

FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT

❑ Fall is one of our favorite seasons for decorating. This year, though, go beyond the traditional orange gourds and dried cornstalks.

Porch Looks

If you're lucky enough to have an open porch, fall is its time to shine. The weather is gorgeous, making porch-sitting a prime autumn idea. And you can decorate your outdoor room just for the occasion. Make it memorable by selecting a color scheme that accentuates your existing palette, but don't be afraid to kick it up with bright colors. Think a punch of orange and fiery red heirloom pumpkins. Don't be afraid of bright yellows, as Pantone picked a sunny yellow as one of the top colors for this fall.

Good Gourds

Speaking of pumpkins, let's get out of the orange pumpkin rut. Pumpkins come in a huge variety of colors, including neutral creams and whites, deep jewel greens, blazing reds and hot yellows. Group your pumpkins in complementary colors and pick a variety of shapes so that your pumpkin patch really shines. Bonus points: Decoupage or paint faux pumpkins in any color scheme you like for a personalized peck of pumpkins.

Cozy Up

Come fall, there's literally no space that couldn't use an extra blanket. Elevate your cozy game by displaying throw blankets in a variety of textures and colors that compliment your existing decor. Also consider using blankets in new ways, such as draped over tables as table cloths.

Terrific Tartans

Plaid is back this fall, and look for it on throw pillows, blankets, tableware and more. Go beyond the traditional buffalo check, though, and hit plaid patterns in warm jewel


tones. Don't be afraid to play with pattern and mix and match, using neutral plaids as your base and working up from there.

Foraged Foliage

Create gorgeous centerpieces, posies and other arrangements by going no further than your front yard. Sprays of limbs festooned with colorful leaves, fall grasses and seasonal blooms are all perfect for bringing the outside in this season. Also look for seasonal fruits in jewel tones, such as pears and apples, to dress your table and kitchen.

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Get Those Gutters Cleaned

When gutters are working as they should, they provide a largely unnoticed defense against rain intrusion, foundation erosion and water damage. As they fail, however, these very serious issues can begin to quietly take root. You may find yourself with a hefty repair bill when all that was needed in the first place was more regular maintenance. There is also an acknowledged lifespan for these systems, based on the material they’re made of.

How They Work

Properly installed, well maintained gutters keep rain from entering eaves and exterior walls. They also keep water away from your foundation. Without this important drainage system, water intrusions can lead to mold and rot, stain siding and brick, and potentially even destabilize your home. Water that hasn’t been rerouted may collect around the perimeter of the structure, creating the ideal condition for interior flooding and foundation cracks.

What to Look For

Blockages and dislodged joints are the most common problems associated with these systems. It’s critical to make regular inspections since overflows lead to all of the same issues as having no gutters at all. That’s particularly true in the fall, since wetter weather is ahead. Overflows may also be caused by poorly designed systems that do not have enough downspouts to handle average rain showers.

Look for signs of rust, since that’s a sign that you’ve reached the end of the system’s natural lifespan. The average galvanized steel or aluminum guttering system is meant to last about 20 years, according to the National Association of Home Builders. If it’s time for a major repair or replacement, seek out a licensed, insured contractor.

Proceed with Caution

Inspecting your gutters will obviously involve time spent on a ladder, and that can lead to a dangerous situation if you don’t proceed with caution. Use a spotter to ensure that the ladder is sturdy and secure. The International Association of Certified Home Inspectors also recommends that you constantly reposition your ladder, rather than reaching beyond your immediate grasp. Working in that position potentially creates an imbalance issue. Wear gloves since there may be loose fasteners or sharp debris lodged in the gutters. If you plan to inspect your gutters from the roof, be sure to wear footwear with proper gripping.



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The Perfect Fall Centerpiece

❑ Autumn’s vibrant colors are a creative way to make any gathering in your home warm and inviting

Foliage, plants, traditional items and candles in the shades of autumn can provide just the right season-focused touch for your next table setting. Complement your fall centerpiece with handpicked accessories to complete the look.

Bring the Outside Indoors

Look for leaves, branches, vegetables and flowers that reflect the traditional colors of fall — from rich reds to bold oranges to warm yellows. Weave them together into a circular or oval shape to create the foundation of your centerpiece, or craft a free-form garland. You could also paint a plain woven bread basket to create a cozy place to collect it all. If you’re not necessarily that crafty, you can also purchase an autumn-themed centerpiece and use these handpicked items to personalize



it. Cornucopias are a classic choice that will provide timeless memories for a new generation. Place fall-colored and scented flowers around the arrangement. Complete the centerpiece with wheat sprigs, small pumpkins and squash, or other seasonal foods like apples.

Finishing the Look

Select napkins, placemats and a tablecloth that fit into the color palette you’ve created with the centerpiece. Then get creative: Paint leaf patterns by hand on wooden napkin rings to give them a sense of homemade charm. A hollowed-

out pumpkin can also be used as a vase. Large fallen leaves from outdoors can serve as fall focused place cards. Rinse them first, then allow each to dry before carefully inscribing them with the names of friends and family. Go around the table, placing one in front of each plate.

Other Helpful Tips

Make sure your centerpiece isn’t so large that there isn’t room for glasses, condiments and serving platters. It also shouldn’t be so tall that guests struggle to see one another. Don’t light the candles, since that may interfere with the scrumptious aromas associated with the meal you’ll serve at this fall gathering. Don’t be afraid to keep it simple: Arrange a grouping of mismatched gourds and pumpkins to very easily transform your tabletop. Focus on varying sizes and colors. Rather than worrying with formal floral arrangements, collect dried branch stalks in a variety of vases. For more pops of color, wrap the branches with wool and fleece, creating a sculptural conversation piece.



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A beginner’s guide to fall planting and maintenance

❑ Here are some helpful tips and tricks to make the most of the fall gardening season.



Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to your gardens.

The tree and bare root retailer Bower & Branch advises that soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year’s bounty.

Here are some helpful tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

- Think about fall annuals and bulb planting. Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer flowers fade. Also, it’s a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.
- Sow salad seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate the cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.
- Take inventory of the sun. Positioning a garden carefully means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.
- Fill in landscaping gaps. Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are

- fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.
 - Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.
 - Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.
 - Continue to water plants. Water is essential in the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.
- Fall planting and maintenance can extend the gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring time garden.



Time to Winterize: Prepare Early

Save money now and in the future by winterizing your home now, before the worst of winter arrives. Drafty doors and windows, failing furnaces and leaky roofs should be addressed or they risk becoming a much, much bigger issue as temperatures drop. In some cases, winterizing your home takes nothing more than a bit of sweat equity.

Windows and Doors

Inefficient doors and windows make it more difficult to warm your home, sending energy bills soaring. The danger doesn’t end with uncomfortable drafts, however. Leaks that let in winter temps also allow in condensation, which can lead to rot in the wood

frames that surround your doors and windows. Caulking or weather stripping is often all that’s needed. If you decide to entirely replace them, consult local professionals to find out more about the most efficient new models. Then hire a licensed professional to make sure you receive a warranty-protected installation.

Furnace Issues

Electric and gas furnaces need annual service checks in order to operate optimally. Most are projected to work efficiently for around 10-15 years before they need replacement. You don’t want that term to end when there’s snow on the ground. The good news is, it’s easy to monitor any system’s

age. A sticker with the model number, date of manufacture and date of installation should be found on the unit. If your system has been in place for more than a decade, it may be time to consider a complete overhaul or unit replacement. Even if your furnace manages to limp through the looming cold season, an inefficient system can still have a huge impact on your bottom line Residential costs have been skyrocketing lately, and the U.S. Energy Information Administration predicts that trend will continue.

Other Trouble Spots

Check your roofing each fall for damaged shingles and leaks. If you don’t feel comfortable with doing this inspection yourself, hire a



professional. They can help head off serious issues. Power wash all siding and decks so remaining dirt doesn’t promote mold and mildew. Add a new coat of sealer to the exterior of your home to help minimize the impact of winter precipitation.

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