GET READY FOR FALL & Winter

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How to create more interior space for the winter

After a summer and fall spent outdoors, winter drives many people back inside. Homeowners may take inventory of their interior spaces in winter and find that there isn't as much room as they would like. When entertaining inside, a home may feel particularly cramped.

Creating an open, inviting indoor environment requires maximizing spatial design but not necessarily expanding square footage. By focusing on a few strategies, homeowners can maximize interior flow.

CHANGE UP THE LAYOUT OF FURNITURE

Being able to move around a space more easily may come down to rethinking the furniture layout. Interior design experts often emphasize traffic flow in a space, which can determine how comfortable homeowners and their guests feel. Universal design methodologies point to establishing clear, unobstructed routes to link different zones of a room. This will minimize physical congestion in the space. When entertaining, homeowners can push larger pieces of furniture against the perimeter of a room to open up a centeral gathering area. Heavy coffee tables can be swapped out for smaller tables to allow the rearrangement of the layout depending on how many people are spending time in a given space.

SUBDIVIDE ROOMS

Open-concept spaces might have lost some their appeal in recent years. Designers are now going back in the direction of room-based layouts over open concepts, according to Martha Stewart and New York-based designer Madeline Merin. Some homeowners now have a greater need for definition of the spaces they have to work with. Instead of one open room, dividing the space can create the illusion of having more square footage while providing distinctive spots for privacy and other room functions. An open-concept family room, for example, can be divided into a gaming room on one side and a home office space on the other.

CHANGE HOW SPACES ARE PERCEIVED

Lighting and visual elements can make spaces feel more roomy and inviting even if they haven't gotten larger. Painting walls in soft tones will help them reflect more light, making boundaries feel like they are receding. Incorporating more natural light by removing heavy draperies is one strategy. According to the Journal of Biophilic Design, biophilic design is the intentional integration of nature into buildings and spaces to improve human health and productivity. Homeowners can incorporate natural lighting, living plants, organic materials, and organic patterns into their interior designs to make spaces feel more inviting

Homeowners can look to various design strategies to open up interior spaces in their homes with a goal toward making them more comfortable places to ride out the winter.

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Winter vehicle maintenance starts now

Changing seasons expose vehicles to various conditions throughout the year. Although severe weather can occur at any time, the winter is known to be particularly harsh and can make it hard for a vehicle to function properly.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says winter weather can cause extremely dangerous road conditions. An estimated 320 fatal traffic crashes occurred in the United States in 2023, and 22,293 injuries happened when there was snow or sleet conditions at the time of the crash. It is essential that drivers prepare their vehicles for winter weather. Properly winterizing a car can help prevent breakdowns and accidents, and also potentially save drivers from being stranded in the cold.

Here are some winter car maintenance tips to consider before the first storm of the season, courtesy of AAA and State Farm®.

· Test the battery. A driver needs a battery to be fully charged and in good condition to start the engine on cold winter mornings. Colder temperatures cause chemical reactions within the battery, which can make electricity slow down and hinder the vehicle's ability to reach maximum power. Check the battery prior to winter, and replace it, if necessary.

· Check fluids. Part of winter preparation is ensuring that all of the car's fluids are at the right levels and appropriate for low temperatures. This includes engine oil, windshield washer fluid, and antifreeze.

· Schedule a maintenance checkup. A mechanic can look at hoses and belts to check that they are in good working order. Cold temperatures can make belts and hoses more brittle and prone to breaking.

· Apply a windshield repellent. Scraping ice and snow off of windshields on winter mornings can be a frustrating and arduous task. Adding hydrophobic repellent like Rain-X to the windshield can make it easier to remove ice later on.

· Maintain tire pressure. As outside temperatures drop, so does tire pressure. Routinely check and inflate tires to the recommended pressure listed on a label located on the driver's side door frame.

· Inspect the wiper blades. Seeing clearly out of the windshield is important for safe winter driving. In addition to a properly working defroster, drivers will need wiper blades that can remove rain and snow. If any streaks or skips occur while using the wipers, it might be time for a new set.

· Conduct a brake check. A combination of snow, moisture, and salt on roads can contribute to rust on brakes and rotors. Symptoms of brake issues include noises, sticking brake pads, and slower stop times. Before the thick of winter, drivers are urged to have their brakes checked by a professional.

Winter is on the horizon, and vehicle owners should prepare their cars and trucks now for the rough weather to come.

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The benefits of a fall roof replacement

A roof is a vital component of a home that protects the structure from the elements and ensures that sun, rain, wind, and snow do not compromise the integrity of interior spaces. Peak Performance Roofing says the average asphalt shingle roof found on many homes lasts between 15 and 30 years. Alternative roofing materials, such as metal or clay tiles, can last much longer.

Homeowners who stay in a home for many years will likely need to replace a roof at some point. Choosing when to replace the roof may come down to selecting the right season. Experts typically consider fall the prime time to upgrade a roof for a variety of reasons.

· Moderate temperatures: Fall weather tends to be comfortable in many regions of the country. Magnolia Home Remodeling Group says fall temperatures are better suited for roofing and allow materials to work the best. When temperatures are too hot, shingles can become soft and prone to scuffing, while cold temperatures can make materials brittle and difficult to seal.

· Comfort for workers: The same moderate conditions can make it easier for roofing contractors to get the work done. It can be extremely hot on a roof during summer, necessitating frequent breaks for workers. Winter weather conditions are not ideal for working on a roof, with snow and ice making things slippery. Fall weather can help workers feel more comfortable.

· Avoid the rush: Earl W. Johnston Roofing, LLC says spring and early summer are peak seasons for roofing contractors due to post-winter repairs. Homeowners may experience shorter wait times, better pricing and flexible scheduling if they opt for a fall roof replacement.

· Prepare for winter: Getting a roof in the fall means having a new and functional barrier against winter storms that can be hard on old roofs. It also means the roof will be ready for rainy, spring weather.

Fall is an ideal time to replace a roof for many reasons. Homeowners can use the summer to vet various roofing contractors and come up with a package that fits their schedules and budgets.

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How to prepare for winter storm season

Though it's now firmly in the rear-view mirror, the winter of 2025-2026 may prove hard to forget for millions of people across North America. Marked by particularly cold temperatures and considerable snowfall in many parts of the continent, the winter of 2025-2026 has undoubtedly prompted countless individuals to wonder what they can do to prepare to make future winters a little more manageable.

No one knows for certain if a winter will be mild or marked by extended periods of chilly temperatures and heavy snowfall. But preparing for harsh weather can make life a little easier if such conditions prevail. As another winter approaches, these winter storm prep tips can make it easier to navigate inclement weather.

· Test your home heating system. Mid-Atlantic Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessment reports that winter temperatures in the mid-Atlantic were two to four degrees below normal for the entire region during the winter of 2025-2026. Faced with such chilly conditions, many people leaned heavily on their home heating systems to stay warm. Prior to this winter, it can be beneficial for homeowners everywhere to conduct a home heating system audit to ensure a heater is working at peak capacity. A professional HVAC technician can run a battery of tests to assess an existing system. Such an audit can catch any issues before the cold weather arrives, and a tuneup can make sure the heater works efficiently, which can save homeowners lots of money on energy bills.

· Inspect your tools and replace them, if necessary. Items that help make life outside more manageable in winter also should be assessed prior to the arrival of cold weather. The winter of 2025-2026 was snowier than usual in some parts of North America, while other areas received considerably less snowfall than they're accustomed to. For example, the Blue Hill Observatory reported a much snowier and stormier winter in the northeastern United States in 2025-2026. So chances are residents in areas that experienced heavy snowfall put their snow blowers to good use a year ago. In advance of this winter, inspect snow blowers to ensure they're operational and capable of handling another potentially stormy winter. If not, replace the items or repair parts that need fixing. It's also good to examine snow shovels prior to the season. Doing so in advance of winter ensures the tools will be fixed and ready to go once the first snowfall occurs.

· Gather some nonperishable provisions. The American Red Cross urges people to gather food, water, and medicine if a storm is in the forecast.

Stores might be closed once the storm approaches or touches down, so gather these items well in advance. Include bottled water among the provisions as some storms can knock out access to drinking water. The Red Cross recommends keeping a one-month supply of medications and medical supplies on hand just in case a storm makes it hard to leave home or prevents access via delivery

· Keep some supplies in a vehicle. Even if a storm does not prevent travel, that does not mean a vehicle will find the roads smooth sailing. Prepare in advance for potential car troubles by keeping emergency supplies in the vehicle. Blankets, an extra sweater, and a hat for each person who routinely travels in the vehicle, and a small but well-stocked first aid kit, can help should drivers find themselves stranded on the road during a winter storm.

Winter storm preparation should include actions that ensure the safety of residents both inside and outside the home.

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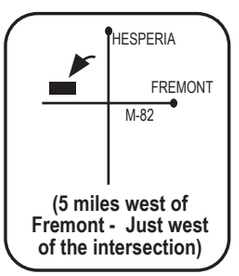

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Potential fireplace problems

Fireplaces are often a centerpiece of an interior living space. Homeowners often laud the ambiance a fireplace can provide, and the supplemental heat a fireplace can provide can be just what people need to stay warm on a cold day. The Northeast Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association says an estimated 57 percent of homeowners in the United States own some type of fireplace, freestanding stove or hearth product. However, fireplaces are not without their potential for problems.

Issues that can affect a fireplace will depend on the type of system, as problems that affect wood-burning fireplaces will differ from those that can affect gas units. The following are some potential issues homeowners can look out for when using their fireplaces.

· Smoke spillage: Fireplaces are supposed to vent up and out through a chimney or exhaust pipe. But if a damper is closed or blocked, if the chimney is dirty, or if there is negative air pressure in a tightly sealed home, smoke cannot escape and will enter the living space.

· Creosote formation: Creosote is a flammable, tar-like substance that is the result of burning wood. Creosote significantly increases the risk of a chimney fire. Creosote can build up in the flue over time if it is not remediated.

· Odors: A dirty chimney from creosote or moisture damage can result in a foul odor emanating from the fireplace. This also may occur if a bird or rodent nests in the chimney.

· Ignition failure: Gas units may not always light properly. Doctor Flue says it could be the result of a malfunctioning pilot light or an improperly placed log set. In addition, if the pilot light goes out as soon as the button is released, it may indicate a dirty or faulty thermocouple or thermopile, which are sensors that keep the gas valve open.

· Cracked masonry: Any cracks in the mortar, firebricks or chimney crown are major hazards. Cracks in such components increase the risk of a house fire and should be immediately addressed.

· Drafts: Cold air coming through the fireplace may indicate a damaged or missing damper.

· Carbon monoxide: Grill Parts Replacement says poorly vented fireplaces can lead to a buildup of carbon monoxide inside the home, which is a health hazard.

Oftentimes homeowners should leave fireplace troubleshooting to a professional. Annual inspections of units can head off potential problems to ensure safer operation.

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