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As the clock turns: Homeowner's Autumn Checklist

Whatever the weatherman or the almanac says, we know that the warm season really ends with the changing of the clocks to mark the beginning of standard time again. Mornings are suddenly dark and frigid, and we know that winter is upon us. Protect your home and garden investment – by taking some time to batten down the hatches outdoors before the snow flies!

1. Last chance for repairs:

Begin by looking up. Your roof and eaves troughs will need to be in good condition to protect your home in the coming months. In particular, be sure to clear leaves and debris from gutters and downspouts; if a clog forces melting ice back against the shingles, you'll be dealing with an ice dam – a serious hazard to the integrity of your roof. While you're checking the eaves trough, make a visual inspection of the roof itself – looking for loose or broken shingles, or damaged vents. Check your chimney for any loose brick or crumbling mortar. Mortar is temperature-sensitive and difficult to repair as the weather gets cold. Any work on the roof should be considered a two-person job, we should add. Always have a strong adult to steady the ladder for the person working at the roof. Now is also the time to repair any fence, lattice, or trellis – before the winter winds and ice take their toll.

2. Tool shed tune up:

Many a fine garden tool has met its demise far too soon, because it has been left outside over the winter. Your yard and garden tools have been working hard this summer, and they'll be in need of proper care and storage for winter. Begin by removing any caked dirt with a good wire brush; some gardeners prefer using a wire whisk attachment on a power drill. Now's the time to sharpen any tools that have become blunted by a season's use: hoe's, spades, pruners, loppers and saws, if you have them. As you're cleaning, check your

tools carefully for any loose screws or nuts. Finally, spray any metal parts and cutting edges with a good penetrating oil like WD-40. Wooden handles should be wiped with boiled linseed oil to prevent cracking and drying.

3. Power Tools:

often have special requirements at the end of season. In general, you should change the oil and sparkplugs of any equipment, and have blades sharpened. This can be done professionally, if you prefer.

4. Before the freeze:

Garden hoses don't need much care, and it's easy to forget about them at the end of the season. But take some time to straighten and drain your hose, and store it in a loose coil or on a reel – not hanging from a nail. Be sure you don't leave an opportunity for water to enter the hose over the winter months. If you have an irrigation system, be sure to winterize it as well – blowing out the lines to ensure that ice doesn't have an opportunity to split and break the waterlines below ground. Turn off any outside taps at source, then drain them at the faucet.

5. Wheelbarrows, carts and wagons:

These workhorses also deserve some attention at the end of the season. Touch up any paint chips and treat any rust spots. Give wheels a spray of oil to keep them running smoothly.

6. Turn on the lights!

You'll need your outdoor lighting as the nightfall comes sooner. Take the time to replace bulbs and ensure that any switches and timers are adjusted for the shorter daylight hours.



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