

FALL

HOME IMPROVEMENT

There's still work to be done in the garden

Fall is the last significant chance before the new year that homeowners will have to address the landscaping around their homes.

Fall lawn care differs from spring and summer lawn care, even if the warm temperatures of summer linger into autumn. Homeowners can take advantage of a warm fall by addressing any existing or potential issues.

It's important that homeowners continue to mow their lawns so long as grass is growing. But as fall transitions into winter, lower the blades so the grass is cut shorter while remaining mindful that no blade of grass should ever be trimmed by more than one-third. Lowering the blades will allow more sunlight to reach the grass in the months ahead.

Much like apple-picking and foliage, raking leaves is synonymous with fall. Some homeowners may wait to pick up a rake until all of the trees on their properties are bare. However, allowing fallen leaves to sit on the ground for extended periods of time can have an adverse effect on grass. Leaves left to sit on the lawn may ultimately suffocate the grass by forming an impenetrable wall that deprives the lawn of sunlight and oxygen. The result is dead grass and possibly even fungal disease. Leaves may not need to be raked every day, but homeowners should periodically rake and remove leaves from their grass, even if there are plenty left to fall still hanging on the trees.

Summer exacts a toll on lawns in various ways, and even homeowners with green thumbs may end up with lawn bald spots come September. Autumn is a great time to repair these bald spots. Lawn repair mixes like contain mulch, seed and fertilizer to repair bald spots, which can begin to recover in as little as seven days. Before applying such products, remove dead grass and loosen the top few inches of soil. Follow any additional manufacturer instructions as well.

Aerating reduces soil compacting, facilitating the delivery of fertilizer and water to a lawn's roots. While many homeowners, and particularly those who take pride in tending to their own lawns, can successfully aerate their own turf, it's best to first have soil tested so you know which amendments to add after the ground has been aerated. Gardening centers and home improvement stores sell soil testing kits that measure the pH of soil, but homeowners who want to test for nutrients or heavy metals in their soil may need to send their samples to a lab for further testing.



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Antimicrobial tiles help create sanitary spaces

Tile can be a worthy addition to rooms with potential moisture issues or areas in a home that may routinely necessitate quick cleanup. Because they are not damaged by constant contact with water, tiled floors and walls are often found in bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, and entryways.

Although tile is resilient, it is not impervious to the microorganisms that tend to proliferate in areas where moisture and humidity are commonplace. Microbes can grow rapidly in warm areas, especially if food is present. Mold or mildew issues also can become problematic seemingly overnight. But certain modifications can help homeowners alleviate the proliferation of microorganisms.

Antimicrobial products inhibit the growth of microorganisms and suppress their reproduction. For example, tiles with Microban® protection employ an antimicrobial agent built into the product during the manufacturing process. When microbes touch the product surface, the agent penetrates the cell wall of the microorganism. Other tiles are treated with micrometric particles of titanium dioxide (TiO₂), which is activated by sunlight or artificial light. This causes a photocatalysis process, which is responsible for the product's antipollution and bactericidal properties. Examples of TiO₂-treated tiles include Active Clean Air & Antibacterial Ceramic®.

Antimicrobial ceramic tile can be



Various manufacturers have developed their own innovative tile that contributes to cleaner, and sometimes more eco-friendly, home environments. The application of certain treatments can make ceramic tiles even more impervious to water and moisture. Some tile may help reduce the spread of certain strains of bacteria, such as E. coli and staph, without requiring the application of potentially harsh chemical detergents. Others treatments may protect against yeast, molds and fungi that can cause stains and odors and result in the degradation of tile.

advantageous in rooms where sanitation and hygiene are an utmost priority. This includes not only public places, but private residences. Worktops and floors where microbes can be transferred are particularly beneficial areas to install antimicrobial tile.

A potential side effect of antimicrobial tile is a reduction in reliance on harsh cleaning products. Although regular washing is recommended, residents may not need to use odoriferous or strong chemical cleaners to sanitize their homes. This helps improve indoor air quality and reduce the potential contamination of the environment from chemical runoff.

Rooms that serve double duty

While large homes remain popular, many people are embracing the benefits of smaller residences. Small homes help homeowners save money, require less maintenance, have smaller environmental impact, and reduce the temptation to accumulate "stuff."

Owners of small homes or apartments can still enjoy the benefits of larger spaces, they just need to equip rooms to perform double duty.

Living room/guest room

Entertaining guests is easier with a dedicated space where visitors can feel at home. When furnishing a living room, keep the guest room in mind. A sofa that opens up to a bed or a convertible sectional can be a comfortable place for guests to lay their heads. Side tables provide guests with places to store their belongings, and an empty storage chest can house bed linens or guests' clothing.

Den/playroom

Children tend to accumulate toys and games. And as kids grow from children to young adults, their list of must-have

items - from video gaming systems to other electronics - grows along with them. Storage can make a room functional for both adults and children. Devote an entire wall to a closet or drawer system where toys can be stored out of sight when necessary. Storage ottomans can be used for extra seating while also providing somewhere for homeowners to stash stuffed animals or games for easy access. When choosing furniture, look for fabrics that are resistant to stains and modular pieces that can be moved around as necessary to create room for playing or entertaining.

Bedroom/home office

In 2015, 24 percent of employed people in the United States did some or all of their work at home, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Bringing work home means men and women will need a space to work. In tight quarters, bedrooms may be the only available area. An armoire-style desk will blend in with the decor and can hide paperwork and electronics behind doors. Otherwise, a makeup vanity can serve the dual purpose of providing a place to get ready for a night out and a ready space to house a laptop during the day.

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What is a smart home?

Refrigerators that inform their owners when it's time to buy more eggs and thermostats that learn homeowners' heating and cooling preferences may once have seemed like futuristic ideas straight out of a sci-fi movie. However, such products are no longer a dream but a reality.

The term "smart home" refers to a residence that has appliances, HVAC, lighting, entertainment systems, security, and many more devices that communicate with one another. Such devices can be controlled remotely, according to SmartHomeUSA, an automation product retailer. Proponents of smart home technology say features can help people save money on utilities and conserve natural resources, all the while providing peace of mind to homeowners.

In 2016, 80 million smart home devices were delivered worldwide. That marks a 64 percent increase from 2015, according to the research data firm IHS Markit. The smart home trend is only expected to grow in coming years.

Although there's interest in smart



home technology, the industry remains fragmented. Consumers are trying to figure out which devices are simply fun and which provide practical benefits. Furthermore, the range of smart devices is expanding rapidly, making potential compatibility issues a concern. Companies that plan to educate consumers further about the advantages of smart home features and are open

to standardization may have the best chances of survival.

Those interested in dabbling in some smart home technology and testing the waters may want to start with the following household items.

- Smart bulbs: Manufacturers offer various types of smart light bulbs. Some are color-changing, others react to doorbells or alarms, and others can

simulate typical lighting patterns when homeowners are away. Integrated apps enable remote access to scheduling so people can arrive home to a well-lit house.

- Home security: Wi-Fi enabled doorbells with video capabilities allow residents to see who is at the door without having to open it. Cameras can even be accessed remotely, simulating that someone is at home at all times. Never wonder if you've locked the door again with smart locks that can be engaged via a smartphone. Make sure that homes are secured or that pets are behaving while out with smart cameras.

- Flood sensor: Get peace of mind against damaging floods with Wi-Fi flood sensors.

- Appliances: A new breed of smart appliances can make it possible for users to turn on the washing machine while out of the house, close refrigerator doors from afar or even start their vacuum cleaners remotely.

Smart technology is taking over and is likely to continue changing the way people live and work.

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Hard water can be hard on your home

Hard water can cause scaling, deposits inside of pipes, reduced cleaning ability, and several other problems.

Outside of high school chemistry class, you may never have given thought to water composition and how it changes. However, once you become a homeowner, you may have to pay special attention to the type of water bubbling out of your faucets.

What is hard water?

Hard water affects about 85 percent of the United States, according to the Water Quality Association. Although not harmful to human health, hard water can impact one's daily life in other ways.

Hard water is formed when water moves through soil and rock. It dissolves very small amounts of minerals and holds them in a solution. Calcium and magnesium are the most common minerals to turn water "hard." The more magnesium and calcium water dissolves, the harder it becomes.

From nuisance to damaging

Hard water can interfere with various cleaning tasks and also personal grooming. Clothes washed in hard water may not be fully clean and may appear dingy. Hard water can cause a film on bath tile and



tubsurfaces. Hair and skin can appear dull and sticky due to hard water.

Over time, the hard water can deposit minerals on the inside of pipes, reducing water flow. If these deposits grow thick, you may have a plumbing issue on your hands. Furthermore, mineral deposits can harm appliances, such as water heaters, washing machines and dishwashers. Eventually, hard water may render these appliances ineffective, and they will need to be replaced.

Treatment options

Since hard water is such a common concern, a number of treatment options

exist. Mainly water-softening systems use either a packaged water softener or a mechanical water-softening unit.

Packaged water softeners are chemicals that bond with the calcium and magnesium ions in the water so that they cannot interfere with cleaning efficiency. These chemicals fall into two categories: precipitating and nonprecipitating. Precipitating softeners are borax and washing soda and can affect pH levels of water and make water cloudy. Nonprecipitating softeners use phosphates.

Alkalinity won't be increased, and usually there is no cloudiness or buildup. These products are typically for laundry and are not recommended for drinking water.

Mechanical water-softening systems are hooked up directly to the plumbing of the house. They are ion-exchange systems that will add salt to the water. Although it can be safe to drink, softened water may not be recommended for those who are on low-sodium diets.

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Chimney maintenance is part of home safety

To avoid chimney fires and other risks, take these precautions, courtesy of CSIA, HomeAdvisor and Popular Mechanics.

- Have chimneys inspected annually and properly cleaned by a professional chimney technician.
- Make sure tree branches and other obstacles are cleared away from the top of the chimney.
- Use seasoned hardwoods that have been split for several months to a year.

“Green” wood creates more creosote.

- The top-down method of building a fire produces less smoke. This means using larger pieces of wood on the bottom and the smallest twigs and kindling at the top. The fire will burn from the top and down, igniting the wood beneath as it goes.
- Put a cap on the chimney to keep out rain, snow and small animals.
- Keep fires small; otherwise, the



intense heat may damage bricks and mortar in the chimney. Repair any damage promptly before lighting another fire.

- Open the damper and fireplace doors so that air supply flows freely and can vent the smoke promptly, reducing residence time in the flue; otherwise, creosote can form.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms throughout the home and routinely check the batteries.



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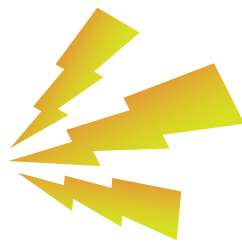


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