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Start at the top: Clean out gutters to prepare for the damaging snow and ice to come.

Winter Warmups

Late fall is the perfect time to get your home and garden ready for the big chill on the way. We asked the experts to tell us how.

By Kristan Zimmer

Go with the flow

"Make sure nothing freezes," says Scott Hobbs, of Hobbs Inc. in New Canaan, CT. The builder, who provides homeowners with seasonal maintenance, advises that you have gutters cleaned out and all exterior hoses drained. Turn off the water to hoses from inside the house and drain the pipes if you don't have a frost-free outdoor faucet. If you have a home sprinkler system, have it shut off and the water blown out of it with pressurized air.

Ground potted plants

Perennials are meant to go dormant and come back the next year, so you don't have to bring them inside. To protect potted perennials, take them out of pots and plant them in the ground, says Kim Conte of Fairfield House & Garden in Fairfield, CT. Water them weekly until the frost. Or, if

you want to keep them potted, dig a hole and bury the pot (just be sure it's plastic as terra cotta will crack).

Protect appliances

Your outdoor kitchen needs special attention in winter so appliances (like refrigerators, stoves and dishwashers) can withstand colder temperatures. Turn off water and electricity, drain water lines and clean appliances thoroughly before covering them up, says Hobbs. If possible, bring them indoors; they'll last a lot longer.

Shelter shrubs, bushes

A deer repellent can help keep deer from eating your bushes. Cage small tree trunks to prevent damage from bucks who rub against them to scrape the felt off their antlers. You shouldn't have to wrap evergreen shrubs to protect them from snow

and ice, says Scott Fawcett of Hoffman Landscapes in Wilton, CT. Winter is when they come into their own.

Say no to nitrogen

Don't feed plants with high nitrogen fertilizers, says Daryl Beyers, head landscaper at Poundridge Nurseries in Pound Ridge, NY. Such fertilizers promote vital growth of stems and leaves, which won't have time to harden before the first frost. If you do fertilize in the fall, use a high potassium fertilizer to promote root growth. "This is always a good thing to help plants survive tough winters," he says.

Keep systems in check

Don't wait until you need your heat or chimney before you have them serviced, says Hobbs. To keep your heating system humming, have it checked out every fall. Chimneys should be swept out every few years, and if you use your fireplace frequently, clean it annually.

Patch things up

If you didn't get around to repairing cracks in your driveway or walkways in spring, fall is your last chance to seal them. "The longer the crack is in existence, the more it will cause the driveway to deteriorate," says Hobbs. Walk your property and look for areas that need repair.

Mulch more

"Check the mulch layer on your garden beds and add a fresh layer anywhere you see bare ground," says Beyers. "Mulch acts as an insulator that keeps the soil temperature consistent...this prevents frost heave (when the ground rises up and cracks) in areas where cycles of freezing and thawing are common." ❧

SOURCES

- **Scott Fawcett**, Hoffman Landscapes, hoffmanlandscapes.com
- **Daryl Beyers**, Poundridge Nurseries, poundridgeny.org
- **Scott Hobbs**, Hobbs Inc., hobbs-care.com
- **Kim Conte**, Fairfield House & Garden, fairfieldhouseandgarden.com