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Volume 22, Issue 12



Deck Guardian

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page 13

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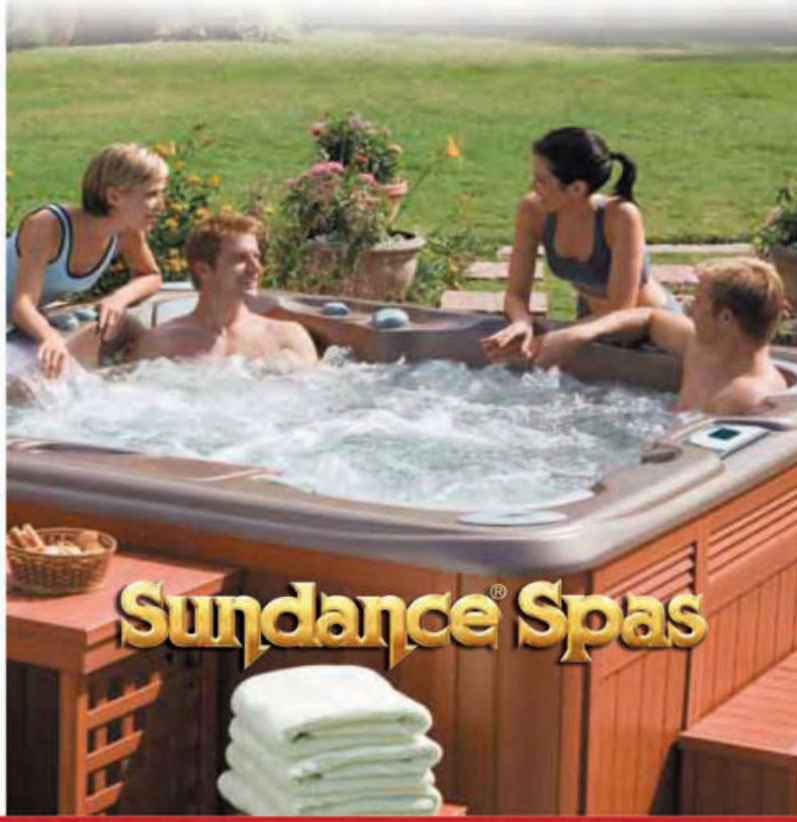
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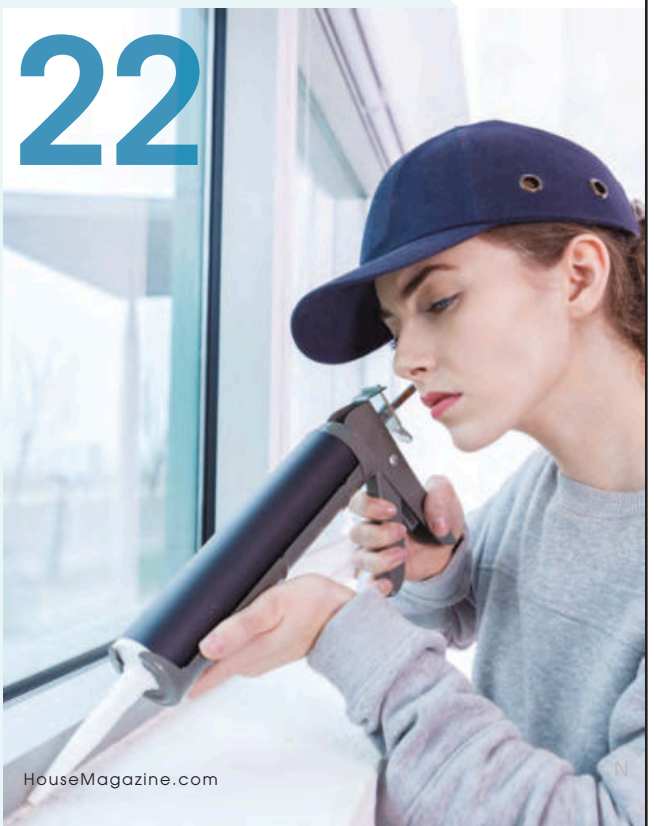
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Here to Please



Customer service has always been and remains the No. 1 priority for **Deck Guardian** as it creates beautiful outdoor spaces for homeowners to enjoy.

By **Matt Cosentino**

As the founder and owner of a decking company that is well known throughout New Jersey for delivering sensational outdoor spaces on time and on budget, Ion Colbasiuc certainly understands what it's like to have his services in high demand. Work especially picks up in late spring and early summer, when the weather is getting warmer and homeowners are dreaming of adding a backyard oasis to their property.

Even at this time of the year, however, Colbasiuc will never find excuses to give a customer the cold shoulder. When he started Deck Guardian over a decade ago, his motivation was to not only provide the finest craftsmanship but also a positive, stress-free experience, and that remains his driving factor to this day.

"Service should be a lot better than what it is across the construction industry," he says. "People call in to get an estimate and they can't get ahold of anybody, they can't get anyone to come out for three weeks to even give them a quote, and once they get the quote it takes too long to get the contract in place.

"We try to make it a lot easier on them. If you call us we'll be there in a few days, we'll get you a price on the deck and if you want to build it, we'll build it as soon as possible. Some people have simple projects and some have more elaborate projects, but it should be as easy as walking in, buying something and having it at your house two months later rather than chasing someone around to answer the phone or give you a price."

That attention to detail is even more important in today's climate, where supply chain issues, rising material costs and difficulties to obtain permits are real challenges. Getting on the schedule early ensures that family dinners, summer barbecues and graduation parties can be enjoyed sooner rather than later.

From the very first meeting, Colbasiuc stresses transparency between his team and the homeowner. He frequently hears the same questions from prospective customers, starting with how much the deck will cost, and takes the time to carefully explain the many variables that will determine the price. Those include the location and whether the soil makes for easy or hard installation of the footings; the cost of building permits in a particular town; the proximity from the driveway to the backyard to transport materials and debris; and whether the deck is low to the ground or on the second story.

"There are multiple factors that come into play when we are pricing a project and it changes on a case-by-case basis," Colbasiuc says. "Most of the projects that we do are around 300-400 square feet and they're within the price range of $20,000-$25,000. But decks are going to last 25-30 years and if you're spending $20,000 on a deck, you're getting at least $15,000 in real estate value."

Customers expect the design process to be complicated, but Deck Guardian takes the approach of creating an outdoor space that is just like the homeowners' favorite rooms inside while accounting for important details like traffic flow and the best place for stairs. "Decks are primarily used for grilling, dining and lounging, so when we're putting together a project, we want to make sure that you have enough space for all three activities," he says.

A shade structure can make the deck usable in extreme heat or rain, and a porch with outdoor heaters can extend the enjoyment into the colder months of the year. Colbasiuc is happy to add whatever amenities make sense for a customer's lifestyle and budget.

When it comes to the timeline for the deck's completion, fall, winter and early spring have the quickest turnarounds, while the summer tends to get extremely busy and will push the project back a bit. Different towns have different processes for granting permits but Deck Guardian has dedicated staff just for this task.

"Most of the decks we build average about a week for installation, so once we get started it will be done before you know it," Colbasiuc says. "But before you start it's a lot of hassles and paperwork, which we handle so the customer doesn't have to."

Nothing beats the feeling when the job is finished and the end result is a beautiful space ready for new memories to be created.

"When it's all done everybody is just thrilled with how much better it came out than they were expecting," he says. "They can look at a picture ahead of time but it's just a picture. When they actually get the space and see how nice it looks against the house, how much room they have and how good the installation is, they have a really good impression.

"It's a great experience for them because our service is really what makes the difference. As long as we stick with our core values, people will appreciate it. That's why we have the best reputation in the state and we're on target to build 700 decks this year." H&H

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FALL

For Outdoor Landscaping





Contrary to popular belief, fall is the most critical time to tend to your outdoor landscape.

SCHOOL IS BACK IN SESSION, THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING UP AND FOOTBALL IS JUST ABOUT THE ONLY THING ANYONE IS TALKING ABOUT. ALL OF THESE ARE TELLTALE SIGNS THAT SUMMER IS OVER, AND FALL HAS OFFICIALLY ARRIVED. HOWEVER, THE BIGGEST CHANGE IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE DRASTIC TEMPERATURE DROP, WHICH CAN HAVE HUGE AND POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON OUTDOOR PLANTS, INCLUDING BUSHES, TREES, FLOWERS AND GRASSES. *HOUSE & HOME* ASKED THE EXPERTS IN LANDSCAPING HOW TO PREPARE YOUR OUTDOOR GREENERY FOR THE ROUTINE SEASONAL SHIFT.



LAWN AND PLANT MAINTENANCE

Typically, the largest and most important part of any property is the lawn. Having the greenest, most well-manicured yard on the block is a suburban family's dream, but most struggle to maintain their healthy, luscious grass when the weather gets cooler.

According to Rich Cording Sr., the owner of CLC Landscape Design, there are certain measures to take to ensure your lawn's health through the fall.

He says that thatching, core aerating, fertilizing, seeding and lining are the most important lawn care jobs to get done in the early months of fall. Of course, with the weather changing, the year-round needs of the grass itself begin to change, including watering and mowing your lawn.

"You should cut it right up to Thanksgiving," Cording says. "And you should still keep it watered so that it gets to at least an inch to an inch and a half per week. We are in a drought, so watering now is critical because the roots are going to try to grow

BY KATIE FRANCIS



> ***As things die back, prune them off because then all the energy goes into the roots of the plants, perennials, bushes and trees."***
>
> —George Mihalchick, owner of Ponds by George

FALL

For Outdoor Landscaping

deep during September and October."

As for other plants, there's a fine line between a healthy haircut and completely destroying the greenery.

Cording and George Mihalchick, owner of Ponds by George, agree that cutting off dead growth is beneficial to plants at any time of the year.

"As things die back, prune them off," says Mihalchick. "Because then all the energy goes into the roots of the plants, perennials, bushes and trees."

But be warned: Too much pruning can be detrimental to your greenery.

"You want to prune dead growth off because dead growth on a plant can be harmful to the rest of the plant," Chris DeMato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing, says. "But you don't want to do any significant pruning as this can weaken a plant and, going into the winter season, that's not such a good idea." According to DeMato, pruning stimulates new growth, which would juxtapose and delay the natural dormancy process that plants go through as the temperature gets colder.

DeMato also stressed the importance of maintaining a clean lawn, free of any fallen leaves, as they could easily kill the grass beneath them.

"It's very important throughout the fall season to keep the leaves off the lawn. People tend to wait until a lot of the leaves fall to clean them and that's a big mistake that can really do damage to your lawn. The weight of the leaves and then matting down on the lawn can kill the lawn," DeMato explains.

THE BENEFITS OF MULCHING

A common theme throughout all of the experts' advice is the importance of mulching, especially this time of year. Freshly mulched beds not only increase the aesthetic of an outdoor property but also provide insulation for the plants growing in them.

"Mulch your beds, clean out your beds," Cording says. "Mulch is important. Not only does it make the beds look nice and give you some curb appeal, but it also insulates the roots over the winter. It holds down winds, and it also holds in moisture."

Cording also says that, because of the late-summer drought, plant roots are going to grow deeper through September and October, making mulching that much more important.



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"To me, it's like a no-brainer. Everybody should be mulching their beds before the winter."

WHAT TO PLANT

There are countless beautiful plants that thrive in the crisp months of fall, including perennials that change colors as the temperature shifts and annuals that bloom just in time for the fall festivities.

Mihalchick recommends both the burning bush and the itea shrub to use as foundation pieces for a colorful autumn oasis.

"The burning bush and itea will start turning a brilliant shade of fire-engine red," Mihalchick says. "They're bushes that will give you a big 'wow' factor. As everything else is starting to drop its leaves, those bushes turn red just before they drop and they're stunning."

He also recommends cabbage and kale, two common annuals that are staples to fall landscaping and gardening, and a variety of different ornamental grasses that provide different colors throughout the year.

DeMato says that chrysanthemums, more commonly known as mums, are another fall favorite that are perfect for adding color to multiple different areas of your outdoor scape.

"Most [mums] in the garden centers will have an assortment of colors. Most people put them out on their porches but you can certainly plant them for full color as well," DeMato says. He also recommends honeysuckle, which is mildly fragrant, attracts hummingbirds, and has red berries in the fall to provide a bright contrast against its green leaves.

And fortunately, there is no better time than autumn for planting.

Cording says that greenery planted in the fall has a higher success rate than anything planted in the spring because of their root growth.

"If you plant one now versus in early spring, it's going to send its roots now. And then the dormancy of winter is less of a shock than the heat of the summer, and they actually survive very well over the winter. But then as soon as the ground warms up in late February or early March, these plants are ready to grow," Cording explains. "They're going to exceed anything planted in the spring in terms of root growth.

"You get a lot of dew forming on the ground [in the fall], which makes it good for lawns, but what that does to a plant is it stimulates root growth. So just that weather cycle of cold nights and warm days, it's telling the plant 'OK, winter's coming. Here, let me grow some roots down deeper.' So the lawn and the shrubs tend to grow their roots more in the fall in preparation for winter."

Regardless of how you decide to decorate your outdoor space for autumn, whether it be ornamental grasses, traditional mums or both, yard maintenance in the fall is just as important, if not more so, than any other time of year. H&H

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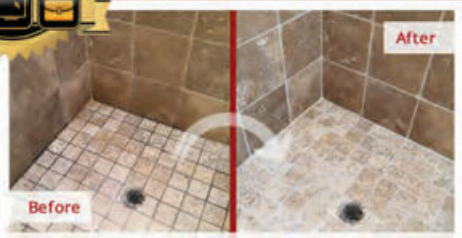
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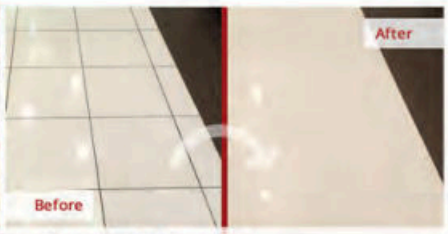
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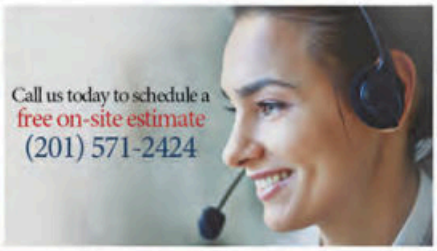




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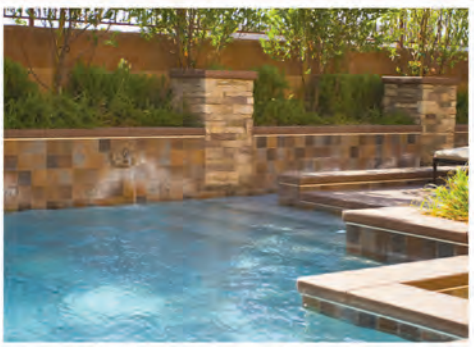
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WARDING OFF WINTER

Take the necessary steps to make sure your home is properly protected against the season's harsh climate.

BY PETER PROKO



After another enjoyable summer, it's definitely hard to say goodbye to those sunshine-filled days and the favorable weather conditions that kept us enjoying the outdoors well past dusk. But as we trade in our swimsuits for sweaters and gear up for fall, it won't be long before we're bundling up even further and welcoming back Old Man Winter.

As the temperatures plummet and the days become drearier, homeowners will undoubtedly be spending more time indoors. But before you can enjoy all the comforts that your home brings, you would be wise to make sure your house is primed and ready for the long winter ahead. Winterizing your home—whether making energy-efficient changes to the exterior or necessary upgrades to the interior—can go a long way to saving you money, time and aggravation. And let's face it, dealing with a major home repair project in the dead of winter is not exactly ideal.

Adam Parnes of Global Home Improvement acknowledges the importance of staying on top of a winter checklist and says that homeowners who don't regularly do so are tempting fate. "I think anyone who is winterizing their home is already ahead of the ballgame," he says. "Upgrading insulation, re-caulking windows and cleaning gutters are some of the easier solutions to a safe home this winter."

The fall is the ideal time to winterize your home in an effort to address any issues before the harsh cold weather settles in, according to Andrew Ziegler of Matute Roofing Inc. "This allows for cleaning of gutters, making sure there are no loose shingles [on the roof] and checking that all the home's ridge shingles are securely in place," he says.



WINTERIZING CHECKLIST

A guide on how to plan for the season

- Make sure your attic/crawlspace is properly insulated
- Install pipe insulation around any exposed copper or PVC water pipe
- Have your furnace, fireplace and chimney inspected and serviced
- Check windows and doors for any leaks, rot or poor sealing
- Have a licensed roofing contractor inspect your roof for loose, damaged or missing shingles
- Clean gutters of leaves and other debris and make sure they are properly connected
- Inspect your grounds for troubled tree limbs that could snap and cause damage or harm
- Repair loose patio stones and pavers
- Drain and store garden hoses indoors and drain outdoor spigots







"It's also very important to inspect all metal flashings between the roof and home siding, and between the roof and chimney, to ensure that you have winter snow, ice and water protection at these critical joints on your roof," Ziegler adds.

Elsewhere in the home, checking to see if the HVAC system is in need of a tune-up is recommended by industry professionals. Having it serviced annually to ensure things are running smoothly will help avoid rising energy bills due to suboptimal operation.

Another good place to start is in the attic. Poorly insulated attic space can be a major source of energy loss. In fact, estimates by the Department of Energy say that a properly insulated attic can cut your heating bill anywhere from 10 to 50%.

While a poorly insulated attic, or wall space for that matter, can be a large factor in energy loss, additional common contributors are windows and doors that are not properly sealed. Parnes says upgrades to old windows and doors are by far the most popular winter home improvement project and can make an almost immediate impact.

"Not only do older windows and doors not have updated thermal efficiency, but many of them have air leaks, which are just inviting the cold air directly into your home," he says.

What's more, homeowners will want to inspect their window frames to see that they are intact and not beginning to rot.



"Rotted wood window frames, or windows missing pieces of the frame will expose the homeowner to the risk of interior water damage, which can be costly to repair," says Ziegler. "It's best to replace windows to proactively protect inside the home's wall cavities and the surrounding sheetrock. Leaking window frames can lead to the growth of dangerous black mold that can make your family sick."

Another trouble spot for leaks is perhaps your greatest protection from the outdoor elements: the roof. Jane Alfaro of Alfaro Enterprises says an annual inspection of the roof by a professional will help identify any concerns and hopefully allow you to get well in front of any major problems.

"Your roof needs to be in good condition. No missing shingles, no leaks, etc. If you see dry rot or corrosion present or the underlayment plywood is corroded, it is time to replace your roof," she says.

Having to potentially replace your roof or windows can be a large expense and so some home-



WARDING OFF WINTER





owners may try and get through one more season before they decide to pull the trigger. But all it takes is one major winter storm and the problem could balloon into a much larger issue.

"The most important thing to consider is what could happen if you don't replace it," says Parnes. "A leaky roof will cost you way more money in damage then the money you save by trying to wait one more year."

Barbara Carranza of Carranza Roofing and Remodeling says age should be the key factor when weighing repairing or replacing one's roofing, siding or windows. "It is easy to nickel and dime repairs, but in the long run it is less costly to replace them. Putting off repairs leads to long-term and more costly problems," she says.

Ziegler echoes that sentiment, especially if the roof is approaching the end of its life.

"Roof and window repairs do not come with substantial warranties," he says. "Typically, when a roof is 20-25 years old, the shingles have begun to curl and the adhesion of the shingles to one another becomes compromised."

This could lead to the shingles allowing water to penetrate or perk down into the plywood decking, causing deck rot. "The risk to the homeowner of not proactively replacing the roof now is that there will be greater expense later for the replacement of rotted plywood decking," Ziegler says.

While having someone inspect your roof, it's also a good idea to check your gutters. "Gutters should be cleaned out and secured twice a year, prior to the change in weather. Ideally in the spring and the fall," says Alfaro.

Once gutters become clogged by leaves and debris, water does not flow through the downspouts. Thus, the water will back up under the shingles and behind the fascia boards.

"These leaks will cause interior damage as well as rot the fascia boards, causing extensive damage and costly repairs," Carranza says.

But, while this is a critical step in protecting your home, Carranza warns homeowners should not attempt to take matters into their own hands.

"It is very important for a homeowner not to climb a large ladder and attempt to clean their







gutters. Professionals have the experience and knowledge on climbing ladders and roofs. Inexperienced homeowners can easily fall from the ladder or the roof and be seriously injured or even cause death," she says.

No matter what type of services you may require, it's clear that now is the time to start thinking about the necessary upgrades that will help get your home ready for winter. By being proactive, you'll save money and avoid the hassles and headaches so you can enjoy your home the way it was meant to be. H&H

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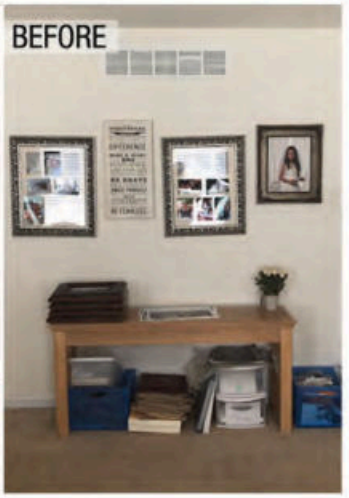


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The Heat is On

When the weather outside is frightful, you want the peace of mind that comes with having your home's heating system professionally assessed, maintained or replaced—and early autumn is the perfect time to do so.

BY MADELEINE MACCAR

ALTHOUGH WINTER MAY BE A FEW MONTHS AWAY, now is actually the prime time to start assessing the state of your home's heating system, giving you enough time to handle any repairs, replace any broken or inefficient parts, or address any necessary upgrades.

According to Jeff Olewine, general manager of C&C Heating and Air Conditioning, spring and fall are the ideal times for homeowners to make their biannual HVAC inspections a priority.

"The biggest thing is getting your maintenance, and tune-ups in general, done by a qualified professional, who will come out and change the filter, take a look at the heating system in general and make sure that it's working at peak efficiency for the next season," he explains. "We recommend that it's done twice a year."

By proactively dealing with any issues before temperatures begin to plummet, your heating system should be in tip-top shape and ready to reliably head into its hardest-working season.

And, as Farrel Shuster of Family Heating & Air Conditioning says, "an upgrade of your heating systems in today's world of ridiculous fuel and electric expenses is a great idea and actually a money maker—and saver."

He continues: "The old saying, 'I just want to get through one more season' doesn't sensibly apply anymore. Not only will you have an increase in comfort, but the rebates available from the government and utility companies, plus the monthly costs to own and operate your system, can pay for your financing monthly payments and also put some money back in your pocket."

Early fall is also the perfect time to act if you're dreaming of gathering 'round a fireplace's glowing hearth and roaring blaze this holiday season—or thinking it might be time to protect against Jack Frost's nip with a heating source that will always work even if the power goes out.

"If people are thinking about having a fireplace, creating memories by the fire during the holidays, and having that warm and cozy feeling of sitting and playing games in front of the fire, now is the time," says Jenna Guldin, vice president of sales for Salter's Fireplace Patio and Grill. "Most of the people who wait until October or November to get a fireplace before Christmas or the end of the year, it's going to be too late."

With the tri-state region both anticipating and already facing a significant rise in gas and energy prices as the year winds down, looking into heating options that decrease reliance on both utilities can be a cost-saving measure for price-conscious or more rural households to consider.

"You have wood stoves and high-efficiency fireplaces for customers who don't have access to natural gas or who want to reduce their dependency on oil," explains Dave Rettinger, operator of Rettinger Fireplace Systems. "Wood-burning is the best solution for those customers looking to cut down on energy bills who don't mind the work associated with owning and operating a wood stove."

More modern takes on an old-fashioned mainstay are increasingly in-demand, as both gas and electric fireplaces have become popular options. The latter is especially appealing for its flexibility and authenticity.

"You can put electric fireplaces in bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms," Guldin says. "They look pretty and realistic—some even come with a crackling noise."

Meanwhile, gas fireplaces offer all the ambiance with almost none of the maintenance their more traditional wood-burning predecessors require: "You flip the switch, set it and forget it," says Rettinger.

No matter how you heat your home, taking care of the system that keeps you warm will improve its efficiency and ultimately lengthen its useable life—though even the most diligently maintained ones have to be replaced eventually.

"If someone's looking to replace their system, typically it's when they have a certain amount of issues with a unit that needs repairs and it doesn't makes sense to put money into repairing it," observes Olewine. "It's also based on the age of the system: At 13, 15, 18 years, that starts to be where you've reached its lifespan."

For those homes with wood-burning fireplaces, though, making sure things like your chimney and flue are in proper working order is imperative before you start firing up that hearth. Ash, soot, creosote and other debris can collect anywhere from the firebox up through the flue, creating the kind of conditions that could become a dangerous fire hazard. Buildup can cause additional problems from unsightly stains around the hearth to getting dust and ash into your home's air.

If you're thinking that your home heating needs less of an update or routine maintenance

and more of a complete overhaul, you'll want to consider your household's needs, among other variables. Olewine notes that for HVAC customers, elements like lifestyles, preferences, the type of system and how much work it's expected to do matter more than what kind of house it's heating.

"There can be a pretty big cost difference between your entry-level unit and your high-end one," he advises. "If you're planning on living in your home for a while, you'll get a return on your investment in terms of energy savings with a more efficient unit."

Shuster adds: "A high-efficiency system is not a commodity item and cannot be installed like an Ikea kitchen set. The higher the efficiency number isn't the way to select a new system—choosing the proper company to guide you, install and guarantee the results you paid for is.

"What needs to be discussed is what are we connecting the new system to," he continues. "Unlike a TV, if the wall space can accommodate a 75-inch big screen it will work fine, but an HVAC system with an existing ductwork system or hot-water heating system with baseboard or radiators may not give you the desired AFUE rating for your heating system—it will actually cost you more to operate with less comfort, and may not operate at all. Items such as static pressure, air velocity, and temperature delta T are questions only an experienced HVAC company can answer, calculate and determine for you."

When it comes to fireplaces of any kind, Rettinger says that customers have a vast array of options. When the sky's the limit, though, the possibilities can be daunting—which is why trusting the experts is the best way to go.

"We always ask questions," he affirms. "What do you want the fireplace to look like and how do you want it to operate? Do you want something that's going to take the chill out of the air? Do you want something to run for the entire day or do you want something purely for ambiance?"

Olewine cautions against thinking that a new or improved system will solve all of your problems. Drafty doors, aging structures and other factors unrelated to your heater of choice may be contributing to cold spots and staggeringly high bills. That's one of the many reasons why he also suggests calling in the experts.

"They can look at the house as a whole and see how they can improve it, as far as energy goes," he says. "That can be windows, that can be insulation—all that lends itself to comfort in the house and more efficiency. An HVAC company can come and put in a new, more efficient system, but if you're lacking in some of those other areas, your heater's efficiency is never going to be what it should be."

However you're heating your home this winter, trusting that system with well-vetted, experienced pros means you can enjoy some peace of mind when even the harshest winter freezes come for the region. H&H

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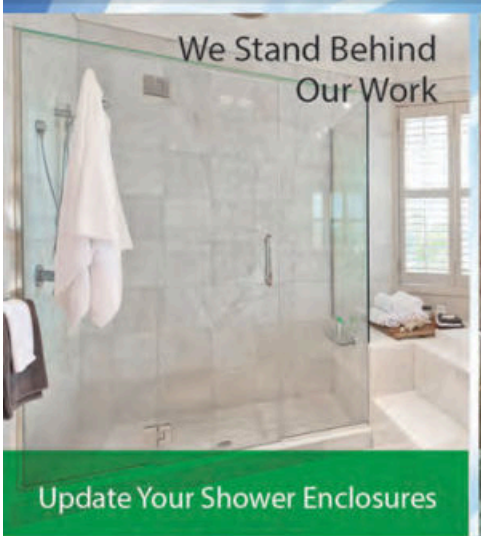
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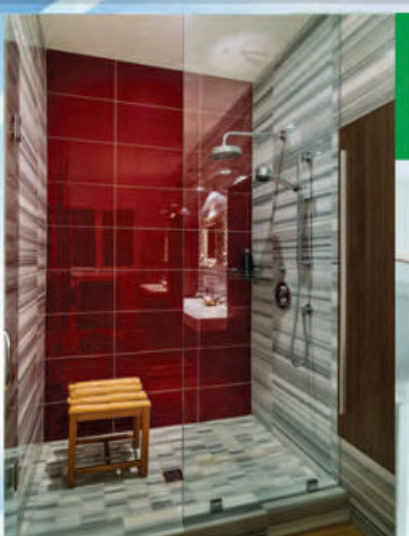


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