

CLEANUP

Fall and winter chores and prep

FROM PAGE 1

season will help maximize a plant's energy by channeling it toward root development, rather than new growth. That way, the plant will be well-established by the time the spring growing season comes.

"If you wait until the spring, the plant hasn't had as much time to adjust and stabilize its root system, and the demands of the spring and summer heat will be more stressful for it," she added.

Fall and winter have their stresses too. The main danger for plants in colder seasons is dehydration. She recommended continuing your watering routine until the ground freezes. This is particularly important for evergreens. While

deciduous trees and plants lose their leaves, evergreens' foliage can still be heated by the sun, causing them to lose more moisture than their leafless counterparts.

John Robinson at McGough's in Traverse City, agrees and said to keep fall fertilizers on the mild side, as a more intense blend will stimulate too much growth outside of the plant's natural cycle.

"If you fertilize heavily during the natural shutdown period, the growth you get is 'weak growth', and it will be more susceptible to winter kill," said Robinson.

McGough's suggests what they call "dormant fertilization." This type of fertilizer is typically a customized blend, made to work specifically with our region's particular soil types. Dormant fertilization should be done at the beginning of the dormant cycle. If done too early, the fertilizer will kick in a

growth spurt that can, ultimately, be harmful to plants, making them vulnerable to various conditions like snow mold.

How can you tell how early is too early?

"When it's time to put the mower away, and you're not seeing any new growth, that's when plants start storing up nutrients to get them through the winter, and that's when you want to fertilize," said Robinson.

What about feeding your yard with what nature already abundantly provides each fall? Terry Bertrand, co-owner of Barker Creek Nursery and Landscaping in Williamsburg, said fall leaves can be a great source of nutrient-rich compost, but only with some key modifications.

Bertrand recommended mixing your fall leaves into existing compost, or creating a new compost mound from fall leaves, dry green grass clippings, hay, straw, shredded bark, manure and food scraps. There should

be a mixture of many different ingredients — both green and brown organic material — to create a properly balanced fertilizer. If your compost is made up of only leaves, it could be thriving with bad bacteria.

Another thing to watch for when using leaves for fertilizer is any indication of harmful fungus. This fungus is most frequently seen on maple, crabapple or fruit tree leaves in the form of dark spots. In this case, rake the leaves away from base of the tree in order to keep the fungus from spreading more and infecting the tree next year. Do not use these leaves for compost.

With your flowers, trees and lawn covered, what about those plants often closest to the house? Pine Hill carries a product called Wilt-Pruf to help care for your shrubs. This spray coats the needles and leaves and prevents moisture from evaporating. Wait until the temperature is

consistently in the 40s before spraying to ensure the plant's moisture has traveled to the roots, but the ground is not yet frozen.

Pest control

Winter's wind and cold aren't your yard's only enemies. Another is rodents and pests. Protect your shrubs and young trees with burlap or use a tree wrap on the trunks. Tree wraps are essentially a plastic wrapping that is wound up the trunk after the ground has frozen. It prevents girdling by rodents, deer and mice. It also protects against "sun scald," which can happen when bark is heated by the sun during warm autumn days and then cools rapidly on the drastically cooler nights, causing trunks to crack and split.

Smaller yard pests and insects love to burrow into bark for a warm winter's nap and lay their eggs. Once the leaves are off the trees, you can spray a "dor-

mant spray" on the needles, bare branches, trunk and surrounding area. Bertrand recommends Ultra Fine oil to customers. It kills eggs and larvae and should be sprayed on plants both currently infested with, or prone to, pests.

Burlap can provide additional protection from the weight of snow accumulation. Shrubs planted along home foundations should also be braced with stakes and rope in order to keep them from bending and breaking under the weight of snow.

Looking at a fall yard care check list can sometimes be a daunting prospect, but remember: there's still a decent amount of daylight, the days are warm and soon you'll be able to close that garage door and forget about your yard until spring — at least until you have to get out your snow shovel!

Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer.

Making chores a snap

BY HARRIET SCHECHTER
Copley News Service

"You make the bed, you do the dishes, and six months later you have to start all over again."

— Roseanne Barr

Think of the free time you would have if you didn't have to do dishes, clean toilets, dust bookshelves or vacuum carpets. And think of the pigpen your home would become without regular upkeep.

90 percent of what we spend our time doing is stuff we need to do over and over again. And when maintenance is lacking in even a small number of life areas, chaos and clutter can creep up on you.

The good news is that even though you can't change the equation, you can learn how to make most types of maintenance more enjoyable — or at least easier and less time-consuming.

What makes it onerous — and therefore likely to get put off — is when you have to put too much time and effort into three parts of the process:

- Locating the tools and supplies to get the job done.
- Using products that don't work well or are unpleasant to handle.
- Putting away all those tools and supplies.

There are several commonplace, inexpensive, yet easy-to-use products that can help "easify" various tasks.

Here are five great solutions to common housekeeping problems:

Trash

If you don't have at least one trash receptacle and/or recycling bin in each room, it's possible that you're not making it easy enough to discard your detritus. Look around your home and notice where things tend to pile up. Those are places just begging for a bin.

Remember to treat your wastebaskets like babies — keep them within close reach at all times, feed them frequently and change them often. And get useful-size wastebaskets, not ones that look too delicate to use.

Clutter

Certain office products can make life much easier when used in unlikely places such as the kitchen. For example, setting up a "mini-file" (a small plastic file holder that holds about a dozen folders) on a kitchen counter makes it easier to deal with papers that tend to pile up there, such as coupons, recipes, shopping lists, takeout menus, receipts, appliance instructions and school-related papers.

And stocking a small basket with frequently used office supplies (such as scissors, pen, pencil, high-lighter, note pad and Post-

its) and putting it near a mini-file makes it easier to use.

Sinks and counters

Keep a roll of paper towels on a handy dispenser near each sink. This will make it easier for anyone in the household to wipe toothpaste spatters off the medicine cabinet mirror or mop up mishaps on kitchen counters.

You'll also never need to think about putting out guest towels for unexpected visitors.

If you prefer not to use paper towels, another option is to install next to the sink a towel-ring for hanging a designated wipe-up towel. A container of pre-moistened cleaning wipes, such as Glass Plus Wipes, is also helpful to have on hand in both kitchen and bathroom.

By taking a few seconds to clean up any areas immediately or at least at the end of each day, the need to ever do a major cleanup job is almost eliminated.

Bathroom

There are several brands of "daily shower spray" available, and they all work well. Once you've given your shower a good cleaning, you'll rarely have to do it again if you simply spray the shower and/or tub liberally after each use.

A similar product is available for keeping toilets clean; it also only needs to be used once a day. Since this is something you need to remember to use daily, it makes sense to keep it within easy reach.

Floors

A cordless, rechargeable upright vacuum cleaner combined with a Swiffer duster is an easy way to keep all types of floor surfaces free of dust and debris. The vacuum is useful for carpets, rugs, hardwood, vinyl and tile, the Swiffer for dusting hard surfaces.

Depending on the floors in your home, you can either get an all-in-one unit (the Dirt Devil SweeperVac plus Swiffer, about \$30) or buy the vacuum and Swiffer separately (Eureka's Cordless Boss Upright, about \$50; Swiffer, about \$10).

Choose a centrally located, easily accessible place to install the charging unit and to store the Swiffer supplies, so you can grab them instantly for quick cleanups anytime.

To wet-clean hard surface flooring, products like the Swiffer Wet-Jet (about \$20) are so easy to use they're actually fun. You can talk on the phone (a cordless headset-style will prevent neck strain) while effortlessly cleaning your floors — and be done with this chore in a few short minutes.

BY DEIRDRE O'SHEA
Copley News Service

Cleaning the 21st-century home gets its own makeover with a new wave of aromatherapeutic natural cleansers that combine style and substance.

Who said that daily chores like doing dishes, de-scumming shower tile and dusting the furniture had to mean harsh chemicals and irritating or cloying odors? Nontoxic, environmentally friendly natural cleaners not only smell wonderful, they look really cool.

Imagine dish soap pretty enough to sit out on the counter. If you're a fan of "Friends," you probably noticed the attractive bottle in neatnik Monica Gellar's kitchen — it's Method liquid dish soap, which comes in curvy, brightly colored bottles and fragrances such as French lavender, mint and magnolia.

Method packaging gets the designer treatment at the hands of Karim Rashid, whose client list includes Prada and Sony. It's the first brand created specifically to woo Gen X shoppers, who make up 42 percent of the \$5 billion house-

hold cleaner category.

Method, a San Francisco company, aims to free cleaners from captivity under the kitchen sink.

"The way we clean has changed," said co-founder Adam Lowry. "People have moved away from whole-house cleaning with a bucket, a mop and rubber gloves and evolved to touch-up cleaning — or what we call on-the-fly cleaning."

With this philosophy, Lowry explains, it makes sense for cleaners to be nontoxic — they need to be left out so that they're handy. And, they must have "wonderful, natural fragrance."

Method products are a little more expensive, allowing them to use cutting-edge technology that really works. With actual botanical derivatives, they achieve true scents.

And natural cleansers are healthier, too. Common household cleaners contain toxic chemicals that are often dispersed in fumes. Instead of attacking dirt with harsh chemicals to break it down, natural cleaners work by absorption, using surfactants that attach to dirt, loosen it and lift it into the solution so it

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