

The skinny on housing

Chore list

Do the following to protect your home against winter weather, say home maintenance experts.

Unhook the hose. Newer homes have frost-free outdoor faucets, but it won't help if you leave a garden hose connected.

Seal up crawl spaces. Cover air-flow foundation vents, which should be open in summertime and are usually found in older homes, to keep pipes from freezing and heat from escaping.

Wrap up pipes. Check crawl spaces, garages or wherever pipes might be exposed to cold air, and wrap them with pipe insulation and tape.

Mind the gutters. Clean out the leaves to make sure they aren't clogging drainage.

Check the roof. Check for missing shingles.

Check the chimney. Creosote-burning logs and powders are available, and flues should be working. A professional chimney-cleaning may be needed.

Shrink-wrap windows. If you have a drafty window, use a window kit that seals all four corners, using a blow dryer.

Caulk it. Inspect windows outdoors for any cracked caulking and fix.

Paint exposed wood. If paint is chipping, get primer on it to prevent rotting. □

— Wire reports

REAL ESTATE & RENTAL

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Banish Rudolph to the basement

■ Elegance is best when home staging during the holidays.



DESIGN DILEMMA

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The holiday season is upon us. But if you have a home on the market, should you deck the halls with festive adornments or skip the decorations altogether?

The key is to keep it elegant without overdoing the holiday cheer, real estate professionals say.

"Don't let holiday decorations dominate a room," says Leona Piro, owner of Act Two Home Staging in Mendon. "As with all staging, keep it simple."



BRADY DILLSWORTH

Leona Piro, owner of Act Two Home Staging and an accredited home stager, stages the great room for the holidays in a house at 598 East Lake Road, Middlesex, Yates County. Piro suggests skipping the Christmas tree for a small or potted version unless you have a huge room.

DILEMMA, PAGE 11

FOR RENTERS

Trade autumn-colored pillows for Christmas ones

THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

It takes just moments for Sam June to decorate his family room for the holidays. He simply swaps the earth-toned throw pillows on the sofa for pillows in shades of red, green and burgundy, adds a few holiday-themed ornaments to the fireplace mantle — and he's done.

"It's a subtle change, but it

still says 'holidays.' And it's easy to take it down when the holidays are over," says June, a designer who lives in Longwood, Fla.

The pillow-switcheroo trick can also signal a change in seasons, and refresh or update the look of a sofa, he says.

Designers June and Debbie Sheaf offer these suggestions for updating rooms with pil-

lows:

■ A mix of pillows is more interesting than uniform pillows. Mix sizes, shapes, colors, prints, fabrics and trimmings.

■ Knife-edge pillows, which have no trim at the edges, look casual. Basic cording along the edges gives a more-polished finish. (Use same-color cording to unify a mix of pillows). Elaborate trim, such as fluffy cater-

pillar edging or crisp dressmaker pleats, creates a formal look.

■ For custom pillow covers (think holidays), raid the remnants bins at fabric stores for interesting end cuts of upholstery and drapery fabrics. To cut costs, use an expensive fabric on the front of the cover, inexpensive fabric on the back.

■ The bigger the sofa, the more pillows can be used. □

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PULLOUT: GALLERY OF HOMES

Dilemma

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Rather than adding holiday pieces to your year-round décor, trade one piece for another, Piro says.

Save Santa and Frosty for next year, Piro says. It's more important for your home to look classy rather than cutesy, she says.

But that doesn't mean that your home should be devoid of any holiday décor, says Jeff Scofield, broker associate at ReMax Plus in Brighton. You want to make sure your home appears lived-in, Scofield says.

With the recent extension of the \$8,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers and the new \$6,500 tax credit for buyers who have lived in their home for at least five years, the usually sleepy winter real estate market in Rochester is much more brisk this year, Scofield said. The hot spring market will be much earlier and may even start in the winter season with the available credits, he says.

While the credits are driving home sales, buyers are choosy and it is crucial to show your home in the best possible light, Scofield says.

"Decorate to the season, decorate to your taste, but you don't want to over-decorate," he says.

For example, Piro suggests skipping the Christmas tree altogether and opting for a small or potted version, unless you have a huge room. In real estate, a homeowner is selling square footage and not home décor.

Avoid a clash of colors, Piro says.

"Holiday decorations do not have to be red and green," she says. There are a large variety of festive colors that will com-

plement most any color scheme.

Home sellers should keep outdoor decorations simple and to a minimum, Piro suggests. Try placing lights on trees and bushes rather than on the house. "You don't want buyers to wonder about damage to the roof or siding caused by fastening the lights," she says.

Skip the kids' homemade ornaments and personal mementos as you want to depersonalize your space, she says.

Select tree decorations that complement the color and style of your room.

While two or three beautifully wrapped boxes will add to the festive look, don't clutter the floor with loads of gifts. If you do have gifts, hide them in the basement or garage.

If you're selling a beautiful view, don't put wreaths on windows, Piro



BRADY DILLSWORTH

Leona Piro stages the dining room of the house on Canandaigua Lake.

says. And don't block architectural features with holiday decorations.

Little touches count when it comes to home staging, Piro adds. The holiday smells of gingerbread, spiced apple cider

and evergreens are inviting to guests.

Since it is winter, be careful that walkways are free from wires that may create a tripping hazard. If it is snowing, keep walkways clear of snow,

Scofield says.

Winter is a great time to sell a home because there is less competition of other homes on the market and the buyers tend to be more serious, Scofield says. And the bo-

nus of selling a home in the winter season if you do not have great landscaping is snow will hide imperfections.

"Snow makes all yards equal," Scofield says. □
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