

FALL Home Improvement & Real Estate



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Tips for healthy fall lawn care for cool-season grasses

Metro Creative Connection

Spring might mark the time when many homeowners begin tending to their lawns each year, but it's important to recognize the significance of fall lawn care as well. Grasses vary, and homeowners are urged to identify which type of grass is in their lawn so they can ensure it gets the care it needs before winter's first frost.

Cool-season grasses like perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass are common in various regions, and the following strategies can help homeowners with these types of grasses tend to their lawns this fall.

- Stick to your recommended fertilization schedule. Homeowners who have been fertil-

izing since spring are urged to continue doing so in fall at the recommended interval. It's easy to forget to fertilize in fall thanks to cooler temperatures that don't call lawn care to mind and busier schedules after school starts again and summer vacation season ends. But many fertilizer manufacturers advise users of their products to fertilize several times over the course of the year, including in fall. Stick to the intervals recommended on the packaging of the fertilizer you've been using, making sure not to forget to fertilize this fall.

- Conduct a soil test. A soil test can determine if the soil is lacking any nutritive elements it needs to come back strong in spring. Certain amend-



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ments can restore pH balance if necessary and foster stronger growth when lawns come back in spring.

- Aerate, if necessary. Soil can become compacted over time, and that can cause a range of problems for a lawn. Compacted soil can make it harder for water to reach the roots of

grass, which weakens grass and makes it more vulnerable to damage during adverse weather events like drought. Compacted soil also makes it harder for nutrients in fertilizer to get into the soil. Aerating is best left to professionals, particularly in larger lawns, as the job can foster strong root development when done properly.

- Remove thatch where it's excessive. Thin layers of thatch can benefit lawns by delivering nutrients from grass clippings and leaves to a lawn. However, when thatch is excessive, it can block air, water and even fertilizer from reaching the soil. Thatch often can be removed with a rake, but lawns with especially thick layers of thatch may need to be scarified.

Homeowners can take a DIY approach to scarifying or hire a landscaping professional to de-thatch the lawn and remove the thatch from their properties.

- Continue to water the lawn. A cool-season grass will continue to require water into the fall. Though the lawn won't need to be watered as frequently in fall as in summer, various lawn care professionals note cool-season grasses still need roughly an inch of water each week in fall.

- Remove leaves as they fall. Fallen leaves can affect a lawn in much the same way as excessive amounts of thatch, blocking water and nutrients from reaching the soil. So it's best to remove fallen leaves, especially when they begin to fall in large quantities.

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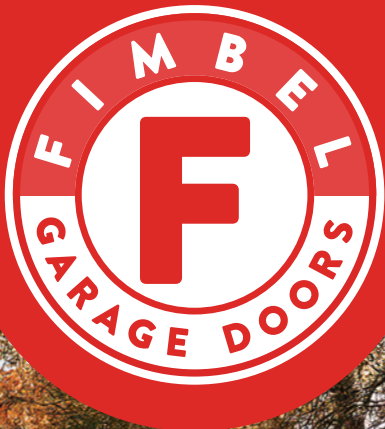
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N.H. REAL ESTATE MARKET

Seller's market is softening; number of offers is dropping

■ **Trends are regional:** Nashua/Manchester is a hot market; Seacoast remains expensive but has fewer “mega-sales” now; Claremont area is seeing a little more inventory and out-of-state buyers.

By Kathleen D. Bailey
Special to the Union Leader

Realtor and broker Roz Caplan remembers a recent sale. “It was a house that, frankly, I wouldn’t have given a nickel for,” she said, adding, “but it sold in three days.”

Caplan is the broker owner and president of Century 21 Highview Realty in Claremont.

While New Hampshire is a small state, the elusive “quality of life” components the state offers continues to draw potential residents, while Realtors and brokers grapple with high demand and smaller inventory.

Stats and such

Released in July, the Manchester/Nashua metro area received the designation of “Hottest Real Estate Market” in the country in the Summer 2025 Wall Street Journal/Realtor.com Housing Market Ranking.

According to the ranking, the area population is 430,462, with an unemployment rate of 2.6% and a median home listing price of \$599,900 in June.

According to Realtor.com, the quarterly ranking evaluates the 200 most populous metro areas as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau. It considers real estate demand, housing inventory, median days on the market, median price trends, property taxes, climate risks, unemployment rate, wages, regional price parities, amenities, and other factors that affect the cost of living and quality of life.

But most of New Hampshire is a hot market right now.

What's going on

The median home price for New Hampshire was \$550,000 in August, according to stats compiled by the New Hampshire Association of Realtors. But the median for Rockingham County was \$689,000. Realtors and brokers working in that area have no trouble selling higher-end homes.

Lee Ann Parks is an associate broker with eXp Realty, a cloud-based brokerage firm operating in 29 countries. She’s been in the business for 22 years and works mainly in the Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine regions.

Over 22 years, she has seen home prices escalate, especially in her region.

Parks points to her own home off of Dover Point, which she bought in 2005, for \$460,000, as part of a multiple bidder process. The house, with its waterfront access and proximity to Portsmouth, has doubled in value since then, she said.

John Rice, associate broker with Tate & Foss Sotheby’s International Realty, has been a Realtor and broker since before most of his millennial clients were born. He started in the 1970s, and 2025 has been the biggest year of that career.

“When you’ve been around five decades, people know you,” he pointed out. He regularly sells homes for seniors going into RiverWoods in Exeter, for example. “The rest of the time it’s just dumb luck,” he added cheerfully.

Like Parks, he lives and works in the Seacoast, a “weird little



PHOTO PROVIDED BY JOHN RICE

This house in Portsmouth recently sold for \$3.9 million, according to Realtor John Rice with Tate & Foss Sotheby’s International Realty.

pocket” that doesn’t follow the state or national norms. “The rest of the country is slowing down,” he said. “But the trend we’re seeing, it’s going back to normal.” Before the pandemic his firm handled 350 listings every month. At the time of this interview, they had 190, according to him.

But Rice is not talking about your average buyer. “The most significant trend,” he said, “is that we’re selling more \$1 million homes. The age of the mega-sale is gone,” he said, adding that a “mega-sale” is one now defined as over \$5 million.

“Last year in Portsmouth we had three sales exceed \$3 million,” he said. “This year we had

eight.”

“We are seeing the ‘top’ melt away,” Rice said of those \$5 million houses. “We are seeing more inventory, and lower high-end prices.”

For Rice’s firm, the ADM, or average day on the market, is 10 days or less. “These people,” he said, “are not shrinking violets. They see something, they’re interested, and it’s gone.” But there aren’t that many offers.

Rice said in 2023, the firm was “overrun” with buyers. “We would see 13 to 14 offers on the table,” he recalled. Recently, for a \$1.5 million listing in Rye, he had a nonstop 2.5-hour open

“*The most significant trend is that we’re selling more \$1 million homes. The age of the mega-sale (over \$5 million) is gone.*”

JOHN RICE
Seacoast area Realtor

Real estate

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house — but only two offers. “People take more time to make up their minds,” he said. But when they want it, they want it.

Caplan remembers when she moved to the Claremont area as a bride in the 1970s. “I came up from Boston,” she said, “and my mother thought I was going to the end of the world.” But she found a home in the Sugar River area, and made a career of helping other people find their homes.

Though her area is less glamorous than the Seacoast, things are going well for Caplan, too. “We have a little more inventory,” she said, adding that “a few things are lingering.” She estimated her firm’s inventory is now 10 to 15% more than “the days when we couldn’t keep a

listing.”

The median home price in the Claremont/Charlestown area is \$255,000, Caplan said.

While some of her clients are first-time homebuyers, many are coming from out of state — and they’re prepared to pay cash, according to her. Others sold their houses, moved South, and didn’t like being snowbirds, so they came back.

The market is still a seller’s market, Caplan said. “But it’s softening,” she added.

Her area has a lot going for it, according to Caplan. “It’s quiet, a different kind of lifestyle,” she said. “We’re close to ski areas, close to Sunapee, close to Vermont. There’s a good industrial base, and we’re near Amtrak, buses, an airport.” And many of

her clients are willing to commute.

The 1/4 point solution

In September, the Federal Reserve lowered interest rates by 1/4 percentage point, to 4 from 4 1/4 percent. The Fed said the drop was due to inflation and a weakening labor market and warned that two more cuts could happen in the near future.

Will it affect the housing market?

For Parks, the drop in interest rates is a “too soon to tell” situation. While she is fortunate to have a number of listings, the attendance at her open houses isn’t spectacular. “There are not a lot of people coming out,” she said. “We see three to six groups, and we get one or two offers —

if it’s priced accordingly.”

Parks worries that if the rates go too low, “the unaffordability will escalate.”

The interest rate drop hasn’t affected Rice’s clients, he said, and he doesn’t expect it to. “Buyers are conditioned to a certain interest rate,” he said.

Not exactly The Waltons

The high cost of buying a house, or even renting, has driven recent graduates and even families to move back home. Or they haven’t left yet. “Children are living at home longer,” Parks said. She sees this up close: her boyfriend has a grown child living with him, and one of her sons and his girlfriend are living with parents.

And the high housing costs

are driving out the teachers, the firefighters — “The people who take care of us,” she pointed out.

While Parks has been able to maintain a reasonable inventory, she said that “as a state, we’re lacking.”

Caplan saw young people moving back home during the pandemic, when some lost their jobs. Now they’re looking for other options, she said, but they’re still gun-shy about buying. “They could do it now, the interest rates are lower, but they still want me to put them in rentals,” she said.

Locked and loaded

According to the U.S. Finance Authority website, many current

See Real estate, Page T6

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Real estate

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homeowners now have fixed-rate loans significantly below current market interest rates, creating a strong disincentive to sell. This phenomenon is known as the “lock-in” effect.

Parks is seeing some “lock-in effect” when homeowners already have a good interest rate. “They’re thinking, ‘I have a 3 1/2 percent rate now, why should I move?’” she said, adding, “This doesn’t apply to people who’ve outgrown their houses or are being transferred for work.” For her current inventory, the majority of sellers are aging and want to downsize.

For those hanging on to their houses, she observes a greater interest in construction and remodeling, often with the adding of ADUs.

Rice has heard about the lock-in effect but doesn’t see it much with his customer demographic. “It’s obviously not affecting us when our listings are going up,” he said. “The other part of the demographic is that people want to age in place.”

Parks continues to see a strong second-home market. She predicts that lower rates will drive up prices, “a double-edged sword,” and that young people will have to work

two and three jobs to afford the home of their dreams or purchase one that needs work.

Parks hasn’t given up trying to predict the real estate business, but she’s learned to turn on a dime. In 2020 that dime was the COVID 19 virus. When the pandemic hit, she thought the secondary home market would die out, as people hunkered down in their primaries.

It didn’t work that way. Instead, Parks saw a spike in secondary home sales. “Once they learned they could work remotely, people were snapping them up,” she said.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY JOHN RICE

This home in Rye recently sold for \$1.5 million, according to Realtor John Rice.



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Remedy suggestions for those annoying creaky floors

Metro Creative Connection

The National Wood Flooring Association says wood floors are the most environmentally friendly flooring options available. In the United States, the hardwood forests that provide flooring products are growing twice as fast as they are being harvested. Furthermore, wood floors can last for many generations and require fewer raw materials to produce than other flooring options.

Hardwood floors can endure for decades in a home but over time may need some tender loving care to keep them looking good and working as they should. Squeaky floors are a common nuisance often caused

by movement and friction between floorboards. Treating the problem involves identifying the underlying issue.

Loose hardware

Squeaky floors may be due to the loosening of the hardware holding the floor in place, says The Home Depot. When nails or screws no longer are secured tightly, the boards can rub together. The noise heard is the sound produced by rubbing. Tightening or replacing the hardware can help reduce the squeaking.

Counter-snap kit method

This Old House says this kit method is a great way to fix squeaks without damaging the



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floor. Once the source of the squeak is located, drill a 3/32-inch pilot hole through the

hardwood flooring. Then insert a screw through the kit's depth-control fixture and into the pilot hole, and drive it until it automatically snaps off below the wood surface. Follow this up by filling the hole with wood putty that matches the floor color. Once the putty is dry, lightly sand the area to blend.

Use a shim or shims

Sometimes the floor may squeak because of a gap between the joists and the sub-floor. Filling the gap with a small piece of wood called a shim can help alleviate the gap or gaps.

Drive up screws

If a squeak is just in one spot, The Home Depot says that

you may be able to drive short screws from below into the subfloor.

Small gaps

For small gaps between boards, sprinkle talcum powder or powdered graphite between squeaky boards to reduce friction. Wood filler applied with a putty knife also may work. For larger gaps, use a liquid filler designed for wood floors.

Homeowners also can visit their local home improvement center for other hardware solutions designed for underfloor repairs to remedy squeaks. Many work from underneath the floor and involve mounting plates or brackets to shore up the floor.

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INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS

Q&A

Jessica Puleo

Owner/CEO & Lead Designer
Spaces Reimagined Interior Design



HEIDI KIRN PHOTOGRAPHY



HEIDI KIRN PHOTOGRAPHER

Medium tone wood floors that contrast the lighter cabinets and stylish pendant lighting can be seen in this kitchen designed by Spaces Reimagined Interior Design.



What’s trending right now in the busiest rooms in the home?

The Living Room

COLORS: Warm earth tones. It’s been on trend for a bit but I don’t see it leaving for awhile. It provides comfort and texture and that homey feeling.

FLOORING: Hardwood will never go out of style. But the middle plank size is what I see more of. Not the super large ones and not the super skinny ones. I don’t love using tile flooring in the living room because it’s so cold on your feet, but the wood look is definitely in.

FURNITURE: Comfortable seating! Swivel chairs for functionality. Velvet textures, tailored drapery for an elevated look.

ACCESSORIES: Greenery and faux branches are always an easy accessory to add in. It provides that natural feel and sometimes a pop of color if you’re going with a more neutral palette. Marble accents are always a fun way to dress up a coffee table or shelf and lamps lamps lamps! I love lamp lighting. Oversized for the end tables, smaller ones for the shelves, it can be a statement piece or an anchor depending on what the room needs.

The Kitchen

COLORS: Wood stain cabinets. Darker wood with sleeker door profiles paired with more statement piece countertops.

FLOORING: I always tell my clients to go with a nice medium tone wood color. But it also depends on what your cabinets look like. If you have a wood stain cabinets, you want to provide some type of contrast with your floors and you don’t want the darker one to be your floors, you’ll see everything! If you have white cabinets or a lighter tone, then doing a white oak flooring still works but my safe bet is a rich caramel tone for flooring.

FIXTURES: Stainless steel is always a classic look and it goes with everything. I’m seeing less and less black fixtures (which I’m happy about) and more of the champagne gold, polished nickel and stainless steel.

LIGHTING: Statement lighting is always on trend. I’ve been seeing a lot of printed fabric pendants and styles leaning way more traditional but with a funky twist that are eye-catching and really add that wow factor to a kitchen.

ABOUT: Jessica Puleo has a background in advertising and the event industry, including wedding and community event planning, before starting this chapter with interior design.
ON THE COVER: A dining room, designed by Spaces Reimagined, that showcases warm earth tones and furniture with soft textures. *Photo Provided by Spaces Reimagined*



HEIDI KIRN PHOTOGRAPHY

Large format tiles are on trend for bathroom flooring.

The Bathroom

COLORS: Definitely lots of color! Bathrooms are such a fun area to play with color because it’s smaller and it can be super playful. Whether it’s through wallpaper or the paint color or the tile in the shower, I love adding in some bolder color.

FLOORING: I always love a large format tile because it helps make the space feel bigger. I’ve been seeing a lot more softer patterns and warmer tones and more natural stone materials like marble and travertine being used.

FIXTURES: I love gold all the time but I’ve been seeing a lot more polished nickel and chrome used in bathrooms. It’s such a polished and clean look and goes really well with wood or white cabinets.

LIGHTING: Wall sconce lighting! I love sconces. They add such a fun and warm layer of light to the space — whether it’s the bathroom, dining room or living, it’s so cozy.



Many New England home-owners appreciate having a living room fireplace. What materials are popular right now for the surround and for mantels?

ANSWER: I have seen a lot more stucco and plaster for both the surround and the mantel. It’s such a clean sleek look.

There’s more on Page 12 ▶



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Q

When designing a kitchen, what are your top tips to help with organization?

ANSWER: I used to offer organizing as a service a couple of years ago and when we would start in the kitchen, I always asked how their kitchen was used? What's the functionality besides just meal prepping. It helped me understand how a family flows in and out.

The second thing we did, take everything out. Not all at once, but as you're going through the sections of cabinets and drawers, take it out, assess what you have, find things you thought you lost and pare down on items you don't need or use anymore. Then you think about the best place for it to go back to. It could make sense to switch where your dishes are or where you keep the Ziplock bags.

The last thing I recommend is getting items to help the insides stay organized. Drawer dividers, acrylic bins for the pantry, lazy susans! I love lazy susans for just about everything!



If you're having trouble keeping your kitchen clutter-free like this kitchen designed by Spaces Reimagined Interior Design, sort and pare down items you don't use and consider installing lazy susans in your cabinets to maximize storage.

HEIDI KIRN PHOTOGRAPHY

Q

How do you design a gallery wall? Are there tips you can share for people trying to do it themselves?

ANSWER: Gallery walls can be very overwhelming but always start with an odd number of pieces to work with, unless you're going for a stacked picture look.

Depending on where it's going and what's beneath it (couch, buffet/sideboard, etc.) you want to make sure it's 2/3rd to 3/4th the size of what's beneath it.

I like to use painters tape and tape out my rectangle the size it needs to be on the floor and then start filling in my pieces and arranging them how I want, and then you can take the tape on the wall and start with the biggest piece first so you can scale around that.

Rule of thumb is to hang each piece about 2-3 inches away from each other, so make sure you're getting large enough pieces if you aren't using a lot of them.



Improving storage, upgrading the flooring, and adding windows for easy ventilation are garage improvements that often see a return on investment.

METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Average garage conversion recovers about 80% of investment

Metro Creative Connection

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage remodels can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office. Homeowners may have some questions about the process.

How much does the renovation cost?

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel, but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

Will I recoup the investment?

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The business firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average garage conversion provides an 80% return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

How can I upgrade the flooring?

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors, although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.

Can I have the best of both worlds?

Sometimes a garage needs to serve

many purposes. Lofting the garage means a homeowner can still park cars or utilize the lower space as a living area, all the while items are stored overhead. Some flip this design scenario and have the loft area as a bedroom or finished living space, while the lower portion remains a traditional garage area.

Another thought is to finish only a portion of the garage. This works well for two- or three-car garages where there will be room to park a car and the remainder will serve another purpose for living space.

What are other improvements?

Installing more windows or improving on the lighting in the garage can be important. The garage improvement experts at Danley's say window installation enables people to circulate air in the garage without having to open the garage door. Spread out lighting in the garage, and use a combination of overhead and task lighting just as one would in the home itself.

How do I deter bugs or pests?

Insects often want to hunker down in garages, and they may find it easy to get inside a garage. Keeping the garage clean and organized is the best way to deter pests and to spot infestations before they become problematic, indicates Mosquito Joe pest control company. Reducing water and humidity in the space, weatherproofing at the base of the garage door and other entry spots and utilizing insect repellents to make the garage less hospitable also can decrease the risk of insect infestation.

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TREE MAINTENANCE



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Ash, white pine near your house may need inspection

■ **Concerns:** The emerald ash borer beetle is killing ash trees; white pines have been uprooting and breaking.

By Robert Levey
Special to the Union Leader

With colder weather finally arriving, many homeowners find themselves walking around their homes in search of fall projects.

According to Brendan McAdams, owner and founder of Taylor Tree Service in Lee, fall is probably the best time for projects that involve tree work. "Now is the time to start looking around for hazardous trees to take care of them before winter," he said. "Trim trees before winter to avoid fungus or wounds so trees can start focusing on growth in the spring."

Larger tree work projects, however — especially those that may involve climbing — are best left to profession-

als. "It can be one of the most hazardous jobs in America," he explained. "It can be extremely dangerous if you don't know what you're doing and don't have equipment."

Overhead hazards are often the proverbial culprit, although trees themselves may be in poor condition (although not appear as such). "There is always a fall risk," he said.

McAdams said he started an apprenticeship in the business under a logger in 2017. At the time, he was a fireman. "All firemen have side work," he noted.

His side work grew to such an extent, however, that he decided to leave firefighting behind. "I had gotten so busy," he said, "so I left firefighting and started doing this full time."

Noting he now has a crew and "a really good group of people" around him, McAdams said he especially enjoys how every project — and tree — is different. "It's always a puzzle on how to take it

Tree service

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down,” he said. “You can look at a tree in the morning, come up with a plan, and always end up doing something different — it’s different every day.”

What is not different every day, however, are the risks. “A tree could fall and hit something you don’t want it to hit,” he said.

The most dangerous thing in tree work in New Hampshire right now, noted McAdams, is the ash tree. “The emerald ash borer (beetle) is killing them,” he said. “They are basically mummifying the tree.”

In this condition, an ash tree can essentially break off and “go where it wants to go.” He said ash trees affected by this beetle tend to look greyish white in color with striations in the bark that run vertically.

“There are almost

orange patches where woodpeckers have peeled bark away to get to bugs underneath,” he added. “You can pull bark off by hand after the tree has been affected by the borer and see all the paths the beetles have taken.”

Any “big dead scraggly tree,” however, presents a significant danger. “I definitely recommend calling a professional in these cases,” he said.

In looking ahead to the winter, McAdams said this season is not what it used to be, as white pines no longer tend to properly hibernate. “They’ve been uprooting, breaking, and causing all sorts of problems for folks,” he said. “I’ve seen that change in the white pines in just the last eight or nine years.”

When visiting a property, he looks for ash

and white pines — and if either are within striking distance of a house, he recommends removing the former and at least considering the removal of the latter.

“I also look for branches over the roof and lichen on branches over the roof or side of the house,” he said. “The lichen can work its way under the shingles and start letting water in.”

For homeowners interested in repurposing cut trees, McAdams said they have been working with Urban Furniture in Portsmouth to turn them into furniture or cutting boards. “We can also leave wood chips on site or bark mulch,” he said. “Anything worth saving or using, we try to save it all.”

To learn more about tree work or Taylor Tree Service, visit taylortreeservice-nh.com.



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Taylor Tree Service owner Brendan McAdams says his company works with Urban Furniture in Portsmouth to turn cut trees into furniture or cutting boards. They can also leave behind wood chips or bark mulch on site for the homeowner.



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BRENDAN McADAMS
Owner of Taylor Tree Service



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