



fall HOME & GARDEN

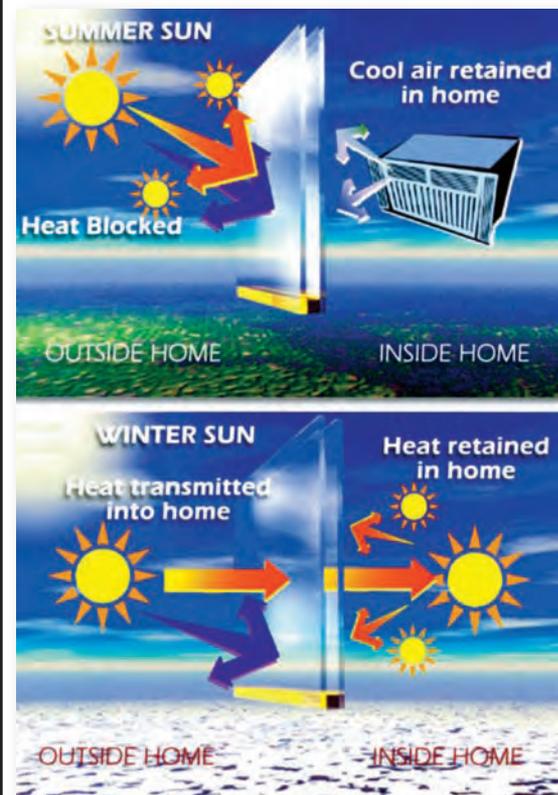
INSIDE:

- Your fall to-do list
- Get organized
- Check for chemicals
- Look for damage
- Care for your lawn

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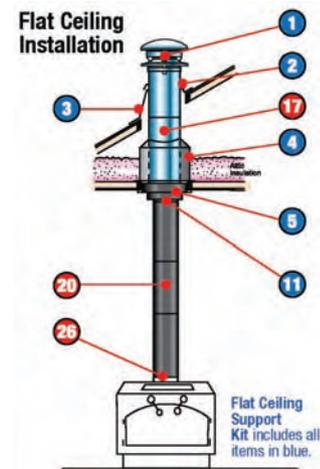
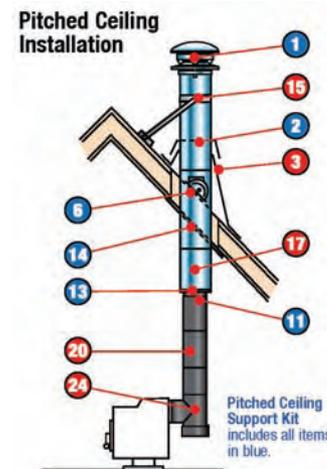
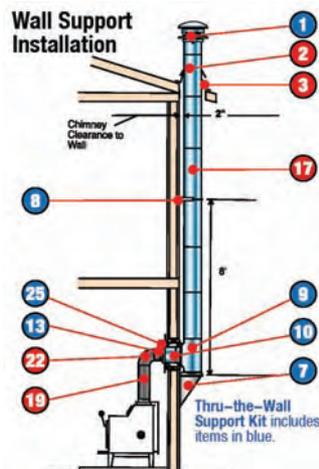
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TIPS

- 1 PAPERS:** Toss junk mail ASAP and scan when you can. Using your smartphone to take digital images of notes and papers will help ease the paper clutter.
- 2 CLOTHING:** Go through each piece every season. This not only gives you a mental inventory of what you have, it helps to keep only what you wear handy.
- 3 TOYS:** Kids can get overwhelmed with too much fun stuff. Keep only what they love and rotate toys, so not everything is always accessible.

Time to get organized

By Melissa Erickson
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The

weather will soon turn cooler, and you'll be spending more time indoors. You're probably surrounded by warm-weather clothing and goods that you won't need for a few months. Time to seize the opportunity and get organized.

Unless you stay on top of things, it's easy for drawers, cabinets, closets – the entire home – to get messy. Tackling the tumult can seem an insurmountable task. One problem is simply getting started. Where do you begin? What comes first?

"Don't look at the big picture. People get overwhelmed when they think about the magnitude of the project, especially if clutter abounds in every room," said Monica Friel, president of Chaos to Order, Chicago.

HOW TO START

You don't have to get to it all immediately. A big mess can be dwindled down a bit at a time.

"If you find yourself never getting started because you can't find the time for such a large project, use a timer. Can you only deal with it in 30-minute increments? That's OK – it's better to get started than to never begin," Friel said.

Just start in one section of the big project.

"For example, you've got a cluttered garage and it's full to the brim, grab a trash bag and a donation bag and begin eliminating what you can. Even 10 minutes of this will get that dent started. Who knows, maybe you'll realize it's not so bad and keep going beyond the allotted time," Friel said.

Some people like to start with an overall strategy, but just doing it is what matters.

"Planning is always a good idea, but don't spend too much time planning, making lists and reading books about it. We see many folks who stay in the planning mode and avoid getting started," Friel said.

Need a little encouragement to get started?

"Containers are a great motivator," Friel said. "Don't buy any organizing gadgets until you've finished the weed-through-and-purge process. If you've got your eye on some fun baskets or containers, let that be your reward for getting through it. You can even set some reward markers in your planning stage: containers for getting through different sections, a manicure for getting through all the paperwork and a massage after cleaning out the basement."

If you're really having trouble getting started, "working with an expert organizer makes getting started happen easier. You plan the time and carve it out. Your organizer arrives and they guide you through this process, which makes what once was daunting a little more fun," Friel said.

breathe EASIER

What to know about chemicals in your home

Today's home buyers are more conscious of being green and installing energy-efficient appliances, according to the most recent "What Home Buyers Really Want" survey by the National Association of Home Builders.

A majority of respondents, 67 percent, said they were concerned about their home's impact on the environment and responded positively to the question of whether they wanted a more healthy home.

Conversely, homeowners are also becoming more concerned about how their home affects their health.

"Ten years ago people were scratching their heads over the farm-to-fork concept," said Jillian Pritchard Cooke, founder, Wellness Within Your Walls, an informational resource group created to provide education and guidance on chemicals commonly found in living and working spaces.

Now, it's not just gourmet chefs and organic farmers who have embraced this healthier way of eating. Consumers are jumping on board, too.

"What's started as farm-to-table has been transferred to the interiors of our homes and work spaces," Pritchard Cooke said. "People need to learn just as much about VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and how they get into our homes as they now know about GMOs (genetically modified organisms)."

VOCs are emitted from products such as paint and paint strippers, wood adhesives, glues, aerosol sprays, air fresheners, wax and stains, and can cause adverse short- and long-term health effects, said Pritchard Cooke, a



Healthy home tips:

- Install hardwood floors wherever possible.
- Use area rugs that can be washed rather than dry cleaned.
- Wash rather than dry clean your clothes.
- Use appropriate venting in the kitchen.
- Ventilate art rooms where children are doing hobbies.
- When refreshing your home, choose low- or no-VOC paint.
- Look for furniture manufacturers that are members of the Sustainable Furnishings Council.

“

Consumers need to be more vigilant. They are often not aware of what they are bringing into their homes similar to 10 years ago when they did not know what was in their food.”

Recognizing DAMAGE

METRO CREATIVE
CONTENT



Homes are potentially susceptible to a host of problems.

Water damage is a potentially costly problem that can afflict any home. Old homes tend to be most susceptible to water damage, and that damage can manifest itself in various ways. The following are some telltale signs of water damage that should give prospective home buyers pause and compel current homeowners to seek professional assistance as soon as possible.

Stains

1 Many prospective home buyers have been disappointed by the sight of water stains during an open house or home inspection. Water stains tend to be on ceilings and/or walls. Stains on ceilings tend to be round, while wall stains are straight lines down the wall that may or may not have forced paint to peel. Water stains are not necessarily indicative of a major problem, but homeowners should have the stains examined by a professional while potential buyers should direct their home inspector's attention to the stains.

2 Deteriorating wood

Wood around windows or doors that is deteriorating may indicate water problems. The wood might be deteriorating because water is infiltrating the wood during storms. Baseboards and molding that is dilapidated or beginning to deteriorate may also indicate water damage.

3 Buckled drywall or wood

Drywall or wood that is buckled or beginning to buckle is another potential indicator of water damage. Drywall buckles when it gets wet, and that is often a sign that there is a leak behind the drywall. Severely buckled drywall will feel as if it has ridges. Wood also buckles when it is exposed to excess moisture, and this can usually be felt when walking on the wood barefoot or in socks.

Odor

Sometimes water damage is best detected by the smell test. Homeowners who notice the smell of mold or mildew in rooms that previously never emanated such odors might have homes that are in the early stages of water problems. The water damage might be behind the walls, where mold is beginning to form thanks to water damage. Older homes tend to be musty, but call in

a professional if you notice that mustiness if more pungent than usual.

Water damage is a potentially costly problem, especially if it goes unnoticed for months or even years. Homeowners and prospective home buyers should be on the lookout for signs of water damage before problems escalate and require expensive repairs.

How to prevent mold growth in your home

Mold plays an important role in nature. Mold breaks down dead organic matter, including fallen leaves, and speeds up the decomposition process so nutrients can return to the soil as quickly as possible.

But mold inside a home can be a formidable foe, triggering allergic reactions and increasing a person's risk of developing respiratory problems. Mold can even cause damage to a home by attaching itself to wood and breaking down that wood.



Because the consequences of mold growth inside a home can be so dire, it's im-

portant that men and women take steps to prevent mold growth in their homes and apartments. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that controlling moisture levels in a home or apartment is the key to controlling mold as well.

- Address spills quickly and properly. Many instances of mold infestations can be traced to leaks or spills that were not quickly or properly addressed. The EPA advises that wet or damp materials or areas should be dried within 24 to 48 hours to prevent the growth of mold. Make sure spills are thoroughly cleaned as opposed to a cursory cleanup of only the areas visible to the naked eye. Inspect nearby crevices when spills occur to

see MOLD | 15

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3 PRE-WINTER lawn care tips

Winter weather can be harsh, especially on lawns. Homeowners who spend much of spring and summer tending to their lawns may fear the impact that winter will have on their once-lush landscapes, making the fall a great time to fortify lawns against any harsh conditions to come.

Homeowners must take grass type into consideration before taking steps to prepare their lawns for the winter. Some grasses are best fertilized in late-summer, while others should be fertilized in autumn. Cool-season grasses, including fescue and bluegrass, are best fertilized sometime between the months of September and November. Warm-season grasses, such as Bermuda or zoysia, should be fertilized between July and September. Once homeowners have gained a greater understanding of their lawns, they can begin exploring the various ways to prepare their lawns for whatever winter has in store.

1 Explore winterizing fertilizers

Homeowners who want to make their grasses more winter hardy can consult landscaping professionals to determine if winterizing fertilizers will work for their lawns. These specially formulated fertilizers, many of which are made exclusively for cool-season grasses, contain higher levels of potassium and lower levels of nitrogen than early-season fertilizers. Potassium helps strengthen and harden plants, and cool-season grasses may need extra potassium as winter settles in. Homeowners who are not sure if they should apply winterizing fertilizer can conduct soil tests to determine the potassium levels in their soil. If the test indicates the soil has sufficient potassium, then applying a winterizing fertilizer is likely unnecessary. In addition, homeowners who have fed their lawn a balance of nutrients throughout spring and summer likely will not need to apply winterizing fertilizer.



2 Get rid of fallen leaves

While fallen leaves may be integral components of idyllic autumn landscapes, leaves left on the lawn throughout the winter may lead to disease in the grass. Leaves trap moisture and block sunlight and air from reaching grass, and that can encourage the development of disease. In addition, leaves can harbor insects that also may contribute to disease. While it might seem like common sense to delay leaf removal until the end of autumn when all the leaves have fallen, that, too, can prove harmful to lawns. Leaves left laying on lawns for long periods of time can contribute to the same types of damage as leaves left on the lawn throughout winter, so do your best to remove leaves as they fall.

3 Take steps to fight snow mold

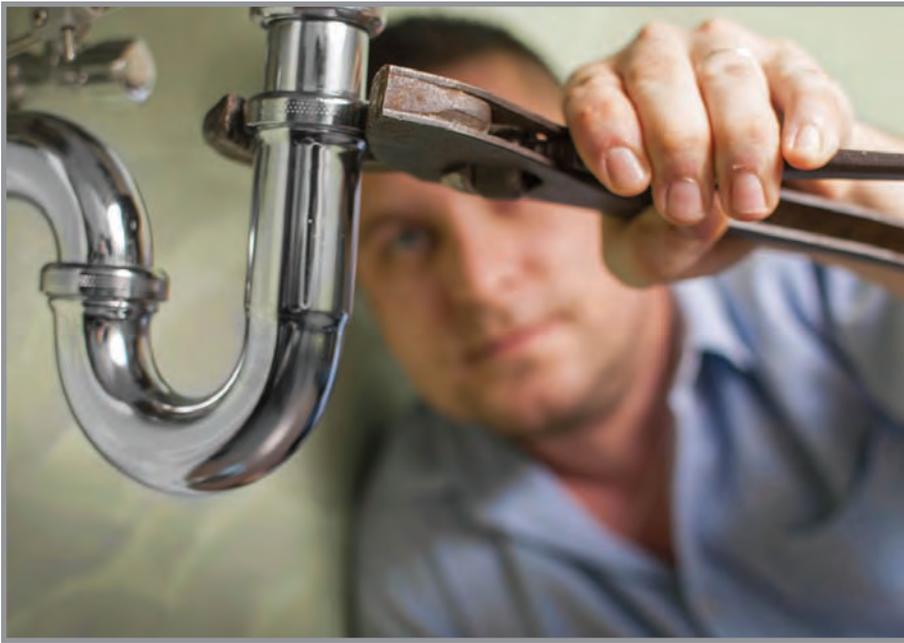
Homeowners who live in regions where snow falls into spring or where spring tends to be cold and damp may want to take steps to prevent snow mold. Gray snow mold typically looks fuzzy and gray, and lawns infested with snow mold may develop unsightly gray or brown spots indicative of dead grass. Pink snow mold may be even worse than gray snow mold because pink mold attacks the roots as well as the leaves. To prevent snow mold, continue mowing into the fall, even as lawns grow dormant, clearing the lawn of grass clippings and leaves after each mow. Thick lawns may provide a breeding ground for snow mold, so homeowners whose lawns have a history of developing snow mold may benefit from mowing their lawns into the fall.

Winter is rarely easy on lawns, but homeowners can take several steps to prepare their lawns for potentially harsh winter weather.

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PROTECT PIPES from FREEZING this winter

Freezing pipes are a concern for homeowners who live in cold climates. When temperatures dip below freezing, the risk that pipes will freeze rises. Should a pipe burst, the damage that results can be extensive and costly.

Any pipe can freeze, but those that are directly exposed to the cold are the most vulnerable. These include pipes that feed outdoor hoses, swimming pool supply lines, pipes in unheated indoor rooms (i.e., basements or garages), and any pipes that run close to the outdoors through uninsulated walls. Water expands as it freezes, and that expansion can place pressure on whatever is trying to contain it – including pipes.

To avoid serious damage, homeowners need to prepare for the arrival of

see PIPES | 12

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Sitting on your living room couch doesn't seem risky, but did you know that your cushions could contain flame retardants that could be hazardous to your health? Products that are likely to contain flame retardants include couches made after 1970, including love seats, recliners and padded chairs; children's car seats; infant sleep wedges and pregnancy pillows; high chairs and portable crib mattresses. Have concerns? A research team at Duke University will test up to five samples from your furniture or household products for free. Start the simple submission process by visiting foam.pratt.duke.edu to get a serial number. Then you'll need to cut out a piece of foam about the size of a marble, wrap it in aluminum foil, seal it in a sandwich bag and mail it in. Styrofoam and polyester filling will not be tested. You'll receive a brief report of the findings in about 45 days. — **MCN**



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BREATHE

Continued from 4

cancer survivor whose disease was caused by environmental factors. VOCs are also brought in the home by many cleaning, disinfecting, cosmetic, degreasing and hobby products and dry-cleaned clothing and rugs. All of these products release VOCs over a period of time.

Studies have found that levels of several volatile organic compounds average two to five times higher indoors than outdoors. During and for several hours immediately after certain activities, such as paint stripping, levels may be 1,000 times greater than outdoor levels, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

There are several steps that can reduce your family's exposure to VOCs.

"Take a look at your existing ventilation system. Change your filters

regularly and clean out air ducts," Pritchard Cooke said.

If you're painting or having carpet installed, "toxins are introduced into the air. Run your HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems on overtime. Even if the paint is no-VOC, you're still introducing chemicals into the home. Get the fresh air moving. Run fans and air purifiers," Pritchard Cooke said.

"Consumers need to be more vigilant," Pritchard Cooke said. "They are often not aware of what they are bringing into their homes similar to 10 years ago when they did not know what was in their food. Reading and understanding labels is key. We need manufacturers to be transparent and accountable. It took a long time to get fire retardants out of upholstery — thankfully that was a battle worth fighting and the result has produced healthier upholstery nationwide."

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Simplify fall leaf cleanup

Apple pie, pumpkins and blooming chrysanthemums are symbols of autumn. But nothing signals the arrival of fall more than the millions of leaves that begin to cascade from the trees as the temperatures dip.



Many people believe nothing is more beautiful than the yellow, red, purple, and orange leaves that coat neighborhoods and countrysides each fall. But in spite of their beauty, leaves might be a nuisance to homeowners tasked with removing the growing piles of them from their lawns. Those with large oak and maple trees in front of their homes understand the seemingly endless work of leaf removal.

As the days begin to grow shorter and colder, these changes trigger a hormone release in trees, prompting them to drop their leaves. This chemical message causes the formation of abscission cells where the leaf stem meets the branch, say botanists at the Missouri Botanical Garden. So rather than merely dropping off of trees when the wind blows, the leaves actually fall off deliberately.

Left untouched, fallen leaves can contribute to lawn problems such as poor aeration, mold growth and moisture issues. Leaves also can cause staining on

driveways and walkways. Prompt removal can help prevent any problems. To make faster and easier work of leaf removal, keep these tips in mind.

- Mow over thin leaf coverage. If only a few leaves have fallen, use a mulching mower to shred the leaves until they are small enough that they won't suffocate the lawn. The small pieces will decompose in the lawn, reintroducing nutrients as a result.

- Use an ergonomic leaf rake. Ergonomic rakes can prevent back and arm pain, much in the way that ergonomic shovels do when shoveling snow.

- Invest in a quality leaf blower. Using a rake is good exercise, but homeowners with large properties might want to use a leaf blower. These machines can dislodge leaves from bushes and hard-to-reach crevices, and they work faster than rakes.

see LEAF | 13

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YOUR FALL TO-DO LIST

METRO CREATIVE
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Homeowners know that maintaining a home can be a year-round job. No home is immune to wear and tear, and homeowners who want to protect their real estate investments should try to stay two steps ahead to ensure their homes do not succumb to the elements or become outdated and unappealing to prospective buyers.

Fall has become a season that's synonymous with home improvement, but homeowners need not wait until the leaves begin changing colors to start planning their next projects. The following are a few items homeowners can add to their fall home improvement to-do lists.

Roof inspection

Less precipitation tends to fall during the warmer months than during the late fall and winter. As a result, homeowners may not be aware of leaky roofs until autumn has come and gone. But waiting until winter to inspect the roof can prove disastrous, as weather conditions will not be conducive to inspection and increased precipitation may result in potentially costly damage. Leaky roofs can be easily identified by looking for water stains on interior ceilings. Once you see a stain, you can climb onto the roof to identify the location of the leak and fix it before winter rains and snowfall turn the problem into something much larger. Inspect your ceilings for signs of leaking after a strong rainfall, and then address any leaks immediately.



Gutter cleaning

While some homeowners prefer to delay their gutter cleaning projects until late fall, those whose homes are surrounded by trees may need to schedule two such projects. Gutters clogged with leaves and other debris can cause serious roof damage, and that damage can extend all the way inside a home. In addition, clogged gutters make great nesting areas for insects or critters. Always stand on a ladder when cleaning gutters, wearing gloves to remove items by hand and dropping leaves and debris into a trash can below. Standing on the roof and leaning over gutters greatly increases your risk of injury. If the gutters are clear when you first examine them in early fall, you can wait until later in the season to give them a complete and thorough cleaning. Once you have finished clearing the gutters, you can use a hose to run water through them and the downspouts to confirm everything is functioning properly.

Window and doorway inspection

Before temperatures start dropping once again, homeowners will want to inspect their windows and doorways for leaks. Over time, cracks can develop around windows and doorways, and while such cracks are rarely noticeable when the weather outside is warm, they can be quite obvious

see LIST | 13

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arpets provide both practical and aesthetic appeal inside a home. In winter, carpets help keep homes warm, and the right color carpet can add to design schemes.

While rugs may have originated in the Far East, North America also has some rich carpet history. According to The Carpet and Rug Institute, the United States carpet industry began in 1791 when the first woven carpet mill opened in Philadelphia. Others soon followed suit. Tufted carpets and machine-powered manufacturing helped churn out yards upon yards of carpeting, making it a popular, affordable and common addition to homes, especially after the post-World War II housing boom.

Carpeting remains a go-to flooring material in modern homes. In fact, many homes offer a blend of both carpeting in some rooms and different flooring choices in others.

Upon choosing carpet, it is important that homeowners follow some guidelines to prolong a carpet's longevity and maintain its style. The following are some common carpeting dos and don'ts.

DO consider the room's purpose and foot traffic before shopping for carpeting. Make a list of the attributes desired (e.g., soundproofing, easy care, high pile) and present these to the salesperson so he or she can help you make the best choice.

DON'T rush into flooring choices. Unlike paint colors, flooring materials are more permanent choices that are only updated every several years or more. Weigh all of your options before diving in.

DO consider conservative colors and styles. Neutral hues and patterns will blend better with furniture options. This means you can change

see **CARPET** | 14



Sustainable flooring options abound



Kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects tend to make great investments, earning homeowners significant returns when they sell their homes down the road. But flooring upgrades are another home renovation project that can attract attention and help sellers when they put their homes on the market.

Home flooring options abound, and it is easy to get excited and overwhelmed about flooring reno-

vation projects. When choosing new flooring materials, homeowners should keep in mind the latest consumer trends, as those trends might help them recoup more of their flooring investment down the road.

One popular flooring trend is the use of sustainable materials. In addition to the more widely known benefits of choosing sustainable flooring, such as protecting natural resources and reducing a home's

carbon footprint, sustainable flooring can help reduce indoor air pollution. Various studies from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have shown that indoor air pollutant levels may be higher indoors than outdoors. A major contributor to indoor air pollution are the volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, being off-gassed by carpeting and other flooring in a home.

see **FLOORING** | 14

A place to MULTITASK

By **Melissa Erickson**
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METRO CREATIVE PHOTO

The kitchen has always been the heart of the home, but no longer is it a tucked-away space for meal prep. The new trend is a connected “super kitchen” that serves multiple purposes and incorporates features traditionally found in other parts of the home, according to the latest Houzz Kitchen Trends Survey.

“The kitchen has been a gathering place for friends and families for many years now, but it will become part of the main living space even further,” said kitchen and bath designer Petra Jakobskrueger of Creative Partner, a European-style kitchen and bath design and home remodeling specialist in the San Francisco Bay area. “In almost all our current projects we merge kitchen and living room, for exam-

ple, by including hidden and integrated appliances.”

The line between the kitchen and other living spaces is now being dramatically blurred, the survey found. Of people who are in the midst of planning or recently completed kitchen renovations, the survey found that 69 percent use the space for eating and dining, and nearly

see **MULTITASK** | 14



PIPES

Continued from 7

colder weather and be smart about how they protect pipes.

- Drain water from swimming pools and water sprinkler supply lines prior to the onset of cold weather. Drain water before freezing temperatures arrive, and don't forget to drain outdoor garden hoses and store them inside after watering season has come and gone.

- Close indoor water valves that feed outdoor spigots/bibs. Open the spigot outside to allow water to drain out. Keep the outside valve open so that any water that has accumulated will continue to drain and expand outward without damaging the pipe. An insulated bib dome also can help prevent frozen pipes.

- Open cabinet doors to allow heat to reach pipes inside of cabinets. Keep the doors open to spaces that may not be heated or insulated as well as other areas of the home so that heat can find its way inside. Consider

wrapping these pipes with an insulating material as well, such as heat tape or pipe sleeves.

- Maintain a consistent thermostat temperature. Ensure the temperature inside your home does not drop below 55 F; otherwise, problems can arise. Use a programmable thermostat to keep the house comfortable even when you are not home. Individuals who are traveling should set the thermostat so that it will keep the home at the recommended temperature to avoid frozen pipes.

- Open one faucet. When it is very cold outside, particularly at night, let water slowly drip from one faucet to prevent freezing. Choose the sink that is furthest from where water enters the house so water is flowing through all of the pipes to reach that faucet.

- Increase insulation around where pipes enter the house. Use insulating foam to seal any drafts where pipes enter the house from the outdoors.



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Prepare your fireplace or stove for the season

Fireplaces and wood-burning stoves not only can be beautiful focal points within a home, but they also provide an additional source of heat and can be used to keep rooms or entire homes comfortable without the need for additional and potentially costly heating sources.

Just like more modern home heating systems, stoves and fireplaces need to be maintained, and that maintenance includes readying them before winter when they are used more heavily. Ensuring a fireplace or stove is in good working order helps to guarantee efficiency of use and safety during the winter months.

Open-flame heating sources carry with them certain risks. The National Fire Protection Association states that, between 2009-2013, American fire departments responded to 56,000 home structure fires that involved heating equipment. The NFPA notes that the leading factor contributing to home-heating fires is a failure to keep things clean, principally from solid-fueled heating equipment. The following are a handful of ways to stay safe as you get ready for another cozy season around the fire.

- Start with the chimney. Begin by having your chimney thoroughly

see **PREPARE** | 14

METRO CREATIVE CONTENT

LIST

Continued from 10

and very costly if they remain unsealed come the start of winter. Cold air can enter a home through cracks around windows and doorways, and many homeowners who don't suspect leaks may respond by turning up the thermostats in their homes. That can prove quite expensive over a full winter. Choose a windy autumn day to place a hand by windows and external doorways in your home to see if you can feel drafts. If you can, seal these cracks as soon as possible.

Patio cleanup

Patios are popular hang-

outs during spring and summer, and that can result in a lot of wear and tear. Once you store patio furniture for the winter, inspect your entire patio to determine if it needs any refurbishing. While certain patio projects may be best left for spring, you can still clean any stained areas around the grill and look for cracks in the sidewalk that need to be addressed.

Preparing for fall home improvement projects ahead of time can help homeowners complete projects in a timely manner and ensures they won't be forced to brave the winter elements when refurbishing their homes.

LEAF

Continued from 9

- Use a tarp. Rake or blow leaves onto a tarp and then drag the tarp to the curbside or to the back of a truck for proper disposal. Special leaf scoopers enable you to grab more leaves if they need to be picked up and transported. Otherwise, you can use the covers from two garbage pails to achieve a similar effect.

- Work with the wind. Rake in the direction the wind is blowing and downhill

if your property slopes. This way it will be easier on you, and you won't be working against Mother Nature.

- Spread out the job. Do not attempt to remove all fallen leaves in a single day. Schedule a few cleaning days during the season to make lighter work of the job than if you tried to do it all at once. Keep in mind that leaves will continue to fall throughout the season and you may need to spend a few days removing leaves from your yard.

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MULTITASK

Continued from 12

half for entertaining (49 percent) and socializing (43 percent). In addition, more than a quarter of renovating homeowners use their kitchen as a homework space (25 percent), one in five watch TV (19 percent), and 14 percent read. Because it's become the hub of such activity, 60 percent of homeowners spend more than three hours a day in their kitchens.

"Planning a new kitchen, I always ask homeowners how they entertain so we can plan the space according to their specific needs. Typical features for entertainment these days are built-in speakers, a wet or wine bar, and a big, multifunctional island," Jakobskrueger said. "Workspaces in addition to dining tables are also a common request. Parents want to be able to take care of bills, check emails, do on-

FLOORING

Continued from 11

Flooring manufacturers and designers are embracing the green design and remodeling movement. Today there are many beautiful and sustainable eco-flooring options. Here are some of the more popular materials.

- **Bamboo:** Contrary to popular belief, bamboo is not a wood, but a grass. It is a fast-growing grass, and that makes it a smart choice in many design applications. Also, unlike wood, which will absorb moisture and can warp, bamboo repels water and can be used for flooring in areas where one wouldn't think to put wood, such as in bathrooms, entryways or mudrooms. Bamboo is naturally very light in color, but can be stained in many different hues to give homeowners

line shopping from the convenience of their kitchen while their kids might do homework on the island."

High-tech features are welcome additions to the kitchen.

"Homeowners also select state-of-the-art appliances, from steam ovens to built-in coffee machines to wine coolers. They look for smarter appliances and other kitchen gadgets that make cooking easy and more convenient. A big hit are hidden charging stations, for example in a drawer, to store devices like phones and tablets so that they are always operable, at hand, and charged but out of the way," Jakobskrueger said.

"The modern 'super kitchen' supports family, friends and work and does it in style," said Nino Sitchinava, principal economist at Houzz. "Our findings show that homeowners expect kitchen renovations to go far beyond improving flow, storage or aesthetics. The 'super kitchen'

more options.

- **Green carpeting:** Consumers can now find a wide range of sustainable carpets and rugs that are available at competitive prices. Wool carpets made with undyed or vegetable-dyed yarns and minimal glues are some options. Some carpets are even made from recycled content, such as rubber and plastics. Water-based, low-VOC adhesives paired with recycled cotton padding can reduce the toxicity and impact of carpeting even further.

- **Cork:** Growing in popularity, cork is a material harvested from the bark of cork trees found in the forests of the Mediterranean. The bark grows back every three years, so it is a handy renewable resource. Cork boasts fire-retardant properties and may naturally repel insects.

has literally become a living room, family room and office, with finishes, layouts and decor that challenge us to define where the kitchen ends and the rest of the home begins."

The survey also found that kitchen updates often included changing the layout to support better flow. U-shaped kitchens are the most popular choice of new layout (35 percent), followed by L-shape (28 percent), shapes which lend themselves most easily to open-concept floorplans.

Neutral colors were the most popular. Similar to last year's findings, the majority of those renovating kitchens continue to gravitate toward colors that will stand the test of time. Shades of beige, gray and white are top choices for updated walls, and white and medium-light wood are still trending for cabinets. Updated counters either integrate multiple colors or are primarily white or black, the survey found.

It can usually be stained to suit various color schemes.

- **Rubber:** Rubber flooring may call to mind fitness gyms and playground safety substrate, but it's also slowly finding its way into homes. Made from recycled tires, rubber flooring is flexible underfoot and can be long-lasting and colorful.

- **Reclaimed wood:** Rather than purchasing brand new hardwood planks for flooring, homeowners can opt for reclaimed wood reused from other building applications. After some sanding, staining and finishing, reclaimed wood provides homeowners with the opportunity to choose traditional hardwood flooring without any concerns about deforestation.

Eco-friendly flooring materials continue to evolve and can be smart choices in today's homes.

CARPET

Continued from 11

furniture out and still keep the existing carpeting, which complements any new pieces. Also, if there's a chance you might sell your home in the near future, buyers tend to look for a neutral color scheme they can make their own.

DON'T skimp on padding to save a few dollars on the carpet installation. The carpeting needs a solid foundation to last and look its best. Inadequate padding can lead to extra and noticeable wear and tear. Invest in a good foundation for the carpeting, like firm, dense padding in high-traffic areas.

PREPARE

Continued from 13

cleaned and inspected. Creosote can build up inside of the chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and becomes more difficult and expensive to clean the longer it builds up inside your flue lining. In addition, animals may have created nest inside of the chimney since the last time the fireplace was used. A professional chimney sweep should be hired in this situation. He or she will be able to effectively clean the chimney in a manner that is the least messy and disruptive to residents.

- **Install or check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.** Operational alarms are essential to preventing injury or death resulting from smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation. Such detectors are inexpensive safeguards that should be installed on every floor of the house. Batteries should be replaced every six months, and the alarms themselves should be changed every five to 10 years.

- **Have a professional inspect the chimney from outdoors as well.** If left unaddressed, dangerous fires can occur. If there are serious cracks, a professional may need to make repairs or the chimney may need to be replaced. You also can have the chimney capped with a screen to keep animals and debris from entering.

- **Have a professional inspect the damper.** A damper is a valve or plate that stops or regulates the flow of air inside a chimney. It should be checked prior to the first use of a stove or fireplace so homeowners can be certain it opens and closes smoothly.

- **Clear out flammable items.** Move flammable items away from the front of a fireplace or stove. Be sure curtains or other home furnishings are far enough away that they will not catch fire from any errant sparks or flames.

- **Order wood now.** Be sure there is plenty of wood for the season.

MOLD

Continued from 5

ensure the area where the spill happened and all surrounding areas vulnerable to mold growth are dry. In addition, fix leaky plumbing fixtures immediately, hiring a professional if necessary.

- Inspect the ground surrounding your home. Factors outside a home can sometimes contribute to mold growth within a home. Make sure the ground outside your home slopes away from the foundation. If the ground slopes toward your home, rainwater or runoff from sprinkler systems may direct water into your home, creating conditions favorable to mold growth inside. Gutters and downspouts also should be inspected to ensure they are working optimally. If not, they can contribute to water damage on the roof that can ultimately lead to mold growth.

- Monitor indoor humidity. The EPA advises that homeowners keep indoor humidity below 60 percent relative humidity, which can be measured with humidity meters available at many hardware stores. Homeowners who can keep indoor humidity at levels 30 to 50 percent below relative humidity might be even more successful at keeping indoor mold growth at bay.

- Dry wet surfaces immediately. Surfaces can become wet even if a home has no leaky fixtures and no spills have occurred. For example, the surfaces of bathroom walls, ceilings and floors get wet when a home's inhabitants take hot baths or showers. That condensation is natural, but such surfaces are also susceptible to mold growth. Make sure to dry wet surfaces immediately, and keep exhaust fans on or windows open when bathing to decrease the likelihood of mold growth.

Did you know?

The arrival of cooler weather marks a prime time to plant bulbs that will bloom come spring and summer. Bulbs should be planted as soon as the ground is cool, ideally when temperatures average between 40 and 50 F. Just be sure to plant bulbs at least six weeks before the ground freezes for optimal success. Always follow the bulb distributor's guidelines for planting, including suggestions regarding spacing and soil depth. Remove any weeds and loosen the soil to get started. In addition, think about mixing in compost or other organic matter to enrich the soil if it lacks nutrients.

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