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What to do about landscape drainage problems

Homeowners understand that reaping the rewards of beautiful lawns and gardens requires hard work. But sometimes even hard work won’t be enough to prevent problems in a lawn or garden.

Drought can be very harmful to lawns and gardens, but so too, can excessive amounts of water and precipitation. Soggy properties can make it difficult for lawns and gardens to thrive. According to Lowe’s, in addition to killing lawn and other plants, standing water on a property can be a health hazard because standing water makes a prime breeding ground for mosquito larvae and other pests.

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Homeowners who must wear rain boots to traverse their lawns could benefit from a drainage overhaul.

Overflowing gutters will transfer rainwater down the side of a home, where it can puddle at the foundation. This water can ultimately suffocate a lawn, and it may cause interior damage to the home as well.

First, inspect and clean all gutters. Leaves, nests, sticks, and even dead animals can block the flow of water in a gutter. Test downspouts by running hose water from the top of the gutter.

Downspouts should be pointed away from the home and may need to be extended so they direct water away from the dwelling.

PLANT WATER-LOVING TREES OR SHRUBS
In some instances, whether it’s by a byproduct of poor property grade or sloping land, water can pool regardless of how well the gutter system is working. Determine where the problem is and speak with a landscaper to see if there are any plants that thrive in moist conditions. The roots of these plants can protect against soil erosion and may absorb enough water to guard against puddling. In addition, amending the soil with organic matter, pea gravel or another coarse aggregate can prevent water pooling.

Did you know? … Aeration
One of the ways homeowners can keep their lawns looking lush and green is to aerate the turf when the need arises. Aeration perforates the soil with small holes. These holes allow air, nutrients and water to penetrate all the way to the roots, helping them grow deep and strong. Deep, strong roots are essential to healthy, lush lawns. Lawns that get heavy use, such as those that are often played on by children or pets, will likely benefit from periodic aeration. Feeling the lawn also can help homeowners determine if it needs to be aerated. Lawns that dry out quickly or feel spongy may be overcome with thatch, which can prevent lawns from getting the air, water and nutrients they need to thrive. Lawn care professionals recommend aerating lawns that contain thatch that is more than one-half inch. When to aerate depends on the type of grass, but it’s generally recommended that cool-season grasses be aerated in early spring or fall.

CONSIDER A DRAINAGE SYSTEM
When confronted with drainage issues that cannot be remedied by other methods, homeowners may need to install drainage systems. Such systems often employ French drains that are built through or around the perimeter of a property. French drains are typically a trench that contains perforated plastic pipe and is backfilled with gravel. Water runs into these channels and gets swept away by the piping. Do-it-yourselfers may want to try installing drainage systems themselves. However, because excavation is necessary, it’s often best to have the property inspected and marked for utilities, then have the drainage system installed by professionals.

Landscaping does not need to be derailed by drainage issues. Explore the remedies that can easily fix the problems.

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Is it finally time to paint your home’s exterior?

Painting is an inexpensive way to transform just about any space. Many people paint the interiors of their homes, but home exteriors also can undergo dramatic makeovers with fresh coats of paint. Timing the job right and heeding some tips from professionals and do-it-yourselfers who have tread the painting path before you can make the job go smoothly.

CONSIDER THE TIME OF YEAR
Consider local weather patterns and forecasts when planning an exterior painting project. Choose a time of year when there is little rain and low humidity, such as autumn. Keep in mind that the paint will require a couple of days to dry completely and cure, and that can be difficult in damp weather. Don’t hamper the final outcome with poor timing.

PREPARE THE PAINTING SURFACES
Resist the temptation to start painting straight away. Paint may not adhere to unprepared surfaces, and dirt and other debris may show through and mar the finished product. Repainting a home’s exterior will likely involve removing peeling or chipping paint prior to making your first strokes. Wear protective gear when scraping, sanding or brushing old paint, as such tasks can generate dust that can be dangerous to inhale, particularly if the old paint contains lead.

Employ a chlorine bleach solution to kill any mildew and to scrub any dirt from the house. In addition, repair any cracks or imperfections. For example, if you’re painting stucco, you may have to fill in any pitting or holes. Use this opportunity to inspect caulking around windows and doors. Recaulk as needed to seal up drafty areas or those that may cause water infiltration prior to painting.

PRIME AND COVER STAINS
It may be a little extra work, but apply a quality primer as the first coat to hide any imperfections, such as wood knots or discoloration from weathering. Primer provides a smooth, even surface upon which to put your paint color. Once you have applied the primer, test your paint color in a small, inconspicuous spot to see how the color looks in the daylight. You do not want to paint the entire home only to find out you dislike the color.

TRY THESE PAINTING TECHNIQUES
Rent a paint sprayer for large surface areas. The sprayer will produce a more uniform application and is less time-consuming than painting everything with a brush or roller. Make sure you’ve chosen a high-quality paint, as the added expense is worth it if the paint lasts longer and coats more evenly. Also, if you have purchased multiple cans of paint, mix them all in one large bucket to ensure the same color; otherwise, the colors may not match perfectly.

The experts at HGTV recommend working your way from top to bottom in a smooth, controlled manner, overlapping each stroke by eight inches. Trim and hard-to-reach areas should be left for brush work so you can maintain control over your tools.

If you are painting areas like steps or staircases, consider adding a little fine-grain sand to the paint to improve traction, as paint can be slippery when wet.

If painting your home’s exterior is beyond your capabilities, hire a professional. He or she will get the work done in a timely manner, and you can rest assured that the job will be done correctly.

Make the most of mulching

First-time homeowners with little or no landscaping experience may not understand the benefits of mulch, which can be used to strengthen soil and protect properties from the elements.

WHAT IS MULCH?
Mulch refers to a material spread around or over a plant to enrich and/or insulate its soil. Many homeowners prefer mulch made of wood chips, which is both effective and readily available. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that organic mulches, which include leaves, wood chips, compost or grass clippings, can be used by homeowners who want to develop eco-friendly landscapes.

WHY MULCH?
Mulch can benefit plants around a property in various ways. Many people lay mulch because the mulch helps soil retain moisture in the summer, when temperatures tend to be at their hottest. This can help plants survive summer heat waves.

Mulch also can be used to suppress weeds. Weeds, which steal moisture plants need to build strong roots and survive summer, need light to grow. When laid correctly, mulch deprives weeds of the light they need to grow. Organic mulches can even provide homes for crickets and a type of beetle that feed on weed seeds.

Mulch also can deter harmful pests depending on the type of mulch homeowners choose. When purchasing mulch, homeowners will have to choose between the aforementioned organic mulch or man-made mulches, which may be made of plastic or rubber. While man-made mulches may repel pests, they also can have adverse effects. And certain organic mulches can repel insects that can threaten plants.
Homeowners often aspire to have attractive backyards that look like they belong in a magazine. While these can be picturesque and functional for adults, they may not be entirely practical for homeowners who have young children, especially when the majority of the yard is covered with paving stones or concrete.

When young children are part of a household, homeowners may benefit by designing yards that are both functional and fun. Incorporating safe play areas for kids is one way to unlock the potential of both big and small backyards.

As children run off to enjoy a playground, safety is the last thing on their minds. Kids are most interested in scaling ladders to treehouses or coasting down slides. That’s why adults must take it upon themselves to keep injury prevention in mind.

SafestPlayground.com indicates that playground-related injuries routinely result in severe fractures, internal injuries, concussions, and dislocations. In the majority of playground injuries to children younger than age 5, the head and face are affected. Children between the ages of 5 and 9 experience more leg and arm injuries than younger kids. The Consumer Product Safety Commission states 70 percent of children’s injuries occur on home playgrounds. More than 28,000 children are injured each year on playgrounds across Canada, according to Parachute, a national injury prevention organization.

When considering playground equipment for the yard, parents need to make safety a priority. The Canada Safety Society advises parents to follow the 5 S’s of Playground Safety: surface, structures, site, supervision, and safety.

Surface: Parents should assume that children will fall. To lessen the blow of falls, choose playground equipment with a perimeter of six feet of a softer surface, such as sand, pea gravel, rubber pieces or wood chips. This material should be between six and 12 inches deep.

Structure: The structure of the play equipment should be built from sturdy materials. Pressure-treated lumber was once the standard, but it’s not adviseable for kids’ playgrounds, as the chemicals used in the lumber can leach and young children may actually bite or pick at the wood. Use cedar or another wood that resists decay. Once the structure is built, inspect it frequently for damage.

Site: Look around the landscape for an ideal place to locate the playset. There should be no obstacles that children can hit while sliding or swinging. Avoid overhanging branches and do not place equipment too close to trees or fencing. Try to keep the set out of direct sunlight, which can make components heat up and scald young bodies.

Supervision: Do not leave children alone while they are playing. Prevent children from using the playset in an incorrect manner.

Safety: Follow the directions for installation. Make sure all posts are anchored into the ground securely. Railings should be spaced so that children cannot get stuck between them. Check that metal components have not rusted and that there is no additional excessive wear. Be sure that no tools or other dangerous items are left around the yard.

Backyard playgrounds should be built with safety in mind. Learn the rules of play equipment and yard safety.

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Many gardeners understand the frustration that stems from seeing a garden destroyed by wildlife. While protecting wildlife is a cause that’s near and dear to many gardening enthusiasts, even the most ardent wildlife supporter does not want to see his or her garden trampled, eaten or adversely affected by animals.

Safeguarding gardens from local wildlife can require some trial and error. Animals may find ways to circumvent gardeners’ initial efforts to protect their gardens, but the following methods might just do the trick the first time around.

- Erect physical barriers around gardens. Barriers may not be gardeners’ first choices, as some people feel barriers such as wire cages or mesh coverings make it more difficult to tend to gardens and rob gardens of some of their aesthetic appeal. But coverings and wire cages can effectively prevent wildlife from trampling or eating plants while still allowing the gardens to get adequate sunlight. Make sure barriers extend to the ground so animals cannot access gardens by entering beneath the barricades.

- Fight intruders with odor. Stray cats may mistake gardens for litter boxes and enter them to relieve themselves. Preventing such intrusions can be as simple as placing items around the garden to reduce the likelihood that gardens will be mistaken for litter boxes. Peels from oranges and lemons or coffee grounds can be placed in the garden and can emit odors strong enough to deter cats.

- Install motion detecting lights around gardens. Motion detection technology might be enough to deter nocturnal wildlife from trampling or eating gardens. Animals might be spooked and run away when lights suddenly turn on. A similar approach can be taken using noise instead of lights. Gardeners who hope to avoid erecting barriers around their gardens can put up posts instead, attaching aluminum cans or wind chimes to the posts that will make noise when animals come near. Much like light, noise can be enough to deter animals.

- Consider raised garden beds. When small critters, such as moles, are the main problem, then raised garden beds with wood or plastic bottoms can deter pests from trampling or eating plants.

Container gardens can deter pests from trampling or eating plants.
The “O” word in gardening has long been “organic,” but this year it might be “occultation.” You might well ask what that means and what it has to do with the garden — or the occult.

The word “occult,” which can be used as a noun, an adjective or a verb, signifies something hidden, concealed from common forms of perception. Hence its relevance to paranormal phenomena and closely guarded secrets. In astronomy, one celestial body can occult another, as when the moon hides the sun during a solar eclipse.

But let’s bring it a bit more down to earth — to the earth in your yard, that is. In this case, occultation means the spreading of something over the soil to exclude light and thereby inhibit plants from growing. The word has come into recent use thanks to Canadian farmer Jean-Martin Fortier in his 2014 book, “The Market Gardener.”

Fortier’s practice of preventing weeds by laying black tarps on the ground, inspired by European organic farmers, has in turn attracted the attention of other small-scale growers and, as often happens, home gardeners. He credits this technique with much of the success he’s had at his farm, Les Jardins de la Grelinette, and another he supervises, both in Quebec.

A tarp can smother weeds before planting and also deter future ones in a bed. Its dark color absorbs heat and warms the soil, Fortier explains. “Weeds germinate in the warm, moist conditions created by the tarp but are then killed by the absence of light.”

The tarp also improves the structure of the soil beneath. The heating of the soil does not harm its biological life; the bacteria, fungi and other microscopic soil-improvers are all fine. Even after the mere two weeks necessary to germinate and terminate emergent weeds, the darkness-loving earthworms will have come up to the surface, tunneled the upper layer and, in effect, tilled it for you. It’s a joy to see them at work in moist, friable soil once the tarp is removed.

Let’s say you don’t have a garden yet, but there’s a part of the lawn you’re willing to sacrifice to have one, or to expand the one you have. You could till the sod or cut it in squares and shake the soil back into the ground. Better yet, turn the sod upside down so that little grass will regrow. Best of all, you could lay down a tarp now, and by July the grass will have decomposed and added excellent fertility to the new plot. Think of it as a total eclipse of the lawn.

Once the tarp is lifted, there’s no need to till — just sow some spinach, carrots and brassicas such as kale and get ready for good fall eating.

Black tarps are readily available and come with bound edges, to prevent fraying, and grommets with which to tie them down. Carefully used, they’ll last a long time. For big areas, several 8-by-10-foot ones are easier to handle than one huge one, because you can more easily fold them up to store.
Trouble signs for driveways

Metro

Though they are often easy to overlook, driveways are durable parts of a home that can greatly impact a home’s curb appeal. Driveways endure quite a bit of wear and tear over their lifespans, and homeowners who have not given their driveways much thought may want to start looking for potential trouble signs that indicate a need for some driveway maintenance.

According to the online home improvement resource HomeAdvisor.com, the average cost of a driveway installation in 2015 was just under $3,700. Those costs are influenced by a host of factors, including the size of the driveway and the material it’s made of. Damaged driveways do not necessarily need to be replaced, as some may just need minor repairs. But homeowners who see any of the following trouble signs in their driveways may want to consult a professional contractor to determine what their next steps should be.

Potholes

Potholes might be most often associated with heavily trafficked roadways, but even driveways are susceptible to potholes. As the ground beneath the driveway expands and contracts, the pavement above that ground weakens and becomes more susceptible to damage. That damage may ultimately lead to large chunks of the driveway breaking down, creating holes as a result. Homeowners who live in areas that experience heavy snowfall may see their driveways develop potholes after they are shoveled or plowed. Potholes that are not fixed may damage vehicles that drive on the pavement, and potholes may even expand over time.

Accumulation of Water

Puddles that form during a rainstorm may not be indicative of anything other than a rainy day. But water that pools or runs down the middle of the driveway may indicate drainage problems. Such problems may be the result of structural problems with the slope of the driveway, which can cause bigger issues down the road. When water is not absorbed into the ground or directed away from your home, it can then flow into the house, potentially making your garage or home susceptible to water damage.

Cracks

Cracking is one of the more noticeable issues that can plague driveways. Many driveways experience cracking as materials inevitably succumb to the elements. Homeowners should still speak with a contractor if they notice their driveway is starting to succumb to cracks.

Yard work is exercise!

Metro

Try to vary positions and alternate which hands you use to reduce strain and get an even workout.

Fitness experts say that gardening can improve strength, increase endurance and assist with flexibility. According to a report in the UK publication The Telegraph, clearing a pond or weeding can burn some 300 calories in an hour. Forty-five minutes worth of gardening can burn as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics.

Animals

Continued from Page 6

and sides can be enough to safeguard gardens. Raised garden beds might not be accessible to small critters, though such beds likely won’t deter larger animals from getting into gardens that are not barricaded.

- Erect fencing around the yard. Though fencing is expensive, fencing in a backyard or side yard where gardens are located can deter wildlife big and small from trampling or eating gardens.

Wildlife is worth protecting, but gardeners must also take steps to protect their gardens.

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Although it’s virtually impossible to count them, insects are the most diverse group of organisms on the planet. Nine hundred thousand different kinds of insects are known to exist. At any given time, it is estimated that there are around 10 quintillion individual insects living.

Gardeners grow frustrated when seeing their gardens infested with insects. In an effort to restore their gardens, homeowners might be tempted to eradicate any bug that moves in their yards. But gardeners would be wise to first learn which insects are hurting their gardens and which can actually help gardens in the long run.

HARMFUL

Certain insects can be dangerous to animals and plants. The following are a handful of insects that can threaten the vitality of gardens.

*Aphids*: These insects suck on the juice needed to sustain plants, particularly when they congregate.

*Aphids*: These insects suck on the juice needed to sustain plants, particularly when they congregate.

*Bald-faced hornet*: Hornets tend to be an aggressive species that can sting repeatedly. Should you find a nest near an entertaining space or garden, it can cause trouble.

*Treehoppers*: These small, green insects mimic the look of leaves, and their appetites can affect crops and gardens.

*Red pavement ants*: As they feed on all manner of human food, these ants can quickly overtake areas with their staggering numbers and deliver painful bites.

*Grasshoppers*: Certain grasshoppers, like the red-legged grasshopper, can decimate food crops and transfer parasites to birds when eaten as prey.

*Caterpillars*: Many caterpillars, the precursor to adult moths, will feed constantly on leaves, stems and other parts of plants. The tobacco hornworm moth caterpillar can damage potato and tomato plants.

HELPFUL

Plants depend on insects to transfer pollen as they forage, and many insects are quite beneficial to have around. While some pollinate, others are predators of other pests.

*Antlion*: A foe of ants, they’ll help eat and control ant populations and pollinate flowers. They pose no threat to humans, either.

*Big dipper firefly*: These colorful insects feast on earthworms, slugs and snails during the larval stage. Fireflies add drama to evening gardens with their twinkling lights.

*Garden spiders*: Although some spiders can be venomous, many are quite handy to have around the garden. They’ll help control pest populations that can damage plants and crops.

*Dragonflies*: These aerial artists that zip around the yard are consuming smaller insects that would otherwise pester plants and humans.

*Blue-winged wasp*: This wasp attacks the larvae of Japanese beetles, helping to control beetle populations.

*Bees and butterflies*: Butterflies and bees are some of the best pollinators out there, and each can add whimsy to gardens.

A basic guide to helpful — and harmful — insects
Create a new home decor with a fresh coat of paint

Today’s paint products offer homeowners the flexibility to easily change the look and feel of a room — or a houseful of rooms, including walls, cabinets, furniture, accessories and trim items — by changing the color of a painted surface or adding paint to achieve a decorative effect.

Woodcraft has all the paints and related accessories and supplies to “recolor” your home. Woodcraft introduced Black Dog Salvage Furniture Paint to its line of fine finishes in spring of 2016, giving customers a product developed specifically for use with furniture that is custom-built in the Black Dog Salvage shop, as well as accessories that might once have been part of an historic structure. Using Black Dog, a pure black, and Clean Canvas, a pure white, homeowners can create an unlimited number of shades that can be mixed using 13 additional colors with whimsical names like Caution: Dogs at Work (orange). The water-based ultra matte chalky finish interior paint is easy to use, self-leveling and low-VOC, and it covers in one coat. It can be used on finished and unfinished surfaces like furniture, woodwork, metal, glass and more and does not require priming. The companion Black Dog Salvage Guard Dog Topcoat Paint Protector is tough enough for floors and can be used for all types of indoor projects, such as cabinets, countertops, furniture, and decorative items.

ADDITIONAL PAINT OPTIONS

General Finishes Milk Paint is a high-tech, water-based acrylic paint for interior and exterior use that is available in more than two dozen colors, ranging from Dark Chocolate to Tuscan Red. It is easy to apply, durable and simple to repair and can be mixed to create new colors or combined with General Finishes water-based glazes and stains to create custom paints and decorative effects such as distressing, antiquing and color washing.

Rust-Oleum Chalked Paint is a water-based, ultra-matte finish for interior applications that can be used alone as a simple covering paint or to achieve decorative effects such as distressing or dry brushing to give any project a one-of-a-kind look with a vintage feel. It applies easily with brush or roller; spraying is not recommended.

If using an interior paint for exterior projects such as doors, shutters, or porches, an exterior topcoat will need to be added for protection from the elements.

General Finishes Exterior 450 is fortified with UV absorbers to minimize fading and built-in mildewcides to help retard the growth of mold and fungus. Plus, Exterior 450 is fast, as it’s ready to sand in just one hour in ideal conditions. CrystalLac Exterior Finish is a water-based, flexible, UV-stabilized, waterproof, clear topcoat for exterior furniture, doors and crafts. For readers only, see DECOR on Page 11
Spring Home & Garden

**Post-winter garden prep**

Lawns and gardens can bear the brunt of winter weather and are often in need of tender loving care by spring.

Preparing a garden for spring and summer involves assessing any damage that harsh weather might have caused. As temperatures climb, gardeners can heed the following post-winter garden preparation tips in an effort to ensure some successful gardening in the months ahead.

**Assess the damage.** Even if winter was mild, gardens might still have suffered some damage. Inspect garden beds and any fencing or barriers designed to keep wildlife from getting into the garden. Before planting anew, fix any damage that Mother Nature or local wildlife might have caused over the past several months.

**Clear debris.** Garden beds and surrounding landscapes that survived winter without being damaged might still be littered with debris. Remove fallen leaves, branches and even litter that blew about on windy winter days before planting season. Make sure to discard any debris effectively so it does not find its way back into the garden.

**Turn the greenhouse into a clean house.** Spring cleaning is not just for the interior of a home. Cleaning a greenhouse in advance of spring can help gardeners evict any overwintering pests that can threaten plant life once spring gardening season arrives. A thorough cleaning, which should include cleaning the inside of greenhouse glass and washing flower pots and plant trays, also can prevent plant diseases from surviving into spring.

**Check for pests.** Speak with a local gardening professional to determine if there are any local pests to look out for and how to recognize and remove these pets from gardens. Pests may hibernate in the soil over the winter.

**Assess plant location.** If plants, flowers or gardens have struggled in recent years or never grew especially vibrant, then gardeners may want to assess the location of their plant life before spring gardening season begins.

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**Decor**

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10**

best results, apply when temperature is between 60 degrees F and 80 degrees F.

**HANDY HELPERS FOR PAINTING**

- Wagner Home DÉcor Paint Sprayer. This is a great first-step product for those new to HVLP spraying. It is easy to use and sprays milk paint, stains, sealers and lacquers.

- The versatile Vika Two-fold is configured for use as a 21.7”-high scaffold or a workbench that is 47.6” long by 18.7” deep by 31.8” high with a tool tray, drilling hole, protractor and ruler inscribed into the MDF work surface.

- QuikBENCH Portable Workbench is a lightweight, easy-to-set-up portable workbench with a 30” x 24” work surface that is 32” high and capable of holding up to 300 pounds.

- Painter’s Pyramids, New and Improved 10-pack allows homeowners to paint, flip and paint without having to wait for the first side to dry. Pyramids now include tabs and slots on the bases so they can be screwed down to make permanent finishing platforms or joined together to create more stable temporary applications.

- Redtree Finishing Brushes feature beaver tail-style hardwood handles and hand-trimmed chisel edge bristles.

- Unlike Microfiber Tack Clothes, regular tack clothes do not work for finishing with water-based products. But a 12-pack of washable and reusable Microfiber Tack Clothes will work.

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Expect the unexpected when renovating a home

According to projections released in 2015 by Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, a growing number of people in the United States planned to renovate their homes in 2016. The report estimated that spending on remodeling and repairs in 2016 would climb 8.6 percent to $310 billion, a figure that is close to the peak reached in 2006.

While it is still too soon to tabulate all of the figures from 2016, a quick glance at the data indicates renovations have increased across the country. And one only needs to travel through communities to see a greater number of contractors and homeowners working on homes.

Tackling any renovation project is an exercise in patience. Renovations can impede on daily activities and cause a certain level of upheaval in homeowners’ lives. Homeowners planning renovations also may find that they must have some wiggle room when it comes to both their budgets and their expectations. Remodeling, particularly with regard to older homes, may unveil unforeseen issues that only arise in the face of the renovation.

So what can homeowners expect during a renovation? The following are a few issues that might arise during home improvement projects.

- **Dirt and noise**: Homeowners can count on dust, debris and noise throughout the renovation process. Dust appears when walls come down or go up, and construction teams typically erect temporary walls or tarps to contain the debris. Air filtering systems also can limit dust particles. Noise is unavoidable. If it becomes troublesome, arrange to be outside of the home when the bulk of the construction is taking place.

- **Delays or schedule changes**: Even the best contractors cannot control every aspect of the job. They rely on subcontractors and vendors to do portions of the work. Materials may not always arrive on time, or they may fall short of homeowners’ expectations. This can push back the project schedule. Homeowners should hope for everything to be done on time, but it can be less stressful if homeowners anticipate delays and be a pleasant surprise if there are no delays.

- **Hidden issues**: Contractors may uncover all sorts of issues that need to be addressed before a project can progress. Examples include the presence of asbestos (common in older homes), plumbing problems, incorrectly wired electrical systems, and leaks or moisture issues. These problems also can impact the cost of the project, so set aside some money in the budget for unforeseen expenses. Chances are you are going to need some extra money to handle a few surprises during the project.

It’s important to expect the unexpected when embarking on home renovations. Budgeting for hidden costs, expecting delays and coping with the upheaval to daily schedules are par for the remodeling course. However, the end result is often well worth the time and effort.
Drafty windows make homes less comfortable by allowing cold air in during the winter and warm air in when temperatures rise. But comfort is not the only concern associated with leaky windows, as such fixtures also can have a negative impact on the environment.

Leaky windows require heating and cooling systems to work harder to keep home interiors comfortable during times of the year when temperatures can be extreme. In the dead of winter, a leaky window will force a home’s inhabitants to turn up the thermostat, which only increases energy consumption and energy bills. The same scenario plays out in summer, when leaky windows allow hot air in, leading home-owners to lower the temperature of air conditioning units so everyone inside is cool and comfortable.

Thankfully, making windows more energy efficient does not necessarily require homeowners to replace existing windows. Before going that potentially expensive route, homeowners can consider the following strategies to improve the energy efficiency of their windows.

Hang curtains. Curtains can help homeowners cut down on heating and cooling costs. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, properly hung draperies can reduce heat loss by as much as 25 percent. In the summer, curtains can block the hot rays from the sun from entering a home, reducing the need to turn up air conditioning units. While curtains won’t fix leaks or block hot or cold air from entering a home, they can serve as a buffer between a home’s inhabitants and the air seeping in through leaks.

Caulk or add weatherstripping. Small cracks and gaps around windows, which are most often found around windows in older buildings, might not seem like a big deal, but such breaches can lead to considerable energy loss. The DOE recommends using caulk to seal cracks that are less than ¼-inch wide on the parts of the window that do not move (i.e., frames and where the trim meets the wall). Caulk might be less effective at fixing leaks larger than ¼ inch in width.

Employ weatherstripping to address leaks on movable parts of the window. Properly applied weatherstripping should adequately seal windows when they are closed without making it difficult to open or close them later on. Weatherstripping is available in various materials, and homeowners can visit www.energy.gov/energysaver/weatherstripping to find the material that’s most suitable for their situation.

Install windows films. Plastic window films are another option for homeowners looking to improve the energy efficiency of their windows. Heat shrink film can be cut to fit each individual leaky window in a home and then attached to windows using double-sided tape. A hair dryer can then be used to shrink the film and remove any wrinkles.
Steps to a more organized, functional garage

Organization can help homeowners transform their homes into less cramped, more spacious oases without forcing them to finance potentially expensive expansion projects.

Homeowners who park in their driveways may find that their garages have become crowded, cluttered spaces in which searching for tools can feel like scrounging a haystack in search of a needle. Organizing a garage can create extra room in a home while affording homeowners the chance to protect their vehicles from the elements. Homeowners who want to turn their vehicles from the elements.

- **Choose the right day.** Garages tend to be separate from the rest of the homes they’re a part of, meaning the only way to organize a garage is to first remove all items from the garage and into the driveway. Because items removed from the garage will be exposed to the elements, homeowners should choose a day that’s temperate and sunny to clean their garages. If possible, homeowners should opt to organize their garages in late spring, summer or early fall when there are additional hours of daylight. This protects homeowners from having to work in the dark should the job take longer than they initially anticipated.

- **Discard or donate duplicate items.** Duplicate items are some of the main culprits behind cluttered garages. As garages gradually become more cluttered, homeowners may buy tools they already have simply because they cannot find their original tools. When organizing the garage, create separate piles for duplicate tools, placing still-useful items in a pile that can be donated to neighbors, local charities or organizations and another pile for old tools that are no longer useful.

- **Host a garage sale.** Homeowners who want to organize their garages and make a buck at the same time can host garage sales. Make only those items that are still functional available for purchase, and let neighbors and bargain hunters do the bulk of your organization work for you.

- **Designate areas of the garage for certain items.** Once the items that won’t be going back into the garage have been sold, donated or discarded, organize the garage by designating areas for certain items, making sure to separate items that can pose safety risks. For example, store kids’ bicycles and outdoor toys in a corner of the garage that is opposite the corner where potentially dangerous items such as power tools and gas cans will be stored. Keep the center of the garage open for vehicles.

- **Periodically park cars in the garage.** Homeowners who are comfortable parking their vehicles in their driveways can improve their chances of maintaining organized garages over the long haul by periodically parking in the garage. Doing so not only prevents the gradual buildup of clutter that can slowly take over a garage, but also protects homeowners’ automotive investments.
Trees may require pruning for a variety of reasons. Storms may have damaged branches, necessitating a pruning. In other instances, trees may have outgrown their yards, overpowering the landscape.

Autumn and winter, when trees largely go dormant and fallen leaves make it easier to see the branches beneath, may be prime times to prune. Pruning during the dormant period also minimizes sap loss and stress to the tree.

Branches also need to be trimmed properly to facilitate good healing. Trees will form a callus bark covering over cuts to keep out disease and decay, much as a scab forms over a person’s wound. Damaging the bark on a tree while pruning may interfere with that process, so do-it-yourselfers need to take the time to prune correctly.

When deciding how much to prune, less is usually more. All pruning can put some level of stress on the tree and increase its vulnerability to disease and insect infestation. A good rule of thumb is to never prune more than 25 percent of the crown.

The right tools also make the job safer and easier. Use a pole pruner and lopper, rope saws, folding pruner, and a bucksaw. Always disinfect pruning tools after you’re done to prevent the spread of disease to other trees.
Make sure to stay safe during landscaping projects

Metro

Landscaping is typically viewed as a chore by homeowners, many of who enjoy doing some work on their lawns and gardens. But only a few homeowners may recognize the potential dangers of lawn maintenance.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that more than 230,000 people per year are treated for various injuries resulting from lawn and garden tools. Common injuries include loss of fingers, lacerations, broken and dislocated bones, eye injuries, and burns. Many of these injuries are entirely preventable if homeowners prioritize safety when tending to their lawns and gardens.

UNDERSTAND THE EQUIPMENT

Homeowners should not assume they know how to use all of the tools necessary to maintain lush lawns and bountiful gardens. Familiarize yourself with the proper operation of manual and motorized equipment by reading the owner’s manual thoroughly, making special note of recommended safety guidelines.

Take some time to locate the power buttons and other parts by comparing them to illustrations in the guide. Once you feel comfortable handling the equipment, then you can begin to use it.

WEAR APPROPRIATE PROTECTIVE GEAR

Failure to wear protective gear can lead to injury. Personal protective equipment includes gloves, eye protection, ear protection, boots, and a hard hat if necessary. When working during visibility conditions or at night, wear a reflective vest.

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Failure to wear protective gear can lead to injury. Personal protective equipment includes gloves, eye protection, ear protection, boots, and a hard hat if necessary. When working during visibility conditions or at night, wear a reflective vest.

Other protective items include a hat to shade your eyes from the sun’s rays. Sunscreen will protect the skin from UVA and UVB radiation. Long pants and sleeves can guard against flying debris.

WATCH YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Thousands of injuries occur to children and pets who get hurt around mowers. It’s best if children and pets remain indoors when homeowners are mowing or using other power equipment that may kick up debris. Children under the age of 12 may not have the strength or ability to operate lawn tools. Also, never make a game of riding a child on a riding mower. Nobody under the age of 16 should operate riding lawn mowers.

GET APPROVAL BEFORE DIGGING

It’s difficult to know what is beneath the ground without having a property surveyed and marked. Digging without approval can result in damage to gas lines or water/sewer pipes. Always check with the utility company before digging trenches or holes.

UNPLUG OR TURN OFF ALL EQUIPMENT

When not in use, keep lawn equipment off. Do not try to repair or fix a snag or obstruction in equipment while it is on. Don’t modify the equipment in any way, such as removing protective guards.

EXERCISE CAUTION WITH CHEMICALS

Follow manufacturers’ safety instructions when using pesticides or fertilizers. Avoid application on windy days or right before a rainstorm, as this can spread the product and damage the ecosystem. And make sure to keep people and pets away from any treated areas.
The United States Environmental Protection Agency notes that food scraps and yard waste account for between 20 and 30 percent of what we throw away. But thanks to composting, such waste can be put to work rather than discarded.

Compost is organic material that helps plants grow when added to soil. Benefitting the planet in myriad ways, compost enriches the soil by helping it retain moisture. The EPA notes that composting also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers while also suppressing plant diseases and pests. In addition, when homeowners compost, they inadvertently reduce methane emissions from landfills, thereby lowering their carbon footprints.

Homeowners who do not know how to compost can consider the following tips as they start compost piles on their properties.

- Choose an accessible spot on your property. Choose a location that’s easily accessible and in a dry, shady spot near a water source.
- The EPA recommends moistening dry materials as they’re added and adding brown and green materials as they are collected. Examples of green waste include grass clippings, weeds from annual plants and plant trimmings. Brown materials include dead leaves and shredded cardboard.
- Give the pile structure. Layering materials can give compost piles better structure. The EPA suggests burying fruit and vegetable waste under 10 inches of compost material, including brown and green waste.
- Turn and aerate the pile. Using a garden fork, periodically turn the compost pile. This aerates the heap and provides oxygen that can accelerate the decomposition of the pile. Piles that are not periodically turned and aerated may grow malodorous. Without the heat produced by aeration, composting piles will break down very slowly.
- Recognize when the material is ready. The EPA notes that compost is ready to use when materials at the bottom of a pile are dark and rich in color. According to the EPA, this can take anywhere from two months to two years.

What not to compost

- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs
- Coal or charcoal ash
- Dairy products
- Diseased or insect-infested plants
- Fats, grease, lard, or oils
- Meat or fish bones and scraps
- Pet waste, including soiled cat litter
- Grass trimmings treated with chemical pesticides

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