10 Things to Do Before Winter

If you live in a cold climate, there's more to preparing for Old Man Winter than closing your windows and cranking up the thermostat. If you want to protect your possessions, you might have to bring them in, empty them out, clean them up or shut them down. This all may sound daunting, but most winterizing tasks don't cost a lot of money or take a lot of time. Here are 10 tips to help you avoid costly repairs come springtime.

by Mark Petersen
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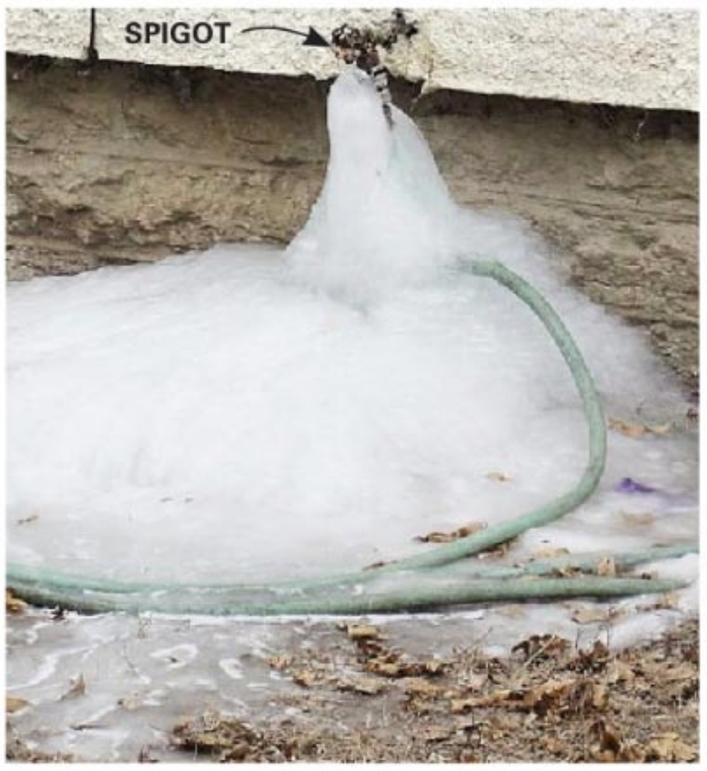
1 WINTERIZE YOUR PRESSURE WASHER...
Or ice might destroy it

I once owned an electric pressure washer. I refer to it in the past tense because a few years ago, I left it in the garage over the winter without draining the pump. The water froze and expanded, and when I fired up the washer the following spring, water sprayed from every part of the machine except the end of the wand.

I should have disconnected the hoses and sprayed in a pump antifreeze/lubricant like Pump Saver from Briggs & Stratton. That forces the water out and replaces it with antifreeze and lube. Pump antifreeze/lubrication is available at home centers for about $10.

Mark Petersen, Associate Editor



REUBEN SALTZMAN

2 DISCONNECT GARDEN HOSES...
Or risk major water damage

A garden hose that's left connected to a spigot will trap water inside the spigot. When that water freezes, it can bust open the spigot, the hose or both. Sometimes the pipe behind the spigot bursts and sprays hundreds of gallons *inside* the house. This can happen even with a frost-proof spigot and even if the water supply is off. So always disconnect garden hoses before winter arrives.

3 DRAIN GARDEN HOSES...
Or waste money on replacements

Due to circumstances (laziness), I sometimes neglect to drain garden hoses before putting them away for the winter. Usually it's not a problem. But every once in a while, freezing water splits a hose open. I've lost a few cheap hoses this way and a super-expensive one (ouch!). That's just dumb because draining hoses is so quick and easy: Blast out the water with an air compressor or stretch them out on a sloped yard or driveway.

Gary Wentz, Editor-in-Chief

4 DRAIN MECHANICAL SPRINKLERS...
Or buy a new one in the spring

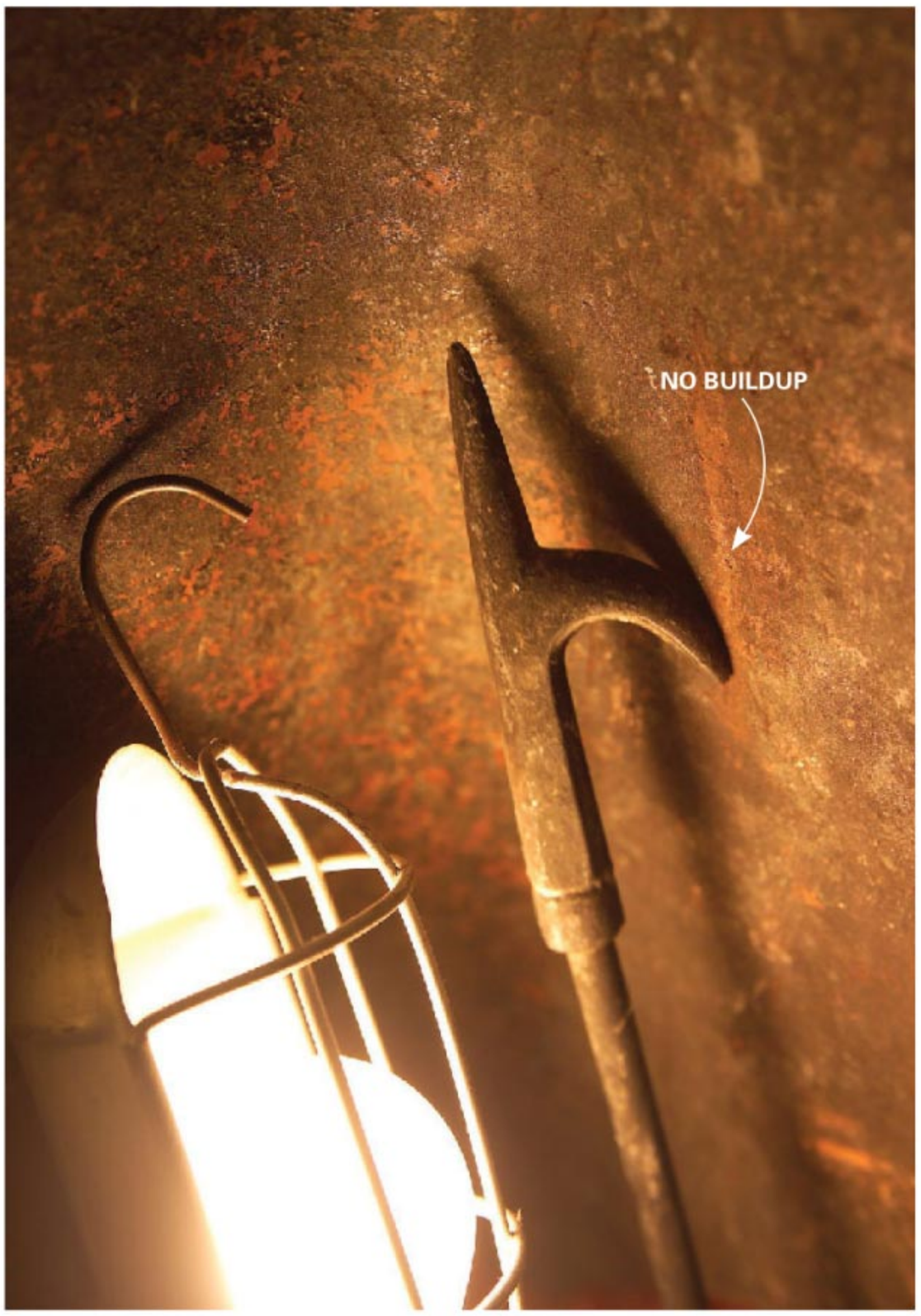
I bought one of those sprinklers that looks like a little tractor. It's designed to follow the path of the hose on the ground. It was expensive (more than $70), but it worked perfectly for my irregular-shaped yard; that is, until it spent the winter in my unheated garage. The residual water froze and destroyed the gears inside. The following spring, all it did was dribble water and make a clicking sound. I should have drained it before storing it. Just to be safe, I'll keep the new one on a shelf in the basement.

Ken Collier, Editor-at-Large

5 CLEAN ATTIC VENTING… *Or invite ice dams*

Poor attic ventilation can cause ice dams in the winter months, increase cooling costs, create a home for mold and reduce the life of shingles during the dog days of summer.

Over time, the vents located in your soffits and on some gable-end wall vents get clogged with dust and debris and lose their effectiveness. Clean them with a leaf blower or compressed air. You could use a pressure washer, but stick to a couple quick passes because you don't want to saturate the attic insulation with water. Clean the vents every few years, unless you live near a lot of trees with floating seeds, which can clog vents in one season.



6 CHECK YOUR CHIMNEY… *Or risk a fire*

Creosote buildup causes chimney fires. You should have your chimney professionally inspected or cleaned after every 70 fires. If you burn wet wood (which you shouldn't), have it inspected or cleaned every 50 fires.

Don't remember the last time you had it cleaned by a pro? A quick way to tell if your chimney needs cleaning is to run the point of your fireplace poker along the inside of your chimney liner. If you find a 1/8-in. layer (or more) of buildup, call a chimney sweep.

7 EMPTY FLOWERPOTS… *Or they could break*

One winter, in order to save garage space, I decided to leave a bunch of clay, ceramic and glass pots outside over the winter. I figured, "They were designed to be outside. What could it hurt?" However, that spring I found that several had cracked or broken because the moist soil inside them had expanded when it froze. I now empty the pots, or make sure the soil is dry and keep them covered, or take the pots in for the winter.

Beverly Petersen, Field Editor

8 SWAP OUT THE GAS IN SMALL ENGINES...

Or replace the carb in the spring

Standard gas at the pump can gum up a carburetor on a small engine in just a few months. I've had to replace a few carburetors for this reason. Now, when I know that it's the last time I'm going to use a tool for the season, I suck out the gas from the tank with a turkey baster and run the engine dry. Then I add a bit of nonoxygenated gas, which has a longer shelf life but is too expensive to burn all year. I also add a splash of fuel stabilizer and run the engine for a while on the good stuff before storing it.

Josh Risberg, *TFH* Lead Carpenter

9 CUT THE POWER TO YOUR A/C... *Or waste energy and damage your compressor*

Cut the power to your central air conditioner before the weather turns frigid. Your compressor could be damaged if your A/C accidentally gets turned on in low temperatures. Also, some A/C compressors have a crankcase heater to keep the oil warm. Running this heater in the winter is a waste of money, and the warmth could attract mice.

Flip off the breaker if the A/C compressor has a dedicated circuit, or rotate the disconnect block upside down into the "off" position. The disconnect block is located in the small panel outside near the compressor. Reenergize the unit 24 hours before startup. That will give the oil time to reach operating temperature.

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10 PROTECT THE A/C COMPRESSOR... *Or risk damage from a falling icicle*

There's no reason to wrap your entire air conditioner for the winter, and many manufacturers advise against it because it can invite rodents and cause condensation, which can lead to early corrosion. But it's not a bad idea to set a piece of plywood on top of the unit to protect it from falling icicles. See Tip 5 to learn one way of preventing the icicles in the first place.