



Fall & Winter Home Improvement



Consider mimicking nature in your landscaping this fall

BY CALEB JACKSON
SHORELINE MEDIA WRITER

For many, the fall season is the most beautiful time of the year, however, it is not something that everybody plans for as far as their yard is concerned. If you find your yard looks dull in the autumn, especially in comparison to the natural splendor all around, then Megan Bodrie, landscape designer at Larsen’s Landscaping and Lawn Care in Scottville, has some tips for you. “Fall mums add a lot of color, and ornamental grasses are always a nice plant to incorporate because they flower in the fall,” Bodrie said.

Finding simple ways to add some color to your garden was a big tip from Bodrie. After all, if the trees all around are turning vibrant shades of red and yellow, a well-maintained summer yard may start to look a little dull if it doesn’t change with them. To help achieve this, Bodrie recommended adding some shrubbery which will turn in the fall. “Burning bush is a good one,” she said. “A lot of people use those because they turn a bright red.” She also recommended some fall blooming perennials, such as Black-eyed Susans and Autumn Joy sedum. Perennials like these are not only a good way to add a splash of color to your yard, but they’re also incredibly hardy and relatively low maintenance.

Although the changing leaves are a source of great beauty, they can also be a source of great frustration as many homeowners find themselves wondering, “what on earth am I supposed to do with all of these fallen leaves?” Many will either toss them or burn them, but Richard Powell, permaculture educator and founder of Orlando Permaculture, has some different advice for you. “The healthiest way to garden is to mimic nature,” Powell said. “In fall the leaves come down in order to enrich the soil so that it can hold more water and nutrients. One of the best ways to incorporate this natural cycle into your yearly landscaping routines is to compost them and return them to the soil where they came from.”

But the good thing about the overabundance of leaves is that we can use them for several different purposes. According to Powell, we can also use them to help our younger plants along



as we move into the colder season. “With the cooler nights and eventual freezes of fall, it is important to consider protecting plants, especially if they are annuals or younger perennials,” Powell suggested.

“Put a small pile of leaves at the base of the plant to protect the roots. This particular method can work better for the young perennials as they slowly become capable of making it through the winter,” he added.

Powell also suggested making a “hoop house” for your annuals. He said to make this out of either wood or PVC pipe and cover it with a roll of plastic. Doing so can give you some precious additional weeks out of your plants. “As an added tip, this method can be used in the spring to get a head start on the season too,” Powell added.





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Gardening in the Cold



A gardener never lets the weather get in the way of a quality season. Through rainy conditions — or even the snow — they are focused on building and maintaining the best garden possible throughout the fall and winter months of the year. And although the winter offers its challenges, there are ways to make sure you’re still bringing in quality plants while also preparing your garden for the more ideal spring season ahead.

ENJOY EVERGREENS
Evergreens can be the best part of your winter landscape because of the brilliant green they offer in an otherwise dreary backdrop. You can also find evergreens in yellow or even blue. Evergreen trees are easy to maintain because they do not shed needles or leaves during the winter months. Some varieties of evergreen trees include pine, cypress, juniper, hemlock and arborvitae. Check with your local landscaping or nursery to see what types

of evergreens they recommend growing in your part of the country. What works best in your area will depend on rain and growing conditions. If you’re plotting out a new landscape design for next season, it’s wise to consider using an evergreen or two as staples of your flowerbed. Your local nursery likely offers a shape, size and color that will fit your evergreen needs.

HARDSCAPE
Speaking of your local nursery,

pick the experts’ brains on what a quality hardscape strategy can do for you. Hardscape is the hard landscape material built into an overall landscape. This includes paved sidewalks, driveways, retaining walls, stairs and other structures. Do not be afraid to be creative with these materials, as they can give your yard and garden areas a nice visual pop. You can think of your hardscape materials as the brick and mortar of your yard area. They are truly

foundational and can be built around to accomplish the design style you’re after. Work with your local nursery or contractors to determine the true purpose of your hardscaping. Are you simply aiming for an attractive area or a strategic system that enables effective draining? What you need your hardscaping for will help you make decisions on pricing and amount of materials needed.

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Protect your home (and more) from winter’s freeze



Freezing temperatures may be good for ice skating or building snowmen, but sub-freezing temperatures can be dangerous for the average person and his or her home. Cold weather often leaves people scurrying to do whatever is necessary to safeguard themselves from the big chill. But it’s important homeowners also protect their homes in cold weather.

PLUMBING

Plumbing and pipes may be vulnerable to cold weather. Frozen pipes may burst and cause substantial damage to a home, potentially causing flooding and structural damage. Homeowners should disconnect and drain garden hoses before winter arrives. Water to outdoor hose bibs should be turned off, though the valves on these outdoor faucets should be left open to drain. Also, outdoor faucets can be covered with insulating foam covers. The Red Cross says pipes that freeze most frequently include pipes in unheated areas, such as basements, attics, garages, and crawl spaces. Close vents to the outside in areas like attics and basements to limit the amount of cold air that gets indoors. Think about insulating unheated areas, as well as using pipe sleeves, heat tape or wraps on exposed pipes. By opening kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors, homeowners can allow warm air from a home to reach pipes under the sink. During extreme freezes, keep cold water dripping from a sink to prevent pipes from freezing.

Service HVAC systems It’s important to ensure that heating systems are working properly prior to the cold-weather season. It may only take hours for the interior of a home to reach dangerously low temperatures without adequate heat. Homeowners should schedule annual checkups of furnaces and hot water heaters. Inspect the heat exchanger for cracks, install a clean air filter and make sure all thermostats are working properly.

HAVE FUEL READY

Homeowners who heat their homes with oil, wood or coal should make sure they have plenty of fuel on hand in advance of winter. Shortages can occur, and it may take some time for new fuel to arrive in the midst of a cold snap. As a precaution, homeowners can rely on portable space heaters to fill in the heating gaps during freezing temperatures. Exercise extreme caution with these devices, turning them off when leaving the room and remembering to avoid overloading outlets.

PROTECT OUTSIDE

Drain birdbaths, clean out downspouts and remove water from other items where water can freeze and cause damage. Inspect roofing prior to the snowy season, but stay off roofs during freezing weather. Remove snow shovels and other winter gear from storage and make sure the items are easily accessible during snowstorms. Winter’s bite can be severe. Homeowners can protect themselves



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Winter Home Projects



Looking to spruce things up around the house this winter? Or maybe you've got big plans to sell your home in the spring and are working on a few improvement projects that will help you get top dollar when you put it on the market.

GET NEW WINDOWS AND DOORS

Noticing a draft in your home? Paying higher heating bills than you did in the past? Remember your windows when it comes to

investing in some home TLC this winter. Heat gain and heat loss through windows are responsible for 25 to 30 percent of residential heating and cooling energy use, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. They are the single biggest source of energy loss in your home, and when winter conditions are in full force, it's easy to see why your drafty windows keep your heating system from operating at its most efficient. The same goes for your doors.

Leaky exterior doors lead to chilly rooms in a hurry, especially as the outside temperatures drop. Work with a local contractor to install new doors or head to your local home improvement store for tips on how to install them yourself.

IMPROVE YOUR WINDOWS

If your windows aren't in terrible shape, you may be able to pull off a do-it-yourself project to give them some extra life. Here

are a few tips to consider when winterizing your windows.

Close any gaps. Use caulk and weather stripping to seal out air that would otherwise sneak into your home.

Add window treatments and coverings to retain the heat within your home.

Add solar control film during the winter to let light in while keeping the cold air out.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WINDOW

Check out these recommendations from the U.S. Department of Energy when it comes to choosing the right window for your home.

Look for the ENERGY STAR and National Fenestration Rating Council labels.

In colder climates, consider selecting gas-filled windows with low-e coatings.

Choose a low U-factor for better thermal resistance in colder climates.

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Safety measures all hunters should take



Hunting draws millions of people into the great outdoors every year. Many avid hunters feel hunting is a great way to actively participate in nature while also taking responsibility for procuring one’s own food.

Hunting requires discipline, dedication, patience, and, perhaps most important, a commitment to safety. By prioritizing safety on each hunting trip, seasoned and novice hunters alike are acknowledging the potential dangers of this beloved outdoor activity while doing everything they can to ensure the trip is as safe as possible. Because safety plays such a vital role in successful hunting

trips, hunters of all experience levels can benefit from a refresher course on the safety measures they should take each time they go on the hunt.

- Treat all firearms as if they’re loaded. Treating all firearms as if they’re loaded ensures hunters won’t be tempted to engage in the kind of fooling around that can contribute to tragic accidents. This approach can reduce the risk of firearm-related accidents or injuries, and can be an especially effective way to teach youngsters about the dangers of firearms and the correct ways to mitigate those dangers.
- Keep your finger off the trig-

ger and only point at what you plan to shoot. Keeping your finger off the trigger until you’re ready to shoot ensures you won’t accidentally discharge your firearm. In addition, never point your firearm at anything other than what you plan to shoot.

- Know the forecast and dress appropriately. Firearms are not the only risk to hunters’ safety. Inclement weather can put hunters at the mercy of Mother Nature. According to the Mayo Clinic, hypothermia, which occurs when the human body loses heat faster than it can produce heat, can affect hunters who are unable to get out of wet clothes or move to warm,

dry locations as their bodies lose heat. In addition, hunters may be at risk of hypothermia even if temperatures are hovering around 50 F. Before embarking on a hunting trip, hunters should read the forecast of the areas where they will be hunting and dress accordingly. Outer layers that repel water can help keep hunters dry, and hunters also should avoid wearing cotton, which retains moisture and can increase their risk for hypothermia. Clothing made with moisture-wicking fabrics is a great alternative to cotton.

- Share your plan with others. Returning home safe is the ultimate goal for hunters, and that’s

more likely to happen when hunters share their hunting plans with others. Let someone, ideally a spouse, parent, roommate, or sibling, know when and where you will be hunting and when you expect to return by. Direct this loved one to call the local authorities if you do not call by a predetermined time. This can dramatically reduce the time it takes to find you if you become injured on your hunting trip and prove unable to get back to your vehicle safely.

Millions of people across the globe enjoy hunting. Avid hunters know that no hunting trip is successful if safety is not the utmost priority.

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Establish winter habitats for backyard animals



Preparing a property for winter involves putting away lawn furniture, raking leaves and removing any annual plants that have shriveled up and spent the last of their energy. It can be tempting to want to clean up completely and leave a

blank slate in the yard. But by doing so, you may be robbing wildlife of the resources they need to overwinter. The nature and conservation resource In Habitat says plants and animals depend on one another

to survive. During the winter, animals may struggle to find adequate shelter and food, especially when there is a lack of sufficient plant matter available. In turn, these animals may actually take up home in people's residences,

turning into pests in the process. Bats, field mice and even opossums and raccoons may move indoors into attics or basements, leaving behind waste and damage if they can't find adequate shelter outdoors.

Homeowners concerned about potential pest infestations can take steps to ensure animals have places to bed down and escape the cold in their yards this winter. These tips can help local wildlife when the temperatures dip.

- Leave parts of the yard wild. Animals can make a nest in leaves or piles of brushwood. Just make sure piles left out are away from the home so curious critters don't try to get inside. Leave the task of tidying up shrubs and garden borders until spring, as shrubs can be dense areas to hide for both insects and animals.
- Consider planting animal food sources prior to winter. Plants like elderberry, holly, mulberry, sumac, and crabapple will grow in colder months and animals can enjoy them as a vital food staple.
- Don't forget water sources. Provide access to fresh water and replace as needed if the water freezes. For homeowners with fish ponds in their backyards, use a hot pot to melt a hole in the top of the pond and allow gases that have accumulated underneath to escape. This allows oxygen to reach fish and frogs in the pond.
- Leave bird, squirrel or bat houses in the yard. This is a fun and crafty project that can ward off winter boredom while also providing a safe place for local wildlife to shelter in winter.

Animals and insects need some extra help staying comfortable when cool temperatures arrive. Leaving some clean-up tasks for the spring ensures that there are plenty of backyard habitats available to local wildlife.



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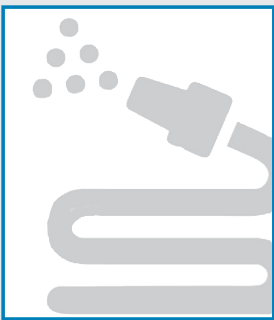
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