Playing It Straight
How to level an uneven yard

fall HOME & GARDEN

September 2019
A Special Supplement to the
Moultrie Observer

Winter is Coming
Simple tips to prepare your deck for winter

Living Outdoors
How to create a winter-friendly outdoor living space

Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter's arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well.

Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening.

But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

INSPECT THE DECK FOR PROBLEMS

Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer.

Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed before winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.

CLEAR THE DECK OF POTTED PLANTS

Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall.

The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.

STORE UNNECESSARY FURNITURE

Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a garage or shed for the winter.

HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

REMOVE SNOW, BUT DO SO CAREFULLY

Prolonged contact with snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant.

HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring.

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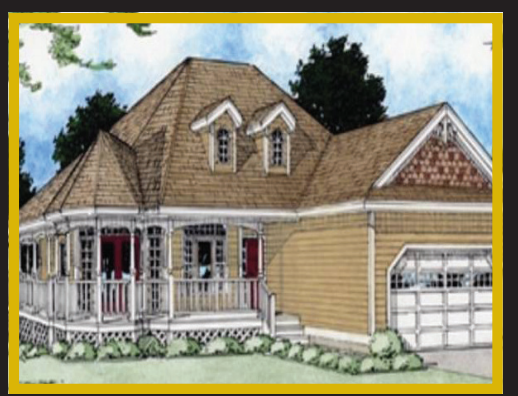

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How to level an uneven yard

Many things can cause a yard to be uneven. Drainage problems, leaky pipes beneath the grass and pests can wreak havoc on a yard, resulting in uneven turf that can be both unsightly and unsafe.

Addressing an uneven yard might be homeowners' ultimate goal, but the home experts at BobVila.com note that homeowners should first figure out what's causing the problem and make fixing that their first task. Fixing uneven ground above leaky pipes will only be a temporary fix if the leaks themselves are not addressed. Professional contractors might be necessary depending on the severity of the problem. However, once the underlying issue has been addressed, many homeowners can handle the task of leveling an uneven yard on their own.

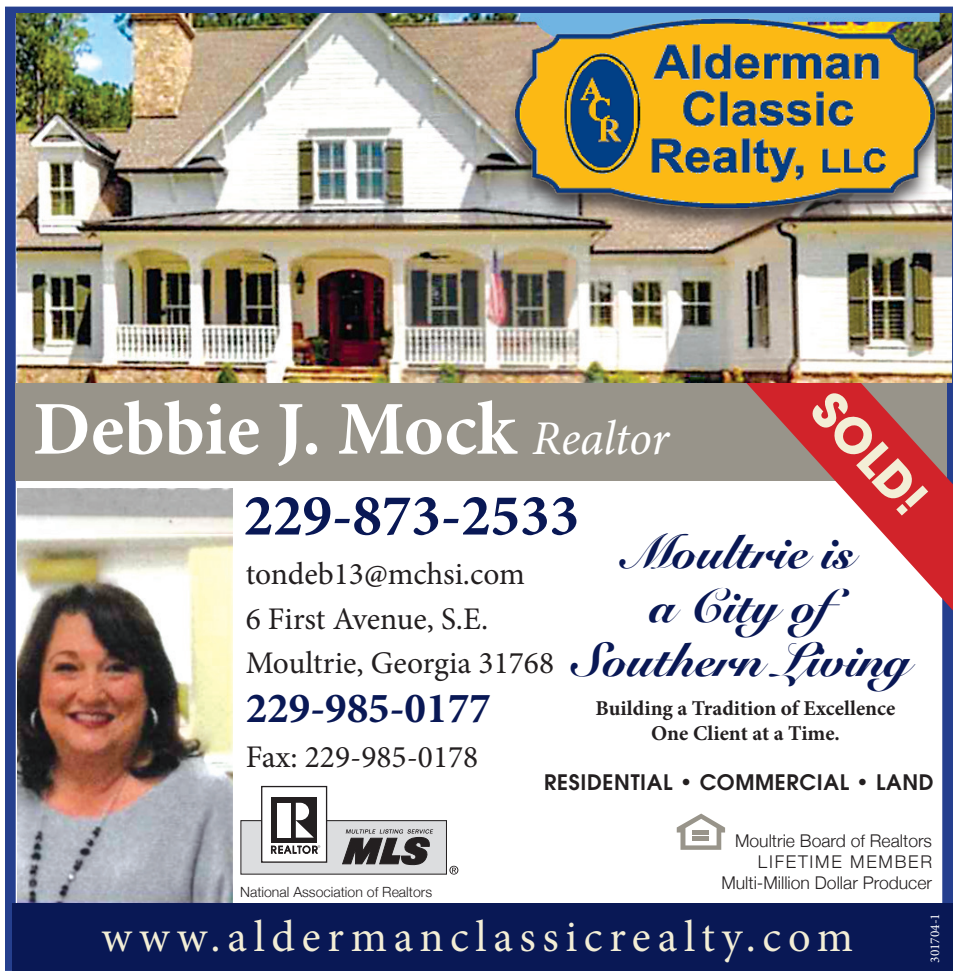
Get the right tools and materials. Leveling an uneven yard may require various tools. Thatch will likely need to be removed from the lawn before it can be leveled out, so homeowners will need a thatch rake or dethatching machine to get this task started. Dethatching machines are generally necessary for especially large lawns, and these can typically be rented from home improvement retailers. A shovel, bow rake and push broom are other tools homeowners will likely need. Materials such as topsoil, compost and sand will be necessary as well, and these are typically sold at local garden centers.

Fill in areas beneath the grass. Areas beneath the grass can be filled in with a mixture of sand, topsoil and compost. The experts at BobVila.com advise using two parts sand, two parts topsoil and one part compost. Each of these components plays its own role in restoring the yard to full health. Sand helps the ground stay level, while the topsoil and compost provide the grass with valuable nutrients. If the low spots are not especially deep, this mixture can be applied without removing the grass. However, before filling in holes when addressing spots that are deeper than two or three inches, remove the grass then place it back in place once the hole has been filled. To dig up the grass, put the blade of the shovel at the outside of the low spot before sliding it under about two or three inches so you do not upset the grass roots.

Spread the top dressing. Once the holes have been filled and the grass has been placed back on the ground (if it was removed), spread the top dressing mix with a shovel. The mix should be spread evenly with the back of the bow rake at a depth of no more than half an inch. Make sure the mix is worked into the low spots and that it's not completely covering the grass, as that will suffocate the lawn. If necessary, use the push broom to work the mix into the soil.

Water the lawn. Finally, water the lawn to help the top dressing settle into the grass. If necessary, repeat the process of applying top dressing and watering until the lawn is even and has returned to full strength.

An uneven lawn is an eyesore and potentially harmful. But fixing an uneven lawn is simple once homeowners discover and address what's behind the issue.



Create a winter friendly outdoor living space

For many homeowners, the arrival of fall and winter marks an end to time spent lounging and dining al fresco on the patio. But cold air does not necessarily mean patio furniture must be packed up until flowers bloom anew in spring.

In its 2017 Home Design Trends Survey, the American Institute of Architects found that consumers continue to emphasize practical features that expand the functionality of their homes via heavy investment in outdoor living spaces. The survey found that the popularity of outdoor living spaces increased by 72 percent between 2012 and 2017, highlighting just how much homeowners enjoy spending time outdoors.

By taking measures to make their outdoor living spaces winterproof, homeowners can enjoy these areas of their homes even more.

COVER YOUR DECK

A covered deck may appear to make the space less enjoyable during spring and summer. However, covered decks can protect residents from the sun on especially hot days while also making the space more functional in winter.

An overhead shelter on a deck can be outfitted with heaters (and fans to provide a cooling effect in summer) and allow residents to sit outside and watch snow fall without getting wet.

PLANT THE RIGHT TREES

Coniferous trees prevent wind, which can be especially harsh in winter.

Homeowners who are unsure about which direction wind typically comes from can consult a landscape architect to determine where to plant the trees to ensure they're most effective.

FIRE UP THE PATIO

A firepit or fireplace can warm up an outdoor living area, making such a space warm and cozy even on a cold winter night.

A patio with a built-in firepit can cost a pretty penny, but such an addition can withstand winter weather better than a standalone firepit, which might be vulnerable to being tipped over by winter winds.

INSTALL LIGHTING

The sun sets early in winter, so homeowners won't be able to rely on natural light to illuminate their outdoor living spaces well into the evening like they do in summer. Heat lamps can be used to both warm and illuminate a space, serving dual, budget-friendly functions.

With the right adjustments, outdoor living spaces can be enjoyed throughout winter.

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For the love of gardening

DEBBIE MOCK

I love to garden. I love the rhythm of the work across the flow of the season; the trust I place in each seed, the watering, the weeding and then watching the plants rise from the earth. I love how the seasons end the same way they begin by placing the spade into the ground and turning the soil. Labor is meditation.

As with most hobbies, you can put as much into gardening as you have time and inclination. You can plant a small container with cheerful flowers to put outside your door or you can build a raised bed garden as we have.

Making a big pot of soup from freshly picked vegetables is a joy or pulling carrots and digging potatoes for the best stew you would want to taste. Especially, when you share it.

Fall is in the air soon, so this is the perfect time to get your gardens in order for fall vegetables. We all love fresh food and it makes it even better when you grow your own. Happy planting!

By Debbie Mock
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Wood paneling makes a comeback

Design trends come and go, but some have a funny way of resurfacing years after they first became popular.

Homeowners who may have been considering renovating their home to remove a design element they believe to be passé might want to see if that feature has experienced a resurgence in popularity. In fact, one of the more derided home decor trends of yesteryear has slowly crept back into style, albeit in moderation.

Wood paneling is back and better than ever, advise many design professionals. It's the formerly ugly duckling that filled homes starting in the 1950s, creating drab dens and faux-wood family rooms.

Paneling had long been an element of choice because it is relatively easy to install and can camouflage problem walls in a home, like those covered in boisterous wallpaper prints.

Wood paneling reached the peak of its popularity in the 1970s, and since then homeowners have been tearing down these faux offenders for years or masking them in paint to brighten up spaces.

However, the experts at Apartment Therapy report that wood paneling in shades of brown are making a comeback in cozy spots such as dens or studies. The warm tones of wood paneling elicit a retro vibe. But unlike their fake predecessors, today's paneled walls are being outfitted in real wood, making them more eco-friendly and stylish than ever before.

Designers have flocked to reclaimed wood and veneer panelings to incorporate them into design elements. And while wood paneling used to be hung vertically, designers now experiment with hanging paneling.

Many people no longer use paneling to cover an entire space. Paneling is used sparingly as an accent wall or another feature for character.

Wood walls can be stained in a rich mahogany to look upscale or be weathered and rustic.

Homeowners ready to re-embrace wood paneling can choose to enhance one wall in a room. Think about the space above a fireplace or a strip of wall behind a sitting chair and side table. Paneling also can serve as a headboard behind a bed in a master suite.

Painted horizontally, paneling can add dimension and texture to walls, even in a bathroom.

Wood paneling is slowly making a comeback, proving that no design trend every truly goes away.

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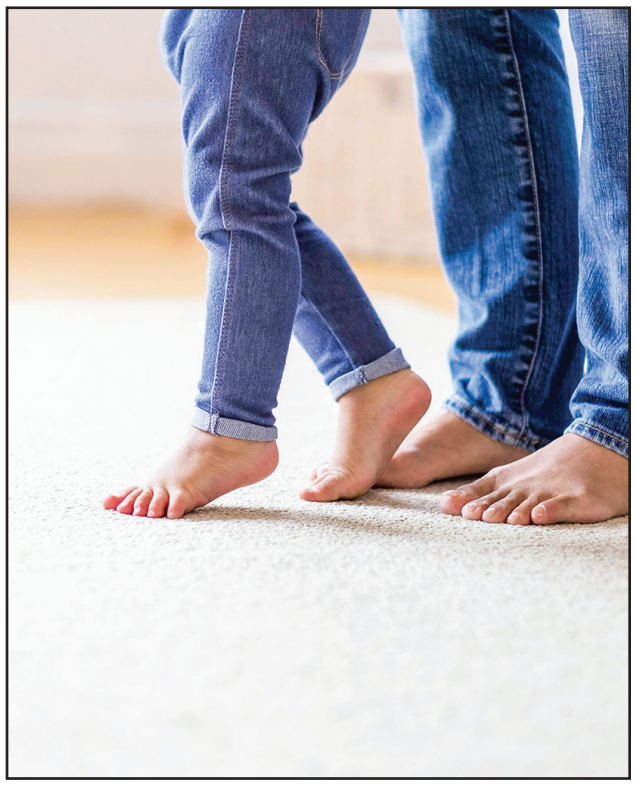

Carpet can add warmth and texture to a room and also provide a little bit of soundproofing. Underfoot, carpeting can be more comfortable than other types of flooring, even though it may require more upkeep. Carpet comes in various forms, but here are the main material components.

Nylon: This is one of the most durable and stain-resistant carpet fibers available and a popular choice among many homeowners.

Polyester: Carpeting can be made from polyester, which is fashioned to feel and look luxurious.

Olefin: Olefin is made from polypropylene or polyethylene. It is prized for its strength, resistance to staining and colorfastness. It is often suited well to loop pile or high, dense cut piles.

Wool: Wool is durable, albeit less resistant to soiling than some other materials. However, because it is an all-natural material, it is prized by people who want natural beauty.

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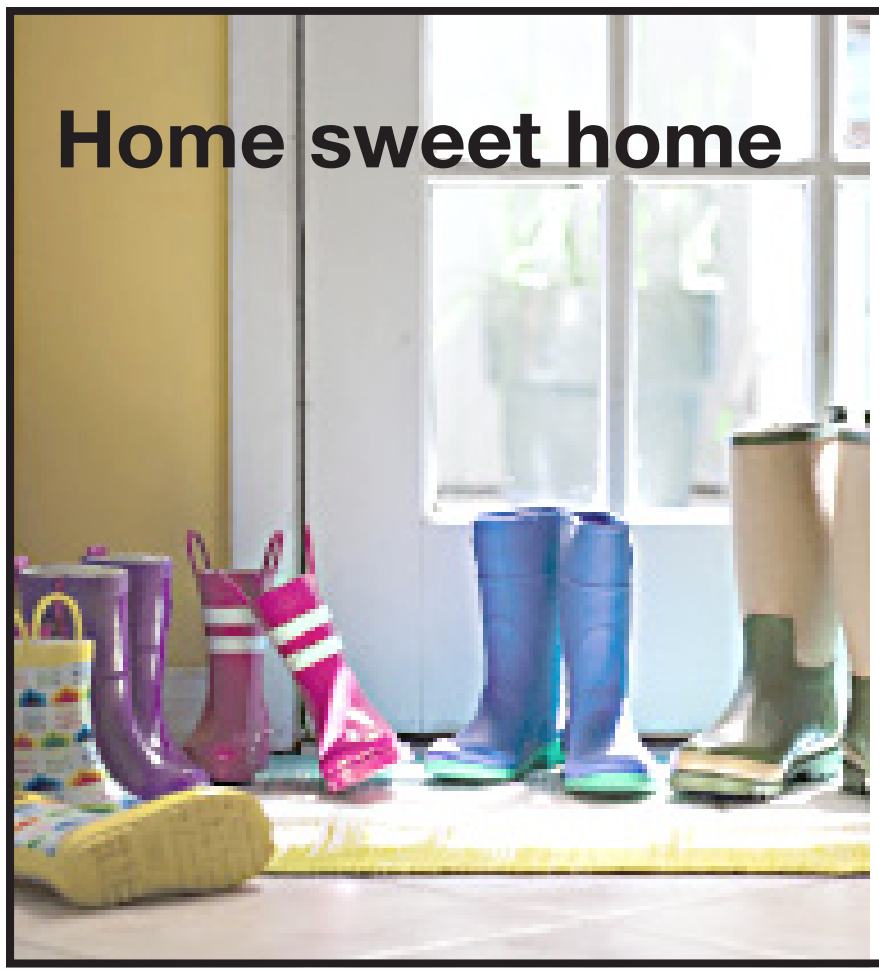

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