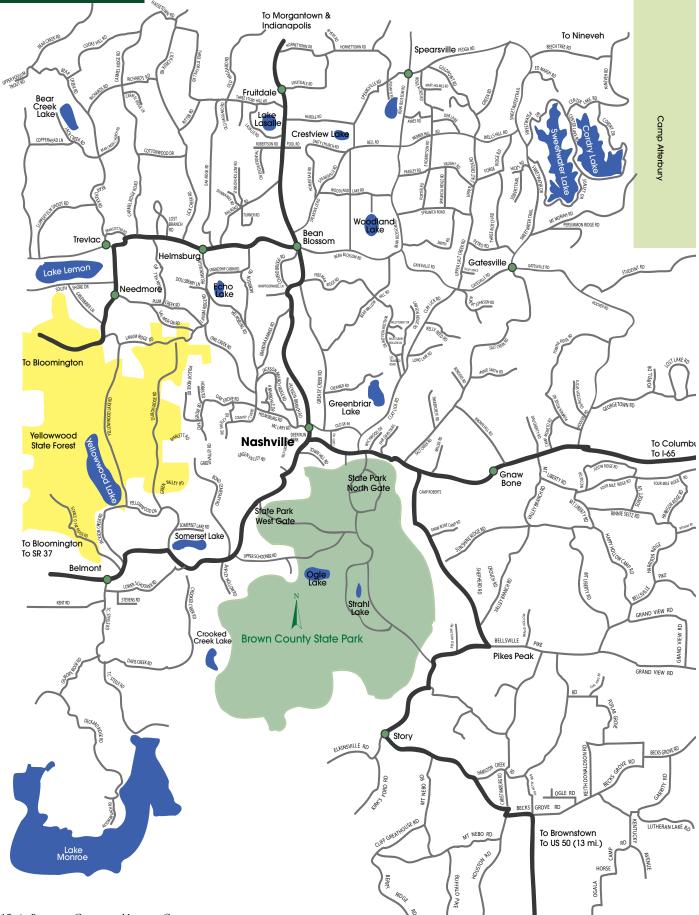
WINTER BURN

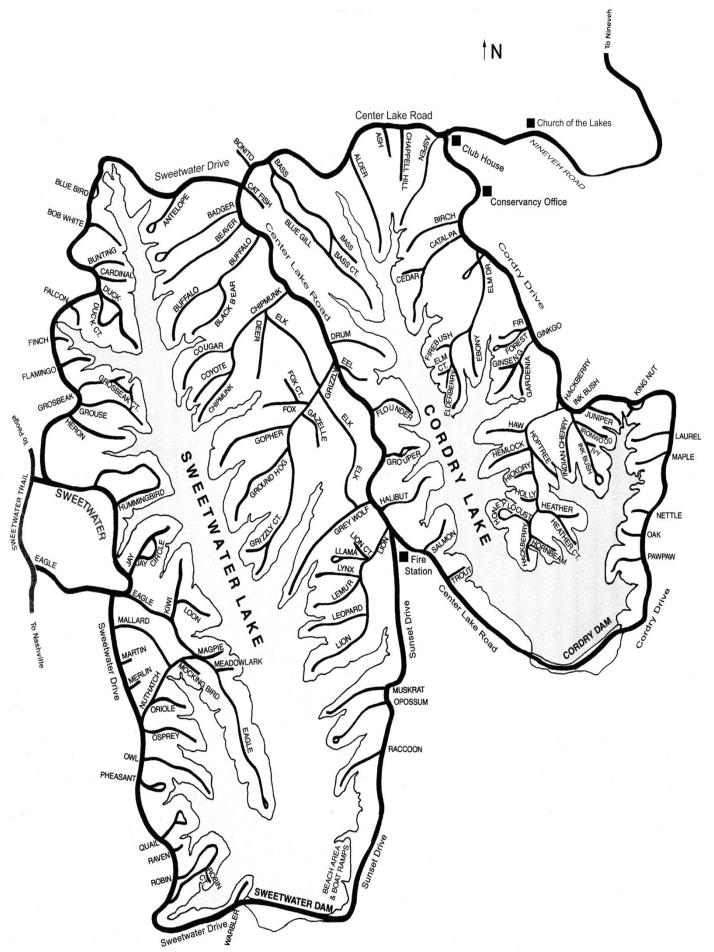
Hazardous winter weather conditions can cause evergreen trees to have brown patches of needles, the result of winter burn. Usually warm fall temperatures, drastic temperature drops and an inadequate root system can all contribute to winter burn. If the entire tree turns brown, the tree is not likely to recover, but pruning the affected areas in spring may help spring new buds and branches.

FROST HEAVE

Typically as a result of late planting, repeated freezing and thawing temperatures may potentially damage or even kill some plants. To prevent frost heave, apply mulch to recently-planted perennial plants to prepare for a hard frost. Additionally, it's best to avoid planting perennials after September as planting will not give the plants enough time to develop a strong root system before temperatures dip below freezing.

AREA MAPS







A WARM ADDITION

Fireplaces add light, heat and ambiance to the room

BY JENN WILLHITE | PHOTOS BY ADOBE STOCK



Fireplaces may have experienced ebbs and flows in its popularity over the years, but there's no denying they are a beneficial feature that adds value, convenience and energy security to a home.

Say you have a fireplace that is in dire need of attention and you're considering replacing it, the level of difficulty, stress, time and money involved is entirely dependent on the condition of the existing fireplace and what you intend to put in its place, said Jim Watson, owner of Fireplace Builders of Indiana, located in Whiteland.

"It depends on how it is installed," Watson said. "If it is just tile around there, it should be pretty easy to retile. If it is brick, it may be a bit more difficult."

Regardless if you are installing new or replacing in an existing footprint, it is important to be familiar with fireplace types, Watson said.

There are essentially two options: There's the old-school, hand-built fireplaces referred to as masonry and you have the new, manufactured, prefabricated ones that come from the factory. There's a big difference between the two, Watson said.

Additionally, there is a differentiation between fireplaces and inserts, he added.

"An insert is just what the word says it is, it is going to insert into the fireplace you already own," Watson explained. "I could put in an actual woodburning insert, which is a stove without legs and a plate around it, so you can heat your house with it and that is an insert."

Those inserts come in gas or wood. And, if you already have a woodburning fireplace, you could easily have a wood or gas burning insert or a gas log installed, he said. However, if you have an existing masonry fireplace and you have gas logs installed, that does not change it from being a masonry wood-burning fireplace.

When it comes to current trends in fireplaces, homeowners are embracing a range of low-footprint but high-impact modern fireplace designs, including flushmounted, sleekly linear, and double-sided glass designs.

Someone who wants a fireplace but has been told their home won't accommodate one should check into the virtues of a sealed gas insert, Watson said. And there are a few of reasons for that.

First, there's the convenience and savings in use and heating costs.

"Most of your gas fireplaces have a big sheet of glass over them and that means they are sealed up," Watson said. "That is how they are able to vent horizontally to the outside. People very easily can have a gas fireplace without much thickness into the house and it is very affordable that way."

Granted, the actual burner for a clean-burning gas fireplace runs a cool \$1,000, but the unit itself costs on average 30 to 35 cents per hour to operate. Compare that to the old-school, gas burning fireplaces that you light with a match and you're looking at 70 cents up to \$1 per hour to operate and you have to leave the damper wide open not only to help alleviate the buildup of heat, but also to release carbon monoxide.

When bought from a reputable company, the lifespan of a gas log is upwards of 15 to 20 years, Watson said. If you opt for a box-store version, that lifespan can decrease to more like three to five years. It is simply another case where you get what you pay for, he said.

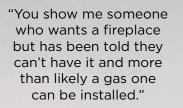
Secondly, sealed gas fireplaces are a good option if you have small children or a lot of traffic in the house. Also, the enclosed flame doesn't pose the same risks as an open flame that can pop and shed live embers that can lead to accidental fire.

And lastly, there's more flexibility in placement with gas.

"You show me someone who wants a fireplace but has been told they can't have it and more than likely a gas one can be installed," Watson said. "In the category of gas, gas vented fireplaces are the most popular that builders include."

Even those who lean toward basement dwelling can enjoy the coziness of a gas insert.

"You just take the vent pipe up a ways and then poke it out and you have your gas fireplace to put in," Watson said. "If you are way below ground, you can go between the floor joist cavities and still pop right out. The gas fire



Jim Watson, owner, Fireplace Builders of Indiana



places have all the flexibility."

Today's home builders often lean toward gas-vented fireplaces, Watson said.

Some offer vent-free, which simply means the logs are venting into your house. Yes, that is the opposite of what the name implies, so you have to be very careful and do your homework, Watson said.

Essentially, the way it works is the high temperature at which the log burns is what eliminates the fumes commonly associated with a traditional gas log that burns at a lower degree.

Another perk of going with a gas-powered insert is the ease of use. Gas-powered fireplaces come with a multifunction remote that allows the user to not only wield on/off control, but you can also adjust the flame and blower to minimize or maximize radiant heat.

Watson said most of the fireplaces his company installs are prefabricated and the project normally takes a single day. All the work is done in-house at his Whiteland location and delivered to the site where it is positioned, installed and finished with either brick or tile surround. Depending on the style, some homeowners also opt to include the mantel and surrounding shelves.

Now, despite all the perks and conveniences fireplaces offer, whether they be gas or wood-burning, they aren't necessarily top of



mind for those seeking to buy, said Ron Rose of Indiana Realty Pros in Greenwood.

Fireplaces are considered kind of a bonus item, he said.

"They are luxury items," he said. "Versus something they say like, 'I've got to have a backyard with a camping area,' or whatever you want to say."

Even when it comes to working with clients who are building, Rose says he will sometimes steer them away from the added expense. "When I am sitting with someone in a new home builder meeting, they like to sell fireplaces for I don't know how much," he explained. "It is always an add or it's a luxury item and I ordinarily ask people, 'Are you going to use it or are you a fireplace family?" And if they don't have any strong feelings about it, I tell them to save their money."

Regardless of the halfhearted attitude current home buyers may have toward fireplaces, one cannot deny the benefit of a fireplace in case of an emergency or power outage. Yes, if it comes down to it, you can heat your home.

The trade-off is learning to master the flue and temper the heat just right so as to not run everyone out of the house with suffocating heat. Woodburning fireplaces and stoves can also suck the moisture out of a room if the fire gets too hot, so all the more reason to keep a close eye and dampen accordingly, Watson cautioned.

"You can have a power outage and you won't run out of power," Watson said. "A lot of people will go with a fireplace and they know darn well if worse comes to worst, they can go out, get some wood and take it back home and put it in the fireplace and heat it. If the world goes to pot, they know they have a good wood burning stove or insert and can always find wood. They know they can stay warm."



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