

HOME DECOR & MORE



Harsh winter weather can make it challenging to live in an eco-friendly way. But there are many ways to withstand winter and do so in a way that does not hurt the planet.

Keep on Going Green this Winter

Each season presents its own unique set of challenges. From summer heat waves to spring rainstorms to snowfall in winter, the planet throws a lot at its inhabitants.

Living an eco-friendly lifestyle is often simple. But sometimes the weather can make it hard to maintain a commitment to going green. Winter weather can be particularly challenging, as it can be hard to sacrifice convenience and comfort in the face of harsh weather. But there are ways to stay true to your eco-friendly roots even when winter weather is at its most unpleasant.

- Save your fireplace ashes. If your home has a fireplace that you like to cozy up next to in winter, you can make great use of the ashes left behind when the fire goes out. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, ashes from wood-burning fireplaces can be added to compost heaps. Once added, these ashes help to create a soil amendment that can deliver valuable nutrients to your garden. After each fire, collect the ashes rather than sweeping them up and discarding them. Then add the collected ashes to your compost pile when the weather permits.
- Install a programmable thermostat. If you don't already have one, install a programmable thermostat in your home. Homeowners can save as much as 10 percent

a year on heating and cooling costs by turning their thermostats back 7° to 10° F for eight hours per day. Set the thermostat to drop 10°F when the family leaves for work and/or school in the morning, programming it to return to a more comfortable level when the family returns home at night. This saves you from sitting in a cold home while also saving you money by making sure you are not paying to heat an empty house.

- Have your home heating system inspected before winter hits full swing. Home heating systems, including boilers and furnaces, should be inspected by a professional each year, ideally before the arrival of winter. Heating systems that are not operating at peak efficiency will cost homeowners money and waste energy. If you notice yourself frequently increasing the temperature on your thermostat just to keep your home warm and comfortable, call a local HVAC professional to inspect the system. Scheduling such an appointment prior to the arrival of winter can save you the cost and discomfort of living with an inefficient system.
- Choose an electric snowblower. Many homeowners now use snowblowers instead of shovels to remove snow from their properties. While snow shovels are

the most eco-friendly snow removal tool, even the most eco-conscious homeowners recognize how snowblowers make snow removal easy and more efficient. But gas-powered snowblowers consume substantial amounts of fuel. If you must use a snowblower, choose an electric one instead of one powered by gas. Even though electric snowblowers consume electricity, the EPA notes that such products leave a smaller carbon footprint than gas-powered snowblowers because they do not emit greenhouse gases.

Protect Pipes From Freezing This Winter

Freezing pipes are a concern for homeowners who live in cold climates. When temperatures dip below freezing, the risk that pipes will freeze rises. Should a pipe burst, the damage that results can be extensive and costly.

Any pipe can freeze, but those that are directly exposed to the cold are the most vulnerable. These include pipes that feed outdoor hoses, swimming pool supply lines, pipes in unheated indoor rooms (i.e., basements or garages), and any pipes that run close to the outdoors through uninsulated walls. Water expands as it freezes, and that expansion can place pressure on whatever is trying to contain it — including pipes.

To avoid serious damage, homeowners need to prepare for the arrival of colder weather and be smart about how they protect pipes.

- Drain water from swimming pools and water sprinkler supply lines prior to the onset of cold weather. Drain water before freezing temperatures arrive, and don't forget to drain outdoor garden hoses and store them inside after watering season has come and gone.
- Close indoor water valves that feed outdoor spigots/bibs. Open the spigot outside to allow water to drain out. Keep the outside valve open so that any water that has accumulated will continue to drain and expand outward without damaging the pipe. An insulated bib dome also can help prevent frozen pipes.

- Open cabinet doors to allow heat to reach pipes inside of cabinets. Keep the doors open to spaces that may not be heated or insulated as well as other areas of the home so that heat can find its way inside. Consider wrapping these pipes with an insulating material as well, such as heat tape or pipe sleeves.
- Open one faucet. When it is very cold outside, particu-

larly at night, let water slowly drip from one faucet to prevent freezing. Choose the sink that is furthest from where water enters the house so water is flowing through all of the pipes to reach that faucet.

- Increase insulation around where pipes enter the house. Use insulating foam to seal any drafts where pipes enter the house from the outdoors.



Frozen pipes cannot always be avoided. Therefore, it is important that everyone in the household knows how to shut off the main water valve in the event a pipe bursts. This can prevent expensive damage to a home.

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