



## Tips for winterizing exterior living areas



When the summer entertaining season draws to a close, homeowners need to ensure their outdoor living areas can handle weather that's right around the corner. Although outdoor furniture and other items tend to be durable, the impact snow, wind and ice can have on them may lead to damage over time. That is why many homeowners take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their belongings. Here's a look at how to prepare for the winter to come.

- **Furniture:** Cover or store furniture to protect it from the elements. Covering it with weather-proof covers can be adequate if storing items indoors is not possible.

- **Deep clean:** Items that will be covered or stored should be thoroughly cleaned prior to being removed from spaces for the season. Lingering dirt

and moisture can cause damage.

- **Insulate and drain:** Don't risk damage to pipes, which can freeze and crack in the cold. Shut off the water supply to exterior faucets and drain water lines to prevent pipes from freezing and bursting. Use foam pipe insulation to prevent freezing and cover any exposed pipes.

- **Apply mulch:** After cleaning up garden debris, think about applying mulch to garden beds and cover tender plants to protect them from the weather.

- **Check gutters:** Be sure that gutters and downspouts are clear of leaves and any additional debris. If gutters and downspouts are not cleaned, ice dams may form on the roof and cause water damage.

- **Inspect and repair:** Inspect walkways and driveways for any damage and make repairs now so

water will not seep in and cause further issues with freeze-thaw cycles. Consider applying a sealant to protect surfaces from snow and ice.

- **Pools and spas:** It's essential to follow the industry or manufacturer recommendations for closing down swimming pools and spas for the season. While covers may not be essential in all climates, covering can help prevent leaves and other debris from getting in the water. Water should be expelled from pipes and tubing to prevent freezing and bursting. If space allows, consider moving the pool pump indoors to prolong its longevity. Turn off the electricity to the outlet where the filter is plugged in.

There may be additional, region-specific steps to winterize a property, but these pointers are a good starting point to protect outdoor spaces.

## Signs it's time to replace gutters



Home improvement projects run the gamut from complex undertakings like room additions to simpler renovations like a new front door. Some home renovations excite homeowners more than others, but all improvements are a way to make a home safer, more comfortable and/or more functional.

A gutter replacement might not inspire the same level of excitement as a room addition or an overhaul of an outdoor living space, but new gutters can help to prevent roof damage and make properties safer by ensuring rain water is directed away from walkways. Homeowners who suspect it might be time for a gutter replacement can look for these signs of fading gutters.

- **Cracks or splits:** Cracks or splits at the seams of the gutters where two pieces connect is a telltale sign they need to be replaced. Cracks or splits are can slowly lead to separation of gutter pieces, which will lead to leaks. But not all cracks or splits are found at

the seams. In fact, some homes feature seamless gutters, which also can crack or split. Regardless of where they're found, cracks or splits are a warning signs of fading gutters.

- **Rust:** Rust is rarely a good sign whether you're looking at a vehicle or even garden tools. Rust also is a bad sign in relation to gutters. Gutters are painted, and not only for aesthetic purposes. Paint on gutter also serves to protect them from water. When paint begins to flake, gutters will begin to rust and may even produce noticeable rust flakes on the ground below. Rust on gutters and rust flakes beneath them are indicative of gutters that need to be replaced.

- **Gutters pulling away from the home:** Gutters that appear to be pulling away from the home is a sign that they need to be replaced. Gutters are fastened to a home during installation, which ensures they can withstand rain and water. Over time, those fasteners can wear down, ultimately leading to gutters that

appear to be pulling away from the home. Though gutters can be refastened, eventually they will need to be replaced.

- **Pooling water:** Pooling water in a gutter may just be a sign that gutters need to be cleaned. However, pooling water on the ground directly beneath gutters indicates they're not effectively directing water away from the home.

- **Water damage inside:** A home's interior might not be the first place homeowners look when inspecting for damaged gutters, but a flooded basement or crawl space could indicate a gutter problem. Gutters and downspouts are designed to direct water away from a home when functioning properly. When that isn't happening, water can pool beneath the foundation, leading to pooling water and other water damage in basements and crawl spaces.

Gutter replacement projects may not be exciting, but new gutters can make a home safer and prolong the life of a roof and other features on a property.

## Senior-friendly interior renovations

Home is where the heart is. That sentiment may be especially true for seniors who have spent decades living in their homes. A lot of hard work goes into home ownership, and seniors who have lived in the same space for a while undoubtedly have countless memories within the walls of their homes.

A lifetime of experiences in a home can make it hard to leave, but many seniors experience diminished mobility as they age. Mobility issues can make it hard for seniors to traverse their homes, but aging homeowners can make various renovations to make a home more accessible.

- **Revamp entryways and staircases.** A 2020 study of 1,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that 28 percent of individuals age 65 and older who don't exercise regularly struggle with activities like walking up stairs. The study, commissioned by Total Fitness, also found that 14 percent of men and women over 65 who regularly engage in moderate exercise still find it challenging to climb up and down a flight of stairs. Seniors facing similar challenges can install a ramp at their home's entryway so they can comfortably go in and out. Inside, a chair lift can ensure seniors are not struggling to move from one floor to another.

- **Raise the outlets** throughout the home. They're easily overlooked, but outlets, particularly those outside the kitchen, tend to be close to the floor. AARP notes that's no accident, as outlets are gener-



ally placed at a height equal to the length of a hammer to save time with measuring when buildings are being constructed. Outlets close to the floor can be difficult for seniors with mobility issues to reach. Relocating the outlets a little higher off the floor is not an expensive renovation, but it can make a home more accessible for seniors who have difficulty bending down or getting down on one knee.

- **Install door knob extensions.** Verywell Health notes that nearly half of all people age 65 and older have arthritis or another rheumatic condition. Arthritis can make it difficult for seniors to grip and turn door knobs. Door knob extensions can make it easier for seniors with arthritis to open the doors in their homes. Such extensions are roughly five-inch levers that can be installed over an existing door knob,

making it easier to grab and pull down. Extensions save seniors the hassle of turning the knob, which some may find painful and almost impossible.

- **Renovate the bathroom.** Bathroom renovation projects can be costly, but seniors with mobility issues should know that bathrooms can pose a particularly dangerous threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that roughly three million older adults are treated for fall injuries in emergency departments each year. A 2019 analysis published in The Journals of Gerontology noted that 22 percent of in-home falls resulted in a change in the person's walking ability. Replacing a step-over shower with a zero-step alternative can make it easier for seniors with mobility issues to get in and out of the shower, thus reducing their risk for falls.

## The most popular rooms to remodel

Home improvement trends come and go. In a testament to that reality, the wildly popular open floor plan concepts that have dominated homeowners' desires over the last decade-plus could be falling out of favor, a shift that Rachel Stults of Realtor.com linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in a 2023 interview with Business Insider. Stults noted open floor plans will likely exhibit some measure of staying power, but linked the shift toward more traditional layouts to COVID lockdowns and the desire for more privacy among residents.

The shift away from open floor plans is a testament to the fleeting nature of home renovation trends. But trends still deserve a place at the table among real estate investors and homeowners who want to renovate their homes with an eye on projects that could be most appealing to prospective buyers.

As homeowners balance their own preferences with those that might help them sell their homes down the road, they can consider this list of the most popular rooms to renovate, courtesy of the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research.

1. Kitchen
2. Guest bathroom
3. Primary bathroom
4. Living room
5. Guest bedroom
6. Primary bedroom
7. Laundry room
8. Closet
9. Dining room
10. Home office

When considering renovating these or other rooms, homeowners should know that Houzz researchers found that the median spend increased for most interior room upgrades compared to the previous year. However, the median cost to upgrade living rooms and home offices remained unchanged.

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# Signs it might be time for a room addition project



No one enjoys being in cramped quarters. Whether a person battles a legitimate case of claustrophobia when confined in tight spaces or simply prefers a place to stretch out, there's no denying the appeal of a little extra room. That's particularly so at home, where cramped spaces can make it hard to unwind.

When homeowners feel their walls are closing in on them, many choose to build space via a room addition. Room addition projects are extensive and expensive undertakings, with the home renovation experts at Angi estimating the average add-on costs \$48,000. But Angi estimates such projects can cost as much as \$72,600, or even more depending on the size of the space and the features chosen.

The financial commitment when adding a room is significant, but homeowners and residents also will need to prepare for a potentially lengthy disruption to their daily routines. Various online resources, including Angi, suggest room addition projects typically take around three to four months. With so much at stake, homeowners who think they might benefit from a room addition can look for various signs to

help them determine if such a project is right for them.

- Increasingly cluttered spaces: Cramped quarters without much space for people are perhaps the most notable sign that residents can benefit from some additional space in a home. Cluttered spaces suggest homeowners may have run out of room for their stuff, and a custom addition can provide that extra room while contributing to a more calming ambiance in common spaces that may no longer be overwhelmed by papers, toys and other items that can quickly take over a home that lacks space.

- Lifestyle hurdles: Millions of homeowners like to entertain friends and family, and that's more manageable for some than it is for others. If interior or exterior spaces do not accommodate hosting, a room addition that expands an existing kitchen or living room might be the ideal renovation project.

- Functionally challenged: A home that no longer has enough space to meet your needs is another sign a room addition might be in order. This very issue emerged for millions of professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic and

has remained a challenge ever since. Indeed, an increase in days spent working remotely has left many homeowners grateful to work from home but desirous of a designated remote work space. A room addition to accommodate a home office can be just what remote workers need to restore fully functional status to their homes.

- Cost: While the sticker price of a home addition may (or may not) raise an eyebrow, the project is almost certain to prove more cost-effective than moving. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the average sale price of a home in the United States reached \$503,800 in January 2025. While that marked a roughly \$16,000 decrease from a year earlier, it's still a high figure that many homeowners aren't willing to pay. A cost comparison detailing the price to move versus the price to build an addition may indicate that the latter option is a homeowner's best bet.

A room addition could be the perfect renovation project for homeowners who need more space but still prefer to stay put.

# Why it pays to create a mudroom in a home



Considerations for room additions or space modifications generally involve rooms that will add value or function to a home. Mudrooms certainly fit that description, as they can add aesthetic appeal in more ways than one.

As the name implies, mudrooms are entire rooms or areas near entryways of homes where muddy shoes and other items can be stored. By having a set space for messy shoes and coats, homeowners do not need to worry about dirt and other debris being tracked throughout the home. Mudrooms also can provide a welcoming space for guests.

Homeowners who have adequate space to add an entirely new room may have no difficulty putting in a mudroom. A mudroom addition is a job best left to a professional. Ideally, this new mudroom can be adjacent to an entry by the garage, or a side or back door. The footprint of the mudroom needn't be too large, either. All it requires is a small amount of space to place

a bench, coat hooks and shoe storage.

According to This Old House, homeowners also can convert a porch, create a mudroom by expanding into an adjacent room or closet, or even repurpose space in an attached garage. U.S. News and World Report indicates that a well planned and executed mudroom has the potential to increase a home's value. Depending on the scope of the work, the average cost of a mudroom project ranges from \$2,500 for a simple porch conversion to \$30,000 when a new foundation is needed and the build-out is extensive.

Budget-conscious homeowners can create a mudroom in an existing foyer or another entryway. Adequate storage is essential for any mudroom, and should include coat racks, hooks, a bench to facilitate removing shoes safely, shoe storage, and additional considerations, like shopping bag storage or umbrella holders. Creating a door from the outside into an existing laundry room

can enable homeowners to use the space as both a mudroom and laundry area with minimal changes necessary.

There are some extra considerations for mudrooms that homeowners should think about. The flooring, walls and furniture/storage used in the mudroom should be durable and easily cleaned. As wet and dirty shoes and clothing will be in the space, it's essential to make clean-up a breeze. Look for nonslip flooring so entering the mudroom safely is not an issue.

Although a mudroom is a utilitarian space, creature comforts can be added to integrate the space with the rest of the home. Cover a storage bench with indoor-outdoor fabric that coordinates to the colors used in a home. Add some decorative drawer pulls and cabinet hardware to elevate the space. Washable throw rugs also can add some design appeal to the room.

Mudrooms can be useful spaces that add function and value to homes.

## Explaining the siding replacement process

The longer a person resides in a particular home, the greater the likelihood that various components of that residence will need to be replaced. Driveways, roofs, HVAC systems, and even appliances all have expiration dates.

Although siding on a home can be quite durable, there may be specific reasons why homeowners choose to or need to replace it at some point. Understanding what's to come of the job can help homeowners prepare. No two siding jobs are exactly the same, and each project will be dictated by a host of variables, including which type of siding homeowners choose. However, these general steps are commonplace during siding replacement projects.

- Choose siding: Homeowners are urged to consult with various siding installation companies

about which products are available and ask each for an estimate. Budget, climate and other factors will narrow down siding materials. The Home Depot says popular siding types include vinyl, wood, fiber cement, metal, and stone. Siding can have almost any color or texture as well.

- Remove and relocate: Outdoor items close to the perimeter of the home will have to be moved out of the way so workers can access the siding. The job will require a dumpster to be dropped in front of the home or in the driveway to collect debris, so homeowners should be prepared to leave space for it.

- Siding delivery: The new siding should be delivered prior to the installation start day. These materials will take up a lot of room and space should be made

available so the installation team can access them without difficulty.

- Interior decor: Siding installation will include hammering, which can disrupt items on interior walls. It is best to have all wall hangings taken down to prevent damage.

- Old siding removal: On the first day of installation, removal of the old siding will happen first, according to Smart Exteriors. Siding, insulation and trim will be removed. In the event that older, asbestos-based siding is on a home, contractors may safely remove and discard it, or go over that type of siding. Homeowners should inquire about this step during the company vetting process.

- Home inspection: Once all old material is gone, the exterior sheathing will be inspected to ensure it is in good shape. Signs of rot or loose boards will be con-



sidered and repaired, if necessary.

- New siding install: First workers will put on house wrap or some sort of insulation/water barrier product. Afterwards, siding boards are layered on in the design chosen.

Nails or screws are used to attach the siding and seams will be caulked to prevent moisture penetration. If the homeowner has chosen to have gutters and downspouts installed during the siding job, those will be fitted and installed as well.

- Clean up: The installation team will begin the process of thoroughly cleaning up the property. All tools will be removed and the property will be swept or blown to clean

away debris. Crews typically use powerful magnets to grab stray nails and screws that have fallen into the lawn and elsewhere. The dumpster will be taken away shortly after the work is completed.

Siding replacement is a big job but one that can offer immediate curb appeal once completed. It typically is not a do-it-yourself project since it requires specific skills to ensure durability.

## Get ready for a furnace checkup

Turning on the heat may be the furthest thing from homeowners' minds come the end of summer or early fall. After all, there are plenty more days of comfortable temperatures to expect over the weeks to come. However, failing to inspect a furnace prior to when it is needed could lay a foundation for cold evenings.

Many HVAC experts recommend that homeowners get their furnaces tuned up before the first cold spell arrives. When

the heat is needed for the first time, it will be guaranteed to work if it's been examined and any underlying issues have been addressed.

HVAC technicians are busy at the start of summer and winter. If a furnace is not working correctly, it could take some time before a professional can make a service call. Having the furnace and related equipment checked prior to when it's time to turn on the furnace means homeowners will not be

left in the lurch or potentially spending premium prices for repairs.

It is important to get a furnace checkup for a variety of reasons. Doing so can make the HVAC system run more efficiently, which could result in savings over the winter. Regular maintenance also can help the furnace last longer, delaying the need for a costly replacement. No one wants the furnace to break down in the middle of a frigid night. Annual checkups can help reduce the risk of

that happening. In addition, many furnace manufacturers offer warranties on their systems that require annual maintenance from a professional. Failure to have the system inspected could void the warranty.

Even if homeowners are floating in the pool and cranking up the air conditioning, they should give consideration to having their furnaces inspected and serviced soon to prepare for the colder months ahead.

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