

Prepare for Winter By Doing Outdoor Maintenance Chores This Fall

Although the fall season has just begun, winter is just around the corner! Take the necessary steps now to ensure your home and lawn can hold up to another cold, wet season.

Lawn and Landscape Care

- **Reseed and fertilize.** Fall is a great time for new grass seed to take root, so consider reseeding in selected areas of your lawn. Reseeding also helps keep weeds from growing in the spring. Fertilize your lawn with a high-nitrogen fertilizer to encourage root growth. Look for a lawn fertilizer labeled “winterizing.”
- **Aerate your lawn.** Over time your lawn can become compacted, which hinders grass growth. Aerating — or breaking up the soil surface by poking holes into the ground — reduces thatch, loosens up compacted soils and paves the way for water and nutrients to reach the roots of your grass.

There are different tools you can use to properly aerate your lawn, including self-propelled units, lawnmower attachments, and hand- or foot-powered plugging tools which can be rented or purchased at your local hardware or home supply store.

- **Trim your trees and remove dead branches.** High winds or heavy snows can cause weak trees or branches to break and cause damage to property and person. Look for large dead branches in trees, cavities or rotten wood along trunks or major branches, mushrooms at the base of trees, cracks or splits in trunks, and leaves that prematurely develop unusual color or size.

Home Exterior Tasks

- **Maintain your gutters.** Remove all debris from your gutters so water can properly drain. This minimizes standing water and slows the freeze/thaw expansion process that occurs in cold weather. Clogged gutters can damage landscaping, lawn and shrubbery, walls, foundation, basement and crawl spaces. Consider installing “gutter guards,” which will prevent debris from entering the gutter and direct the flow of water away from the house and into the ground.
- **Inspect your roof.** To help prevent expensive emergency repairs, look for damaged or loose shingles, gaps in the flashing where the roofing and siding meet vents and flues, and loose or damaged mortar around the chimney. If you see any signs of damage, call a professional to repair the damage.
- **Inspect your home’s exterior walls.** To prevent leaks or drafts, look for possible weather-related damage, like cracks and loose or crumbling mortar. Wood trim and siding can suffer from deteriorating paint or become loose. Windowsills may be cracked, split or decayed.

Taking the time to tackle these chores now will save you an even larger hassle doing repair work once winter has come and gone. For more home maintenance tips, visit the National Association of Home Builders online at www.nahb.org/forconsumers.