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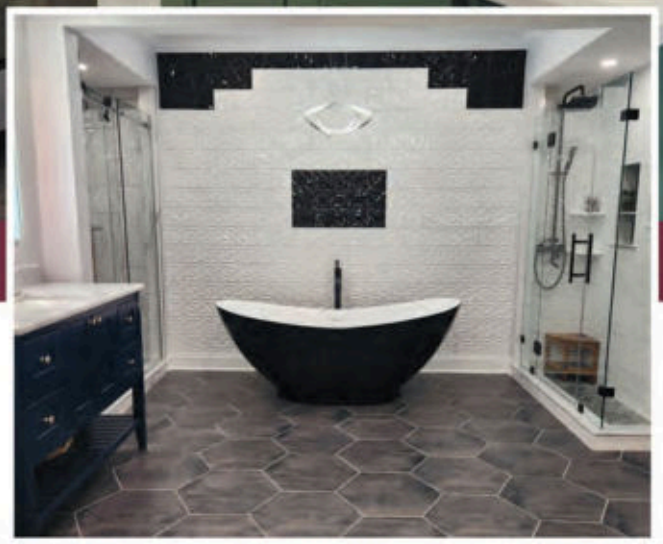
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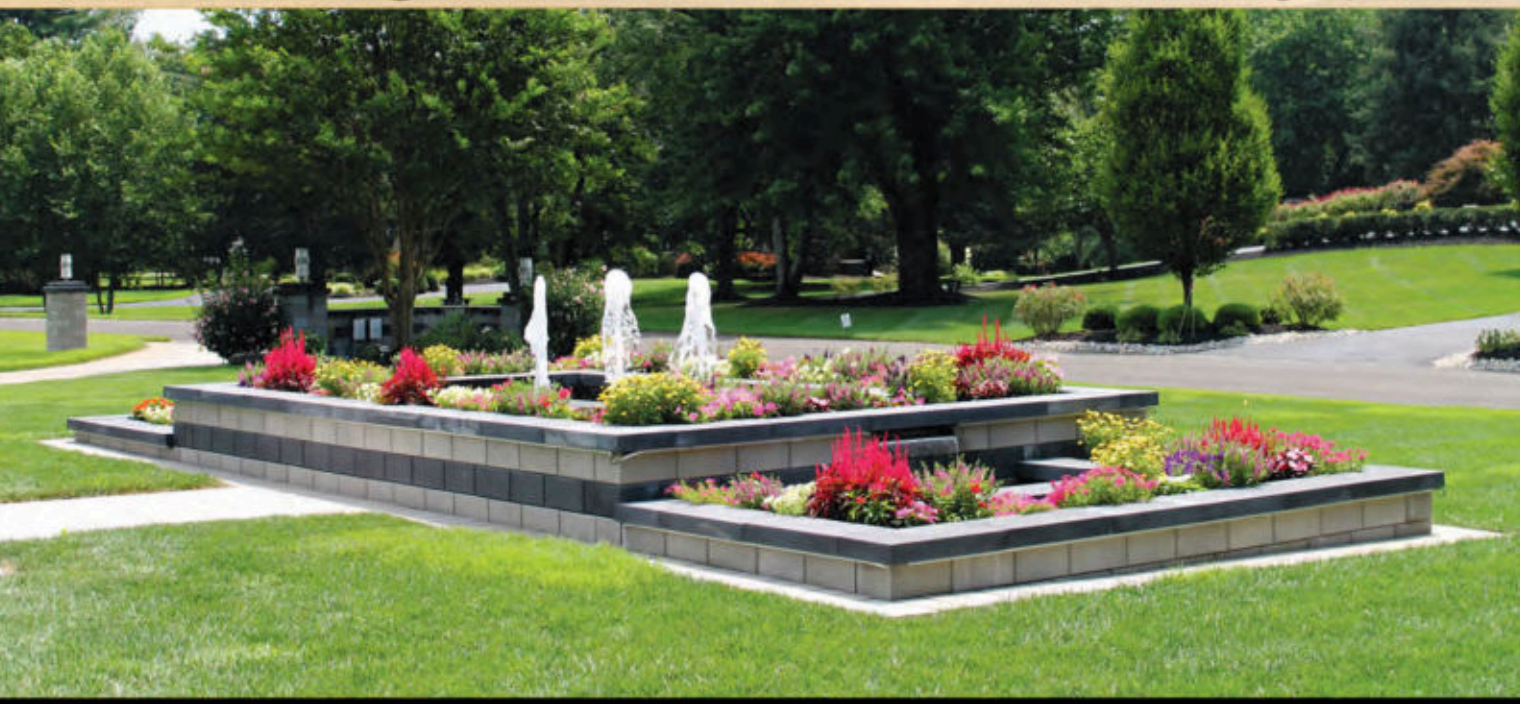
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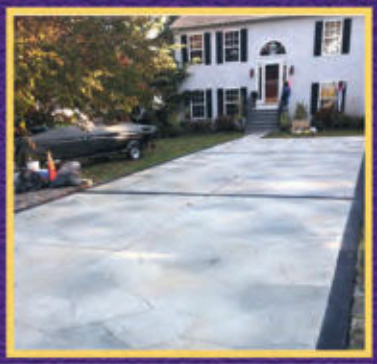
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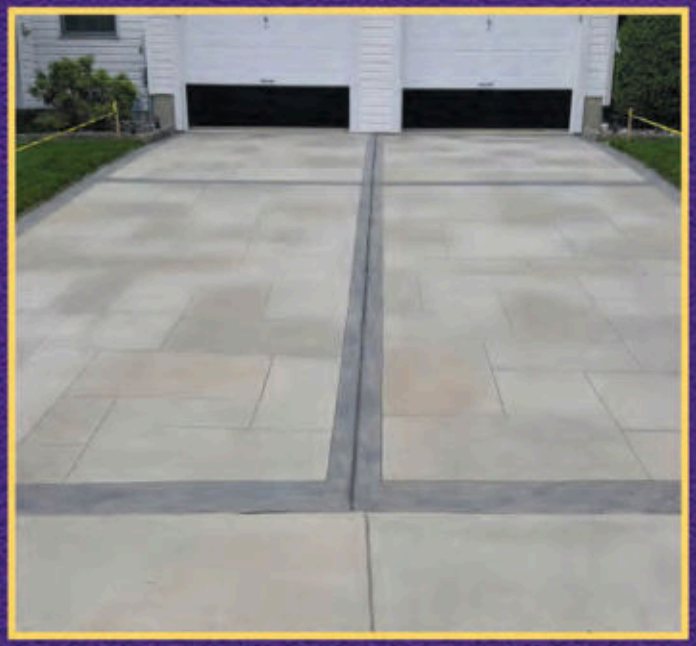
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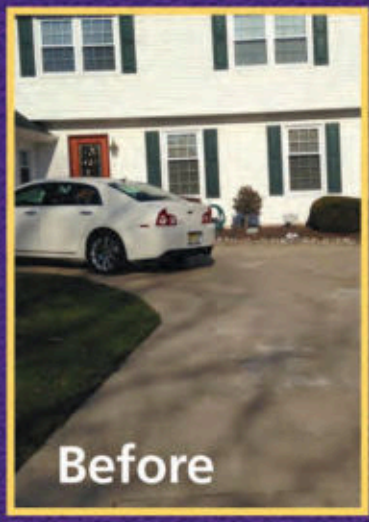
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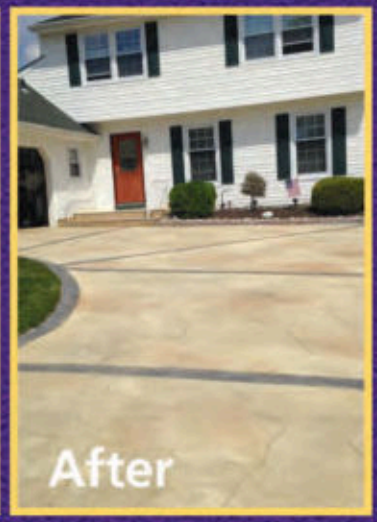






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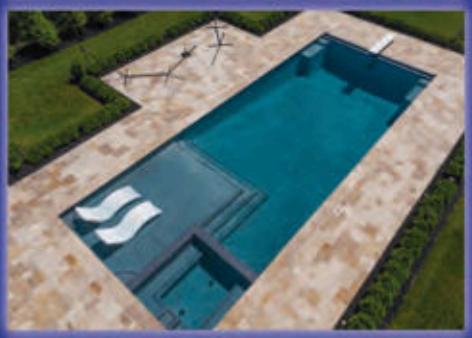
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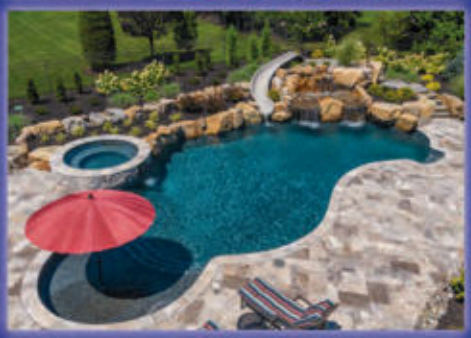
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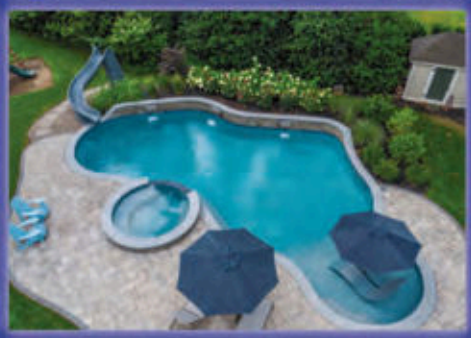


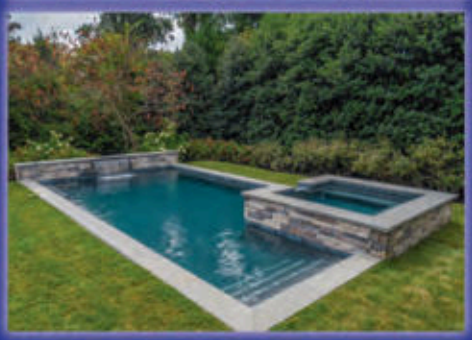




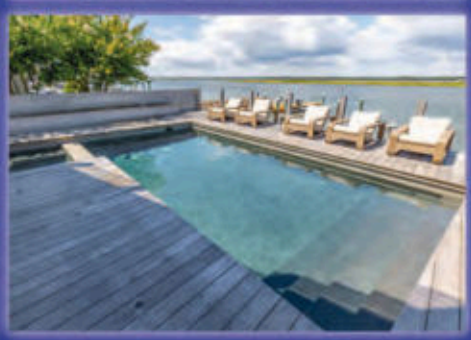












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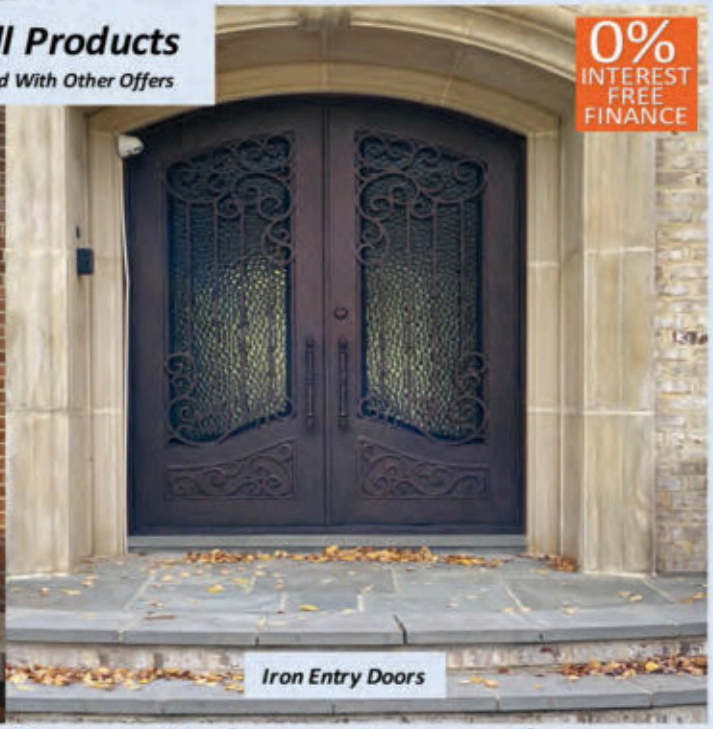
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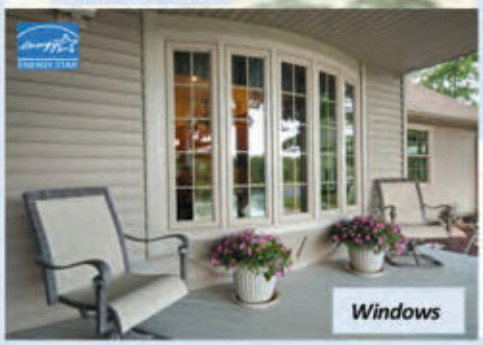




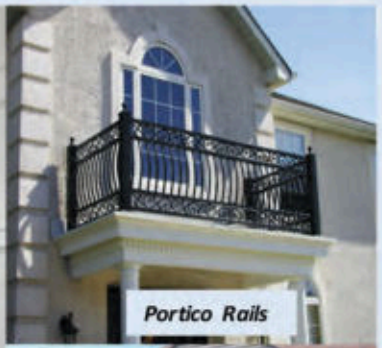
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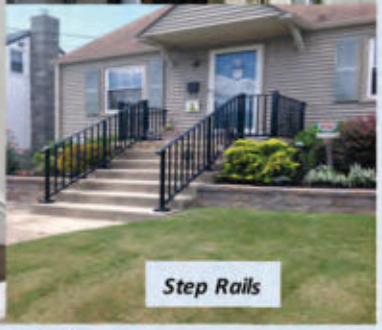
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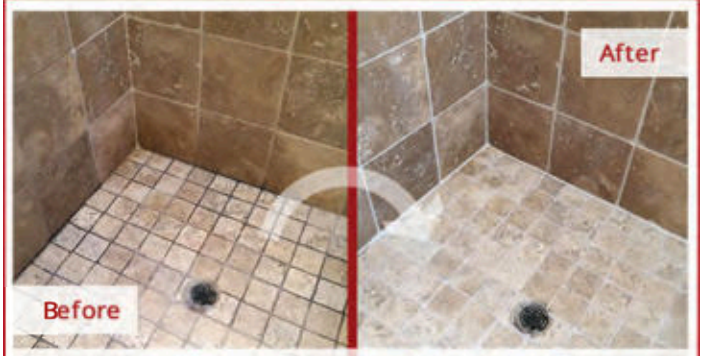
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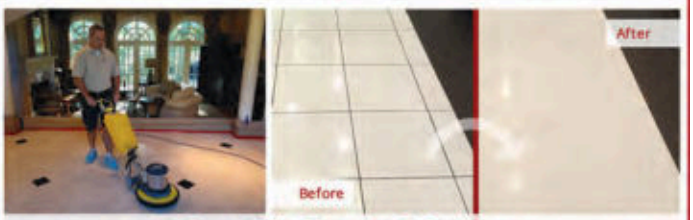
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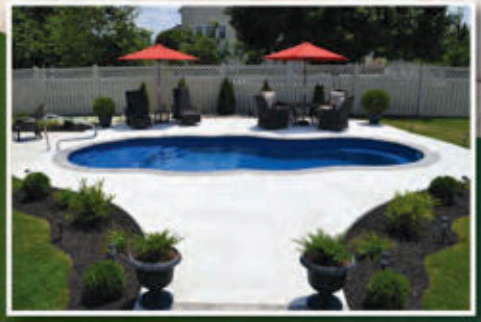
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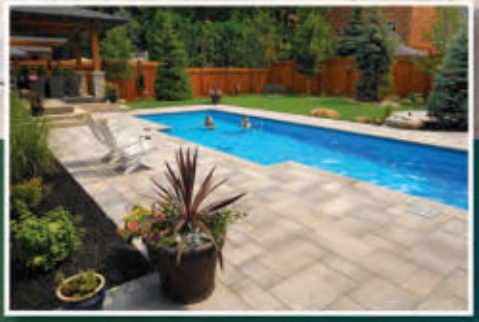
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More Than a Pool

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas elevates backyard atmospheres with quality custom designs

by **Kristen Dowd**

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas partner and general manager Mike McCool recognizes that there is a lot more that goes into a new pool than there used to be.

"The backyard has transformed over the last 10 years or so away from being just 'your yard' and into another room of your home with the same care and detail put into it," McCool says. "Because of this the design of your pool has become more than just a pool but the focus of the outdoor living room. There is a lot of coordination with creating what a customer's backyard haven is going to be."

Fortunately, the family-owned South Jersey business is more than up to the challenge of bringing a customer's backyard pool vision to life. In its 55 years of business, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas has helped to create thousands of backyard paradises throughout the region.

And what's more, they make the process as easy as possible for their customers.

"We're a start-to-finish gunite custom pool company—the design, the build and the service afterward," McCool says. "We have our own crews that handle the work which helps us control quality and makes the process go smoother."

There are six designers at Swim-Mor Pools & Spas who can help guide customers on a new pool design. The company's countless photos and 3D drawings can provide inspiration, and the final design is what best suits the backyard, according to McCool.

"Size, setbacks, elevations. We're here to help you work through that," he says.

Finding the right pool

"The first step is to give us a call. From there we'll set up an appointment to come out to your home," McCool says. "That way we can see all the aspects of the property. What the contours of the yard are. What the access is like. Even the best location based on where the sun rises and sets."

The timeline to get started is largely based on the homeowner and how decisive they are, McCool adds. Once everything is confirmed, things move to contract and Swim-Mor Pools & Spas starts working on permits.

"Time is of the essence. Permits can take from two weeks to several months, all depending on the municipality," McCool says.

Pool popularity

Prior to March 2020, business was strong for Swim-Mor Pools & Spa. That was only boosted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region.

"The pool business was never busier than it was in COVID," McCool says. "The lockdowns forced people to stay at home and they immediately focused on the backyard."

Although that business boom has settled down a bit, things are still busy. But pool trends, according to McCool, have held fairly steady.

Hampton-style pools have long been a customer favorite, but equally popular are the freeform designs, which can be customized to fit into any backyard environment.

"Through COVID there have not been many significant changes in the industry," McCool says, "other than the increased popularity of adding more bells and whistles to the pool."

Natural stone is popular for the coping along the pool's edge, McCool says, as well as darker finishes in the pool. A majority of Swim-Mor Pools & Spa customers are using a salt sanitation system and automated controls in their new pools, as well as choosing to add water features—waterfalls, fountains, deck jets and plenty more. The company also offers many in-pool fixtures for lounging—bar stools and benches that can tie into your outdoor kitchen or can run inside the pool, along with table areas, sundecks for your lounge chairs and custom fire features. Color LED lighting packages come with every pool, too.

The majority of customers also choose elements to lengthen their pool-enjoying season, such as heaters and spas. "It will extend your pool season by a few months," McCool says.

Why Swim-Mor Pools & Spas?

Being a local family-owned independent business makes Swim-Mor Pools & Spas a smart choice for customers, according to McCool.

"We're not national. We're not a franchise. And we do not try to sell everything. Our expertise has been building custom gunite pools for 55 years and that's what we focus on," he says.

Save for a few aspects that are legally required to be outsourced to independent licensed contractors, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas uses all of their own crews for the pool construction, which McCool says is unique for the pool business.

In addition to building new pools, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas also specializes in renovating gunite pools. The experienced team can handle everything from your standard renovation of replacing your coping, tile and plaster finish, to adding features such as raised water features, sun decks, and even spas that were not originally built with the pool. McCool says, "Even though your pool may not have originally been built with the more current popular features doesn't mean that Swim-Mor cannot add them now."

The 2023 pool season is already underway for the business, which thanks to the mild winter meant they were able to start construction early. Pool openings and service will ramp up from mid-April to Memorial Day.

But, for those looking to add a pool to their backyard this summer, it's not too late. "We're still building for this year. We're still selling for this summer," McCool says. "But don't waste time. Get in!" **H&H**

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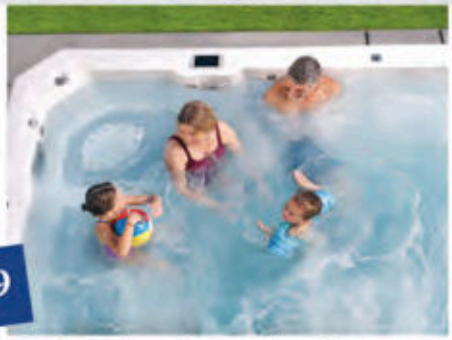
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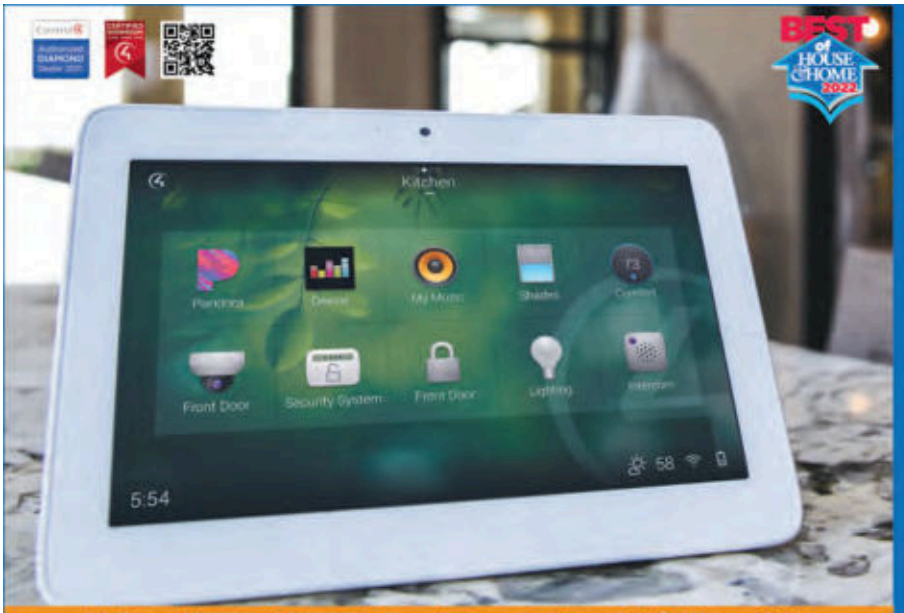
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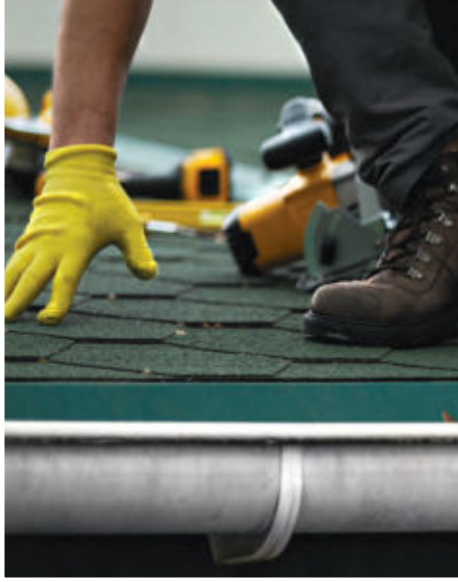
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'TIS THE SEASON



Preparing for the colder months in the Northeast shouldn't be left to the last minute—or to chance. Trusted local professionals provide their advice for getting your home ready for the winter season. **BY CARLY MURRAY**

When disaster strikes, it's difficult to handle damage to a home's exterior in the midst of an emergency. That is why anticipating inclement and extreme cold weather should begin in early autumn—and forming a relationship with a contractor ahead of time can provide insurance that a household will stay warm and protected. *House & Home* spoke to local professionals who specialize in multiple categories from maintenance to replacement, and offered valuable advice for a fall checklist. Across all niches of home installations and repairs, all agree that now is the best time to get started in order to finish by the end of November.

Roofing

Roofs are subject to damage with inclement weather pummeling down directly on a home, yielding opportunity for the outdoors to invade a home's interior.

"Typically, every few years they should probably get their roof in-







spected, but if they know there was a big storm in the area, they should definitely get a check right after a storm to make sure. Because, even a half-an-inch of hail; they may not be able to see it from the ground, but it could really cause a lot of damage to your shingles within the next couple years after a hail storm. … It starts taking the asphalt off shingles, it'll leave impressions on the shingles. Wind will tear the stripping off the edge of the shingles," says Anthony Bate, the owner of Paramount Home Solutions.

Winters in the tri-state area are characteristically more intense than other states, and having local expertise with contractors who are familiar with local weather extremes on a firsthand basis can ensure that the right materials and installation process are utilized. Ultimately, it's a more intensive process.

"The Northeast has different roofing underlayment and shingle types, and there are siding products that we use in the Northeast that maybe wouldn't be used in other parts of the country and vice-versa," says Vic Fiore, the owner of Magnolia Home Remodeling Group.

Furthermore, damage can be caused from the sudden rises and drops in temperature experienced in the region.

"The real hot summer that we had can do a lot of damage and melt things. … Being in this cold climate, you go from 90 degrees to 20 degrees. And what happens is that between the hot and the cold, the expansion and contraction from the hot and cold starts to crack things. It'll crack the shingles, it'll crack the flashing. The good thing is, we didn't have a horrible winter last winter, but this year they are calling for a pretty bad winter, so that's when the damage would occur. And that's why they need to get their roof inspected and checked out before the bad weather comes. When it's 20 degrees and we have a wind chill factor, it's very difficult to put a roof on at that point. So this is obviously the best time to get it inspected," says Gary Selleck, the owner of C&C Family Roofing.



'TIS THE SEASON



Windows

Winter air—or worse, winter storms—can impact the inside of a home if windows are not properly secured. Any gaps or cracks can lead to a chilly draft indoors, and snow, hail or freezing rain can easily get through and create water damage. Fierce winds can also contribute to further breakage if windows are already damaged.

"A big thing in the winter is windows. We do a lot of window replacements. That's kind of something that you can see and noticeably feel the effect of when you change your windows in the wintertime, as far as keeping the warm air in," says Bate.

It's always safest to get a consultation to make sure a home's windows are sturdy and safe, so that a professional can determine if vital replacements are necessary. Once its standard functionality is taken care of, insulation can be added for extra warmth and protection.

And not only is locking one's windows wise for safety reasons, but billowing wind can throw open windows (and doors, for that matter) and create violent back-and-forth slamming that weakens the hinges. Locking them provides that extra protection from the freezing outdoors and longevity for the product itself. When spring finally comes along, the windows will be ready to protect from intrusive insects, too.

Gutters

In the repeated circumstance of preparing for penetrating weather with the potential for major damage, commonly-neglected gutters play a key role in draining water. If a gutter is clogged, the water can build up and freeze. This can result in cracks, bursts and leaks of dirty water.

"You have to make sure that your gutters are 100% cleaned out. No leaves, no debris, no nothing in the gutters. … Gutters are like the arteries of the roof. So if the gutters are clogged, everything stops and all the water backs up. And that's what, in the wintertime, causes ice damming when all the water goes into the gutter," says Selleck. "And if it doesn't go down the downspout and out, what happens at night when it gets real cold, below 30 degrees then it freezes? All the water freezes in the gutter and then that's what causes ice damming. Then you have a frozen gutter and it takes days for it to unfreeze. And then if you have another rain on top of that, then it's even worse. So having clean gutters is very, very important."

Similar to extreme temperature changes affecting roof material, metal is easily contorted and can result in not only damage, but loud noises as pipes rupture.

Siding & Insulation

With a category as expansive as siding, it's pertinent to know what type of product will work best with a home and what kind of protection it will provide. Larger projects inevitably take more consideration than others, requiring a bit more urgency to complete now or soon.

"It can be risky. You can do roofing or siding or windows in the middle of winter, but you have more challenges and a greater possibility for delays. Your house is exposed to extreme cold in some cases, so it's just a more challenging, less desirable time of year … if you're stuck in that situation," says Fiore.

Foam and vinyl insulation as a part of the home's siding will provide extra protection and warmth, and save energy that is otherwise wasted by running a heater 24/7. Ultimately, it is a shield for the home



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'TIS THE SEASON

that protects from air and moisture.

Siding can also protect from condensation that forms when indoor warm air meets the outdoor cold air and causes decay to the material. This can occur without being directly visible, so it is essential to keep in mind.

Heating Systems

While the other elements in a fall to-do list are exterior projects to keep the cold from getting inside, a heating system is integral to circulate warmth inside. Much like any technology, check-ups and maintenance prevent any potential risks and make sure it works when needed. After many months of not being in use, it's never guaranteed that a heating system will operate when it is finally turned back on.

"People [need to be] proactive about their systems and to make sure their filters are changed. A lot of people don't keep regular maintenance plans; so, making sure that they're keeping regular maintenance just like you would do for your car is important," explains Jeff Olewine, the general manager of C&C Heating and Air Conditioning. "Like anything else that's a mechanical piece of equipment, just make sure that you're keeping it up to date with the tune-ups and things like that."

Critical thinking and adequate planning have the bonus benefit of saving money, too. When working with heat, it's always best to think safely to prevent malfunctioning fires or carbon monoxide leaks. Portable mini heaters hardly provide enough heat for an entire household in the Northeast, and are typically considered more dangerous without constant supervision and extra precautions.

"When systems start to run less efficiently and not work as well, it also becomes less efficient to run, so you're spending more money on your energy bills, and things like that. But most importantly is to make sure that you have heat in your home when you need it," continues Olewine.

Investing in your home as a priority is analogous to investing in all of its occupants and their quality of life. With reliable maintenance and service providers, who often specialize in multiple areas, there will be nothing to worry about throughout the entirety of winter except the holidays. H&H

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House & Home recently spoke with owner Jeff Adamiak, who prides himself in providing clients with nothing but the best, as top-quality service has been the We Hang Holiday Lights standard since 2017.



Jeff Adamiak, Owner

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A CUSTOMER?

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We do a lease agreement with our clients. We amortize the cost of the material over the length of the agreement. The longer the term the less per year, and everything is included. The price remains the same throughout the agreement.

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After we agree on a display and the length of the term, we begin building your lights in our warehouse. Our crew comes out and custom-cuts the lights to fit your home. We label and diagram each strand of lights to make sure the display is the same each year, and use special clips to ensure the lights are perfectly straight and secure without damaging your home. We take full responsibility to maintain your display throughout the season. Should anything go wrong, simply call us and we will fix it either that day or the next.





WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF THE SEASON?

We begin our takedowns the first week after the new year and, weather permitting, all the lights are down by the end of the month. We make sure everything is labeled properly, box them up and store them in our facility. Installs for returning customers begin in the middle of September, starting with our clients who celebrate Diwali. We get as many rooflines installed by the end of October before the frost to be as safe as possible for my crews. We will have them installed and ready to go. You simply plug them in whenever you're ready.

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We take an artistic approach to decorating your home. We don't just "hang lights." A few years ago a customer came to me and showed me lights installed by another company. She was happy with the display but wanted better. We came up with some different ideas and agreed that some of her trees didn't quite scream "put lights on me." After the first season with us, she replaced those trees with Christmas lights in mind. This client now has one of, if not THE nicest displays in her town.

IT SEEMS LIKE YOU REALLY ENJOY WHAT YOU DO.

Yes, this business is amazing. Our clients may be the ones paying for the lights, but the whole community gets to enjoy them. A few years ago, a woman called our phone number from a sign we left at a client's house. "I just had to call you and say how beautiful the lights look, I don't know the neighbor, but we walk past her house every night and it brings us so much joy to see the lights," she said.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE DISPLAYS?

The displays I enjoy the most are the ones we don't charge for. Five years ago, a client asked me if she could pay to have lights installed for a family member whose husband and son were both deployed overseas. She paid for the lights and we supplied the labor for free. It was done as a surprise and they were thrilled. It felt great to be a part of that and since then, we are always looking for opportunities to light up someone's home who is going through tough times. Whether it's for a child who's sick or disabled or a family who has lost a parent with young children, we hope to do about 10-12 of these jobs per year free of charge. **H&H**



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A Matter of Trust

When it comes to finding the right contractor for the job, **Emmons Remodeling** offers clients both expertise and peace of mind.

When you need work done on your home—expected or not—you want to know that you can trust the contractor you've hired to get the job done well. After all, you're not an expert on what's involved in services like roofing, siding or windows, and you don't want to get taken advantage of as a result. Because of that, it's important to choose a company that you can feel confident is reputable.

But how exactly do you know a company can be trusted?

One important factor in choosing the best contractor is longevity. Only a company that performs great work is going to be able to stick around for the long haul. That's exactly the case with Emmons Remodeling, a company that has been offering expert care for South Jersey and the Jersey Shore area since 1996. They are a well-known name in the region—and for good reason. Their success was built upon a reputation of honesty, integrity and good work.

In fact, the company is an Owens Corning Platinum Preferred Contractor. That's not a designation that any old company can have. Platinum Preferred Contractors are in the top tier of a premier network of roofing professionals. In order to achieve this title, they must have passed a workmanship inspection, been professionally screened for financial stability and customer service, and continue to adhere to stringent guidelines set forth by Owens Corning. Fewer than 1% of roofing contractors in the United States are Owens Corning Platinum Preferred.

"It's a title that backs up our already strong reputation," says Stephanee Kelly, co-owner of the company along with her husband Matthew. "Only the most reputable companies are able to earn that designation."

Besides being able to feel confident that you've hired a contractor you can trust, this designation benefits homeowners in a more tangible way as well. That's because Platinum Preferred Contractors are able to offer 50-year warranties on their work—much longer than other companies can offer. According to Owens Corning's website, "because we stand behind these warranties, we need to make sure that we are backing up the best roofers in the business."

Protect Yourself Against Storm Chasers

Unfortunately, when it comes to contractors for roofing, siding and windows, there are a lot of fly-by-night companies out there and it's important for homeowners to protect themselves. In the business, many of these companies are called "storm chasers." They follow severe weather from area to area, knowing that there will be a lot of work.

They typically have no community roots and therefore no knowledge of local building codes. Their "rush job" often has shoddy work, and since they typically leave the area in chase of the next storm, they can't be reached when there are problems.

How can you spot a storm chaser? Stephanee says it's critical to be wary of contractors who may not have a physical office—again, an indicator that they may be a fly-by-night company. They'll do the work poorly and then disappear, leaving you with problems.

"We are a local small business in Williamstown with real people answering the phones—not an answering service," Matthew says. "We don't work out of a house and we do not have a 'virtual office.' Be wary of contractors that will not provide you with a physical address but instead only have a P.O. Box or suite number and only use an answering service."

Some of the worst storm chasers don't even carry the proper insurance and are therefore putting you at risk.

"We are fully insured and also carry liability insurance, which is required for roofing operations," Matthew says. "But many contractors carry cheaper insurance that does not include liability insurance, leaving you, the homeowner, liable if a worker is injured while working on your roof. Make sure the insurance certificate sent to you by your contractor's insurance agency specifically includes liability insurance."

Choosing Wisely

At the end of the day, your choice in roofing, siding and window contractors can be the difference between good, quality work—and a big headache. Stephanee says that the last thing Emmons wants to see is people in their local community get taken advantage of by unscrupulous roofing, siding and window contractors.

"You should be able to feel confident that you've chosen a contractor that you can trust— not one that is going to leave you with problems to fix after they've gone," she says. "At Emmons, you are not only investing in a new roof, new siding or new windows—you're investing in peace of mind." **H&H**

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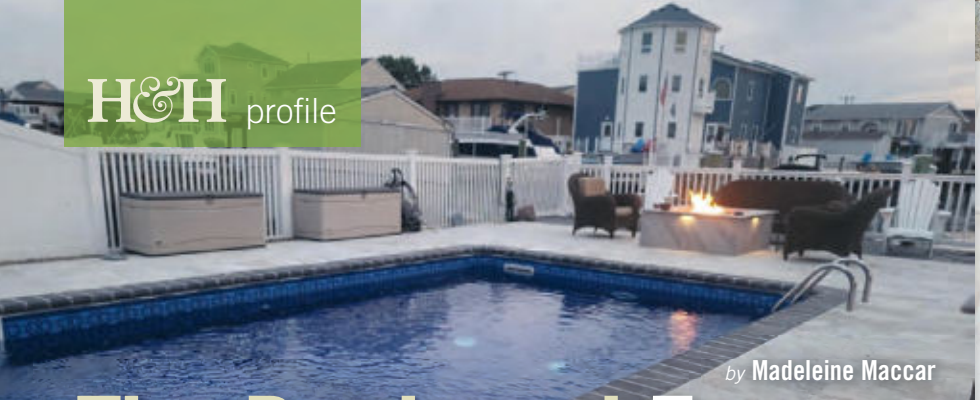
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by Madeleine Maccar

The Backyard Experts

FROM PAVERS AND POOLS TO DECKS AND LANDSCAPING, WORKING WITH THE TALENTED TEAM AT EVERGREEN PROS MEANS THAT YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL WITH JUST ONE CALL.

Forty years ago, Evergreen Pros established itself as a trusted name for South Jersey homeowners in need of landscaping and curbscaping projects. As the company evolved, so too did its line of services, and it would go on to provide everything from pavers, outdoor kitchens and hardscaping to fencing, decks and landscaping.

With those expansive capabilities, it's no wonder why so many have turned to Evergreen to help transform their outdoor living space. But in 2019, while meeting with a client to review plans for an upcoming project, manager of Evergreen Landscaping and co-owner of Evergreen Pools & Spas, Nick Erman, was faced with a dilemma when he could not find a pool company to help add the finishing touch to this homeowner's backyard.

At the risk of disappointing the customer, Erman decided to take matters into his own hands and began taking courses to learn how to become a fiberglass pool installer. It was just the latest example of Evergreen expanding their suite of services and enriching their in-house talent.

Resolving a problem both proactively and with education is, Erman observes, pretty on-brand for Evergreen and its determination to go above and beyond for its residential and commercial clientele.

"The whole point of us turning into a pool company was that we didn't want to lose the customer who's looking to have this beautiful backyard oasis but we're stalled at the pool," he says. "We decided to strictly do fiberglass pools because they're less maintenance, less of a worry for the client 10, 20 years down the line, and warrantied for life."

It's a business philosophy that has allowed Erman and his own hand-picked team to thrive as truly comprehensive backyard experts who take a client-first approach. Being able to offer such a vast array of services combined with decades of experience helps set Evergreen apart from others in a crowded field.

"No one wants to be calling 10 different contractors so, whether we're putting in a pool, patio, kitchen, irrigation, all the way down to planting the sod, it's a one-stop shop," Erman explains. "From the irrigation to the pavers to the shrubs, you're dealing with one person, the main project manager, through the entire project."

It's not just convenience and streamlined communication that the Evergreen team offers by being total backyard experts, though: It's harmonious, thoughtful design and far-ranging expertise, too.

And while Erman is proud of the talent comprising Evergreen's team—one so comprehensively assembled that the only subcontractors it calls in are plumbers and technicians—they never rest on their laurels. A constantly-changing industry that's always touting new trends and technology means that ongoing education is critical.

"Our guys are trained every year through certifications," he affirms, noting accomplishments like Evergreen being named an Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute-certified paver installer. "We're very much up on today's building techniques with installing pavers, pools and porcelain, all the way to building fireplaces and firepits and everything else. That continuing education for our workers makes sure they're at today's level with their installation techniques."

An education-first approach extends to Evergreen's clients, too. The two stores it's opening soon—one for pavers and porcelain; the other, a retail shop showcasing the products customers can choose from—will provide an up-close, hands-on opportunity to interact with and compare project materials, while bringing pool clients directly to their fiberglass pools manufacturer ensures proactive involvement.

"We're very big on educating our customers," says Erman. "Not only do we educate them on the pools themselves and why they should choose fiberglass, but we educate them on what this body of water needs to be taken care of, including the chemistry involved. … We even take them to the facility and we show them the pool actually being made."

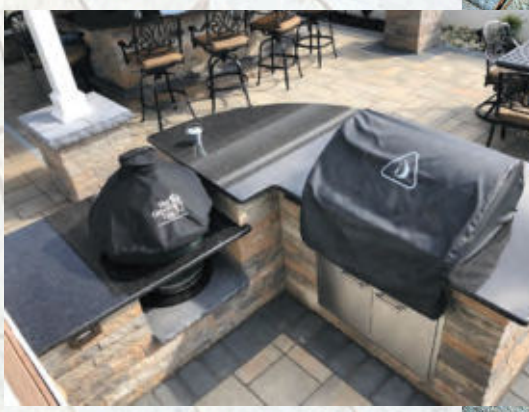
After all, being at the top of their game means nothing without earning clients' trust, which Erman, who spent 27 years in law enforcement, knows all too well.

"There's a loyalty and a trust factor: People know they can get scammed by contractors, so we tell them right up front that we're prior law enforcement, all we know is trust, honesty and integrity," he says. "People don't give us access to their homes because we're contractors, they're giving us that access because they know where we were employed in the past."

That integrity also means working with any budget. Not wanting to deny any homeowner the joys of a lovingly designed and stunningly executed backyard, three- to five-year installation plans offer an affordable process that locks in the project price at the time the order is made. Additionally, the team will tap its far-reaching relationships throughout the home improvement industry to "surround clients with our network" and connect them with qualified, well-vetted contractors outside Evergreen's expertise.

Because for the Evergreen team, customer service that dazzles is all part of delivering the "Wow!" factor they strive for with every job.

"If the client isn't satisfied, I'm not satisfied," says Erman. "We want the husband and wife to both have tears in their eyes because they're so happy. It has to be everything they've ever dreamed of." H&H



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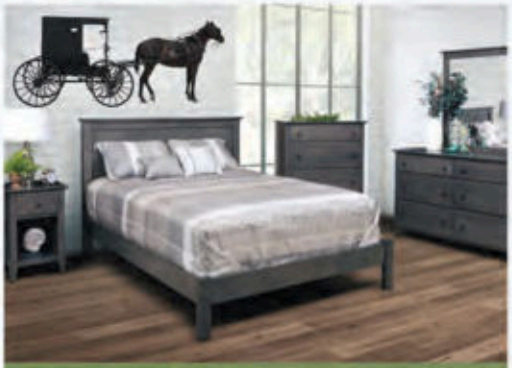
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ask the expert
by Chelsea Valcourt

Amiano & Son Design-Build

YOUR HOME IS AN EXTENSION OF YOURSELF. FROM THE STYLE TO THE DÉCOR, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE THE DESIGN OF A HOME FROM ITS OWNER. However, not every space is a perfect match, and in this competitive housing market it's difficult to hold out for that perfect space—that's where remodeling comes in. Remodeling provides homeowners the opportunity to make the space uniquely their own without holding out or breaking the bank on a total breakdown.

House & Home spoke with award-winning designer Sophia Amiano from Amiano & Son Design-Build about one of her favorite design styles, "quiet luxury," and how she incorporates it into home remodeling designs to add elegance to a space without being too abrasive.


Sophia Amiano, home designer

WHAT IS "QUIET LUXURY?"

Quiet luxury is when multiple elements of texture, monochromatic colors and materials are designed in a beautiful palette—not to compete with one another, but to come together in beautiful harmony. The major key to quiet luxury design is intention. Everything has its place, and as those places may be seemingly minimal, they are major factors toward the overall finished look of the space. Quiet luxury also embraces the idea of timelessness in the home. The idea is to cultivate a space that feels thoughtfully designed without overwhelming the senses.

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE IT INTO YOUR DESIGNS?

I incorporate quiet luxury into my home designs mainly by material aspects as well as the overall layout of the design. Tile selections, cabinetry and flooring are all elements that need to come together to create a cohesive finished product with the original goals in mind. In a kitchen design, quiet luxury may look like panel-ready appliances for one client, while for another it may play into their cabinetry finishes or wood species selections, when applicable. Quiet luxury in a bathroom plays into the multiple tile selections from the shower to the flooring coming together to tell a story. Natural stone, porcelains, stone tile, geometric tile and the colors of those tiles all play such a huge role in this style of design. How you bring these multiple selections together needs to be thought out carefully so all materials flow and do not look stagnant in a space.

HOW DO YOU WORK WITH CLIENTS TO CREATE A SPACE THEY LOVE?

From the time I complete the first initial site measure/discussion with the client, I talk with them about what it is they are lacking now in their space. To me, this comes first and foremost. What do they need to get out of this remodel? Function? Style? Then, I like to dive deeper into that discussion. Whether it is function or style, what is the plan for the home? Is this the client's forever home, or do they have a 10-year plan? Whichever case it may be, I always keep the client's personal touch in mind, as no one will fully enjoy their space if they base every decision off of resale or what they are currently seeing in the magazines.

Through my design and planning process, I work one-on-one with my clients in private meetings held at one of my showroom locations so we can completely home in, in a comfortable environment, surrounded by cabinetry, tile, flooring, cabinet hardware, plumbing and more, all under one roof. Condensing all materials as well as design space into my showroom locations gives me the opportunity to provide my clients with all options. Seeing them in-person all at once, without the hassle of going to different stores and breaking up the process into multiple design meetings, ultimately eliminates confusion for the client and deflection from the vision of the design. H&H







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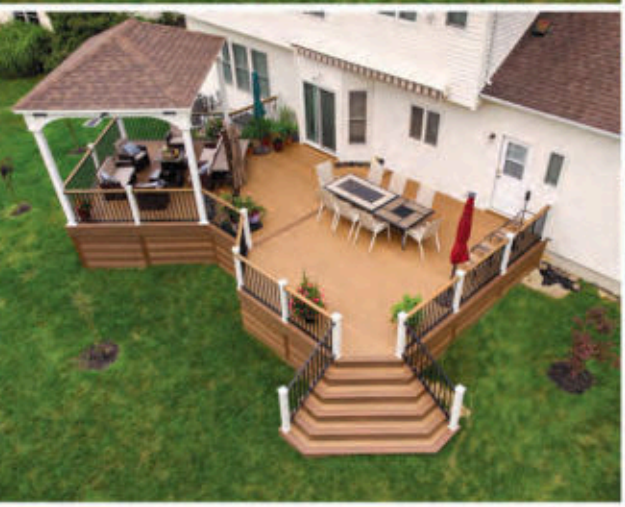
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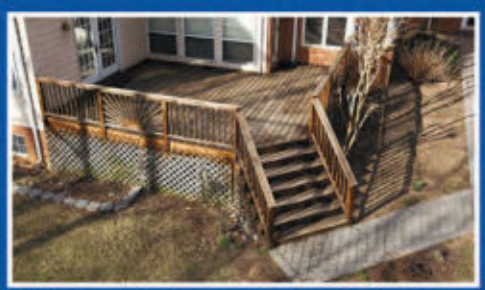


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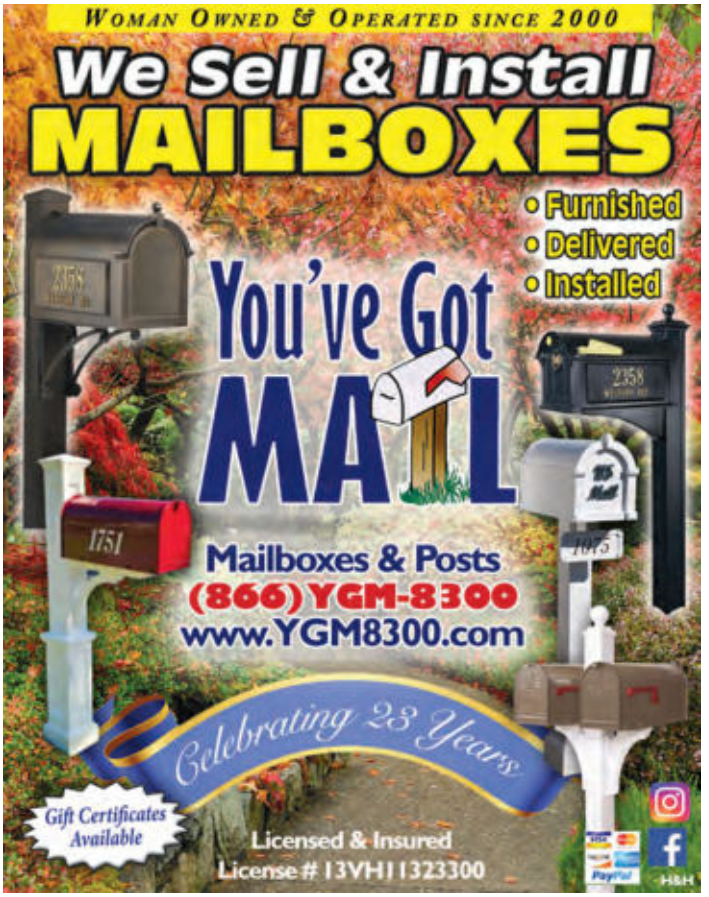


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Saving Energy, Saving Money and Saving Time

Allied Experts offers no-cost home assessments to upgrade equipment, lower utility bills and improve overall comfort *by* **Kristen Dowd**

Allied Experts wants customers to avoid costly emergency repairs down the road by ensuring they are equipped with improved home utilities before those situations occur—and they want to do this in the most cost-effective way possible. The Cherry Hill-based company accomplishes this by performing free home energy assessments to see what rebates and programs customers can qualify for under their utility companies and the state of New Jersey. Homeowners can then sign on for the one-day installation of high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, attic air sealing and insulation to weatherize their homes and bring down their utility bills.

"I think as many people as possible should sign up for a no-cost assessment to be able to make an educated decision on their home and learn about their house," says Will Doyle, Allied Experts owner and CEO. "We have our team dedicated to education first and foremost. … Whether they're going to become a customer or not, we want to solve problems for homeowners and make a difference."



No-cost home energy assessment

For energy assessments, an Allied Experts professional will visit the potential customer's home in Central or Southern New Jersey. The assessment takes approximately two hours and includes checks for the mechanical system, water heating system and building materials. There will also be a sketch and model done of the entire home that includes square footage and volume of the house, as well as an attic inspection. Lastly, the homeowner provides copies of utility bills.

"The next step on an energy assessment for the homeowner is back at our office. We model the system and the utilities' approved software to figure out what savings will be able to be achieved once the project is completed based on recommendations we have for their house," Doyle explains.

Not all homes qualify for the full $5,000 energy rebate, but many do. Rebate qualifications are presented with all of Allied Experts' recommendations on updating and weatherizing the home, as well as the total cost. Over the course of a year, a homeowner can typically expect to see up to 25% savings on utility bills, too.

"In most areas, we are saving homeowners with seasonal energy usage—air conditioning and heating season," Doyle says. "When it's 10 degrees outside or 95 degrees outside, that's when we're making a huge difference for homeowners."

Allied Experts works with a number of utility companies, so payment for the program is handled in different ways depending on the company. However, the zero interest for up to 10 years is the same across the board.

Installation and weatherization

For homeowners moving ahead with the program, they will receive new, energy-efficient heating and cooling appliances and a new hot water heater. Attics will be fully sealed and new attic insulation will be installed.

"Most people have no idea how much air leakage there is leaving through their attic every single day," Doyle says.

For convenience, the entire project is completed in one day, which has been a huge draw for homeowners. This is part of the way Allied Experts makes the entire process—from handling paperwork and planning to the installation follow-up—as simple as possible.

"We want to make it as seamless and as easy as possible for homeowners," Doyle says.

Comfortable living for 15+ years

Everybody uses energy in different ways, according to Doyle. Even in homes of the same model, energy usage will be impacted by factors like the number of people living in the home and how much time they spend there.

When updating and weatherizing a home with Allied Experts, Doyle says homeowners can expect the work to last more than 15 years, while parts are under 10-year warranties. Doyle also recommends maintaining the systems from normal wear and tear through Allied Experts' maintenance program.

"We want to make sure that they're operating the best that they possibly can and keep them as efficient as possible," Doyle says, "so homeowners continue to save energy."

While homeowners cite the new equipment and utility bill savings as the reasons they originally sign up for the program, Doyle says that a year later, surveys show this opinion changes: Customers seem happiest about how comfortable their homes are now, from the bottom to top.

"We're making a big difference for the home in total," Doyle says. "Temperatures become more even and more comfortable. … There's no reason people should spend more on their energy bills while being uncomfortable if there's a better way to do it." **H&H**

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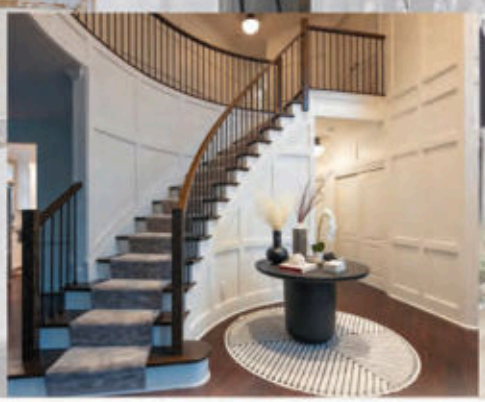
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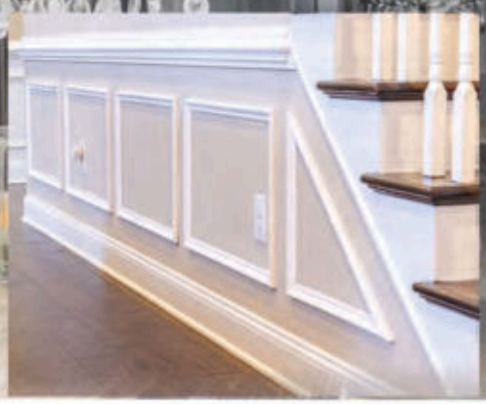
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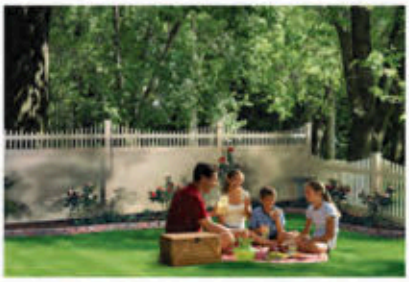
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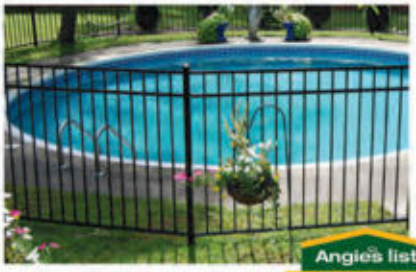
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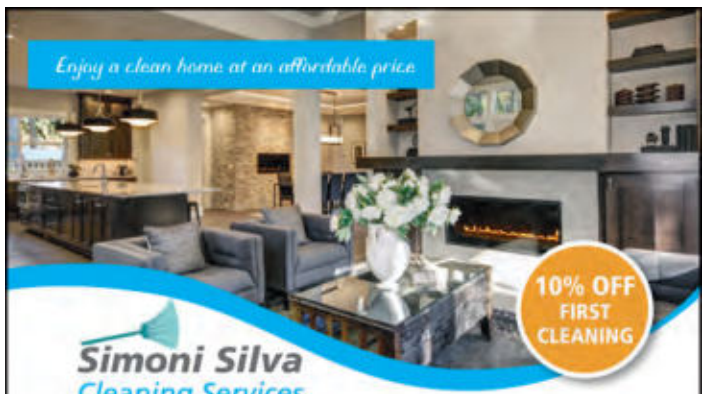
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A Little Extra Love

Autumn's arrival provides the perfect opportunity to keep your landscaping looking its very best.

by **Kristen Jorgensen**

AS THE LEAVES CHANGE COLORS AND THE TEMPERATURE BEGINS TO DROP, IT'S TIME TO SHIFT YOUR FOCUS TO FALL LANDSCAPING. Autumn offers a unique opportunity to enhance the beauty of your outdoor space, whether you have a sprawling garden or a cozy backyard. In this article, we'll explore some fall landscaping ideas and offer tips to help you make the most of this vibrant season.



EMBRACE THE FALL COLORS

One of the most enchanting aspects of autumn is the kaleidoscope of colors that nature provides. To make the most of this, consider planting trees and shrubs that are known for their vibrant fall foliage.

Chris DeMato of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing shares, "Maple trees, for instance, display stunning red, orange and yellow leaves, while burning bushes and dogwoods also offer beautiful autumn hues. Bradford pears and most deciduous trees will turn either yellow or orange before they shed their leaves while adding interest to your property. Also, planting ornamental grasses like switchgrass or maiden grass can add a touch of elegance to your fall landscape."

"Incorporating seasonal flowers is also a great way to bring color to your yard. Although summer is typically associated with vibrant blooms, fall has its array of gorgeous flowers," explains David Flack, owner of Bountiful Acres. "Chrysanthemums, asters and pansies are perfect for autumn, and they come in a variety of colors to suit your aesthetic preferences. Plant them in pots, containers or directly in





the ground to create colorful focal points in your landscape."

MAINTAIN YOUR LAWN

A well-maintained lawn can also enhance the overall appeal of your fall landscape. "Keep up with regular mowing, but raise the blade slightly to allow the grass to grow a bit longer as the weather cools," offers Flack.

Autumn is also an excellent time for lawn aeration and overseeding to ensure a lush, green lawn come spring. "Grass is the hardiest perennial in your entire yard, and the fall is the best time to invest more time into it. All the work you put into your grass during fall will only lead to greener and lushier results in the spring," Flack adds.

PREPARING YOUR POND FOR WINTER

It's important to know how to winterize a pond and prepare fish to withstand the harsh winter. Over a year, your pond will accumulate debris and organics such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings and fish waste. Left unchecked, decaying debris can release toxic gas and reduce oxygen levels. Removing this debris and replacing filtration systems with aeration kits and de-icers will help ensure oxygen levels stay as high as possible and provide aeration, ventilation and circulation throughout the winter months.

"When fall officially arrives, and the trees start losing their leaves, we often recommend netting your pond," says George Mihalchick of Ponds by George.

Fall netting is intended for collecting debris, and is often a choice to use for predator protection, which is why some pond owners even choose to leave the net stay in place until spring, but it is important to note that these nets are not designed to carry a heavy snow load, and should be removed in the winter before any snowfall.

"Once all the leaves have fallen, begin your fall pond care by removing any netting. Pond netting should be stored indoors to keep it safe from wear and tear due to heavy snowfall and ice," says Mihalchick.

As fall ends and winter approaches, plants will naturally fall into a dormant state. To winterize hardy plants, use your pruning tools to trim off dead foliage just above the soil. Removing debris that may have made it into the pond, should also be removed.









H&H LANDSCAPING

"Rotting leaves, twigs or dead aquatic plants will put stress on your pond's oxygen levels throughout the winter, which puts your fish at risk. I recommend removing leaves and debris from ponds and streams with the help of a hand net if possible," Mihalchick details.

Another way to keep fish safe when temperatures drop is with the help of aeration and de-icers help to keep a hole open in the ice during winter months. "This prevents harmful gases from being trapped under the ice and allows oxygen levels to stay saturated in the pond. Or if your pond has a waterfall, leave it running, the movement will cause a natural opening," Mihalchick explains.

ADD HARDSCAPE ELEMENTS

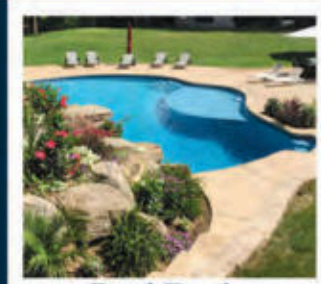
Incorporating hardscape elements like stone pathways, patios and fire pits can extend the usability of your outdoor space well into the fall months.

"The fall is a great time to invest in new hardscaping projects. Landscaping companies typically aren't as busy in the fall, as they are in the spring months, so it's a great time to schedule larger projects. Something like a cozy fire pit not only provides warmth but also creates a welcoming ambiance for gatherings with friends and family," says DeMato.

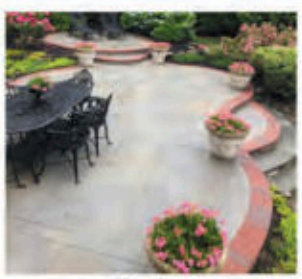
Stone pathways lined with autumn-themed decorations can add a touch of rustic charm to your landscaping. Flack agrees and also encourages decorating with seasonal accents to infuse your landscape with the spirit of fall.

"Consider adding seasonal accents like pumpkins, gourds, and hay bales. Arrange these items strategically around your garden or front porch for a festive and

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inviting look. Cornstalks, scarecrows and wreaths made from fall foliage and flowers can also be wonderful additions to your outdoor décor," he says.

FOCUS ON LIGHTING

As the days grow shorter, outdoor lighting becomes increasingly important for both safety and ambiance. Adding path lights, uplighting trees and string lights to create a warm and inviting atmosphere in your outdoor space. The soft glow of well-placed lighting can make your landscape feel magical during the fall evenings.

PLANTING FOR SPRING

Most homeowners typically get hit with spring fever and refocus their home improvement projects to the outside, but Karen Frederick from ELA Landscaping advises that this is a common landscaping misconception.

"Fall is an excellent time to get your hands dirty and plant new additions to your garden. The scorching heat of summer has passed, but it's not yet freezing cold. Fall moderate temperatures create ideal conditions for plants to establish their roots without the stress of extreme weather," she says. "As the weather cools down, your garden will require less water. This means less maintenance and lower water bills while your new plants become established."

While fall is certainly known for its vibrant foliage, it's essential to maintain visual interest in your landscape throughout the year. "Planting evergreen shrubs and trees can provide the necessary structure and color contrast during the colder months when deciduous plants lose their leaves," adds Frederick.

Popular evergreen choices include junipers, arborvitae and various types of holly.

PREPARE FOR WINTER

Lastly, don't forget to prepare your landscape for the winter ahead. This may involve cleaning up fallen leaves, mulching garden beds and protecting delicate plants from frost. Be sure to also take care of any necessary maintenance tasks, such as pruning, before the harsh winter weather sets in.

"The fall is the ideal time to survey your property for any issues. Make a list of things that need to be cleaned, any hardscaping repairs, fence repairs, dead plant material, or even dead growth on trees that can be hazardous," advises DeMato. "Addressing these matters before winter can prevent greater expense if let to linger."

Fall is a wonderful time to enhance your outdoor space and create a captivating landscape that celebrates the beauty of the season. By embracing the colors, incorporating seasonal elements and paying attention to maintenance, you can transform your yard or garden into a stunning autumn retreat. So, roll up your sleeves, put on your gardening gloves and let your creativity flow as you embark on your fall landscaping project. Your outdoor space will become a welcoming haven for you and your loved ones to enjoy throughout this enchanting season. H&H

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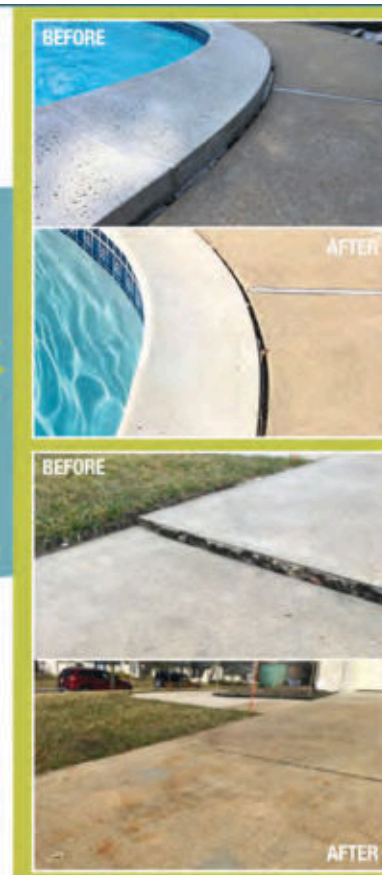
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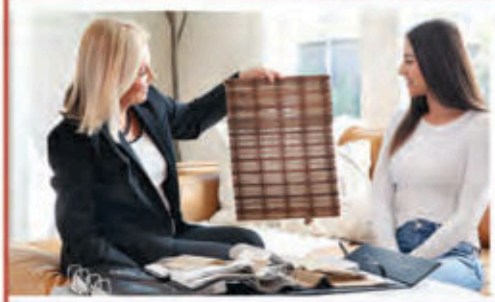
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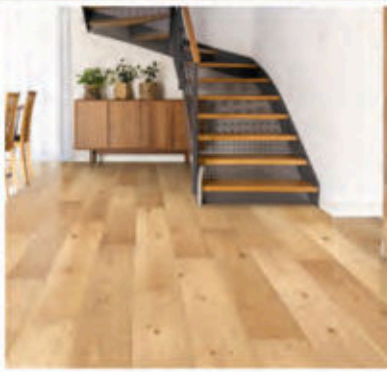
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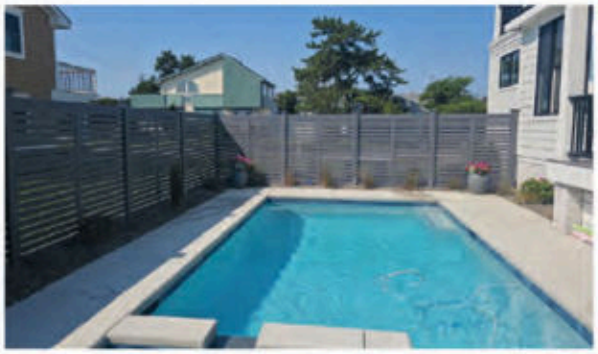
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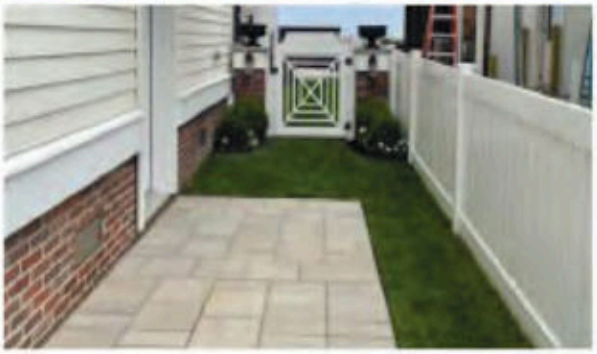
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