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Homeowner's UPDATE



Spice up your front porch for fall

You don't have to be a farmhouse fanatic to make your home festive this season. Here's some inspiration for decorating your front porch.

Pumpkin palettes

Instead of orange-everything, choose a pastel color palette with peach, light blue and white pumpkins, or freshen up your porch with lime green, yellow and off-white gourds. For a bold, classy look, forgo the natural colors altogether and spray paint your pumpkins gold and white.

Seasonal plants

Mums are hardy fall flowers that bring a pop of color to your front steps. Marigolds, ornamental kale, snapdragons, and coral bells are also ideal for fall arrangements. For some extra flair, use rustic planters such as bushel baskets, wooden crates, olive buckets, or even hollowed-out pumpkins.

Finishing touches

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Add fall-themed throw pillows and a plaid blanket to a porch swing or wooden bench. Intersperse a few candles or lanterns with your pumpkins and fall flowers, and arrange your decorations symmetrically on either side of the steps.

If you don't have a porch, move your fall display to the front yard and anchor it by using a larger decoration such as a hay bale or red wagon.

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Pros and cons of popular siding materials

If you're considering updating your home's siding, compare the following pros and cons.

Vinyl

Pros: Inexpensive and easy to install, vinyl requires minimal upkeep, and it comes in many colors and textures.

Cons: Standard panels have to be overlapped, which creates noticeable seams.

Stucco

Pros: Stucco is extremely durable and doesn't need to be repainted. It's also resistant to fires and insects.

Cons: Installation requires a lot of prep work. Make sure you find an experienced contractor to do the job.

Fiber cement

Pros: Fiber cement is a durable material that's fire-resistant, termite-proof and won't rot.

Cons: It's heavy and difficult to work with, which makes it more expensive to install than vinyl.

Wood clapboard or shingles

Pros: Classic and natural-looking, wood is easy to work with and often prized for high-end renovations.

Cons: The better grades of wood can get expensive plus maintenance adds up over time.

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Make a statement with your entryway

The entryway can be easily overlooked when decorating your home, but the truth is it makes a lasting impression. Here are a few do's and don'ts to make the most of this space.

Do ...

- *Reflect your style.* Choose an entryway table that speaks to the overall feel of your home — be it bold, minimalist or rustic. This sets the tone and gives your guests a great first impression.
- *Use the "rule of three."* Avoid cluttering this space with small decorations. Instead, choose up to three statement pieces such as a large mirror on the wall, a unique lamp and vase with long stems. Keeping this space sparse will make it look clean and welcoming.

Don't ...

- *Stash your stuff.* A pile of mail and mismatched shoes shouldn't be the first things your guests see. Add baskets for shoes, use a tray to catch mail, and tuck keys, sunglasses and other miscellaneous items into a drawer.
- *Ignore function.* Add a bench with throw pillows for guests to sit while taking off their shoes and include a coat tree or wall hooks for bags and jackets. When entertaining, move the majority of your items to a nearby closet to give your guests priority.

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Home maintenance: your fall to-do list

Regular maintenance on your home gives you peace of mind and keeps your resale value strong. Putting some energy into seasonal and biannual tasks now will set you up well for holiday entertaining.

Here are 9 items to include on your fall to-do list:

Clean the gutters: Clear out any leaves and debris, and ensure your downspouts are draining properly. This will help prevent wood rot, keep away pests and prolong the life of your gutters.

Check smoke/carbon monoxide detectors: It's recommended to do this each spring and fall, so give them a test and replace batteries if needed.

Inspect and clean the dryer vent: It's recommended that you have your dryer vent checked once each year. Excessive lint buildup can pose a dangerous threat of fire.

Clean the chimney: Whether you have a wood-burning fireplace or gas logs, hire a professional to inspect and clean your chimney once a year.

Service your HVAC: Call a professional to service your HVAC components to see if everything is running efficiently. Make sure to change your air filter and test your thermostat as well.

Deep clean indoors: Polish wood floors, scrub down cabinets, vacuum hard-to-reach spaces, wipe down the fridge, dust ceiling fans, etc. This will make hosting easier with the busy entertaining season quickly approaching.

Spruce up the yard: Rake leaves, prune back bushes and trim any trees that are getting too close to power lines or the roof. This will promote healthy growth and protect your property from falling branches.

Inspect windows and doors: Check for drafts and re-caulk or add weatherstripping where needed.

Reseed/fertilize the grass: Lawn-and-garden experts recommend fertilizing in the fall and spring, and fall temperatures are ideal for helping cool-season grasses take root.

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Crock-Pot[®] Potato Soup

Ingredients

3 lbs. potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
1 small yellow onion, diced
5 garlic cloves, minced
1 qt. chicken broth
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 (8-oz.) pkg. Neufchatel cheese
Optional toppings: shredded Cheddar cheese, bacon crumbles, chopped green onions

Directions

Add potatoes, onion, garlic, chicken broth, salt, and pepper to large Crock-Pot. Cook on high for 4-6 hours, or on low for 7-8 hours.



After cooking time, add cheese in chunks to Crock-Pot and cook on high for additional 30-40 minutes. Stir until cheese is fully melted and mixed. Season with additional salt and pepper as needed, and serve with optional toppings.

Serves 6-8

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