



Looking after your new home

The CB Homes guide

A photograph of a modern bathroom interior. On the left, there is a white rectangular sink with a gold-colored faucet, mounted on a light-colored wooden vanity. The walls are covered in large, light-colored tiles with a subtle pattern. In the background, a wooden door is visible. To the right, a glass shower enclosure with gold-colored hardware is partially visible. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

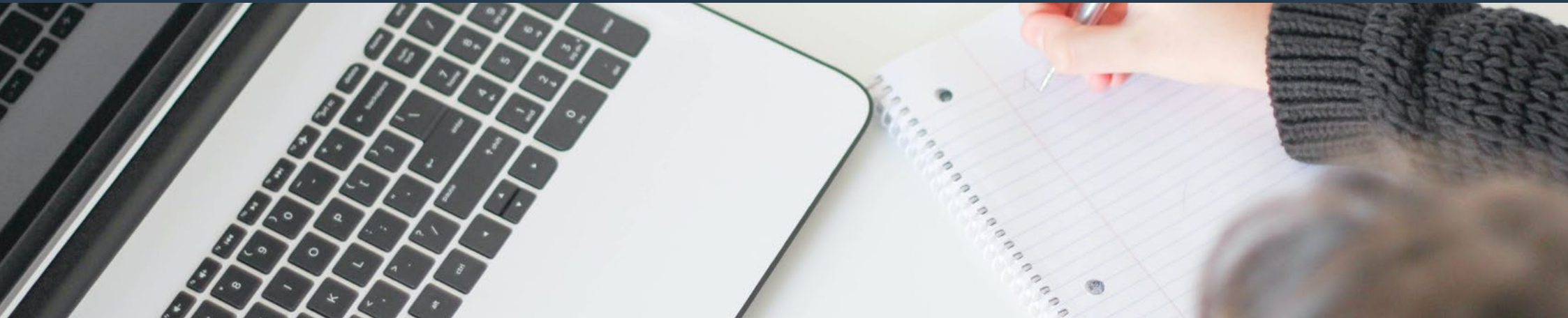
Maintaining quality & style

When you move into your new-build home, it's important to make sure that it retains its excellent finish. Regularly maintaining your property will ensure that everything is kept in working order and operating to its best potential. This includes not just the components of the house - the building materials, such as roof tiles and guttering, etc - but also the 'mechanics' of the home, such as the kitchen equipment and bathroom suites.

When your home is completed, there can be a number of maintenance issues to look out for. These are ongoing checklists of items that may need addressing over time. However, there's a definite distinction between maintenance issues and snagging. In

the construction period and the immediate aftermath of handover, any issues with the finish that relate to the quality of the work must be addressed by the contractor. These initial checklists of work to be carried out at the earliest opportunity are known as 'snagging'.

By carrying out regular maintenance, you are also protecting your investment for the future and ensuring that you get the most enjoyment out of living there while it is at its best. In our guide to maintaining your property, we will be looking at all aspects of maintenance work that will go towards maintaining its quality and style in the future.



What is snagging (and what isn't)?

Sometimes, during the construction process or afterwards, when you have moved into your new home, you may begin to see things you might not have spotted before. Occasionally you may not spot every single little defect or blemish from any number of site visits during construction and sometimes, it's only when you finally move in when you see the finished product up-close and first-hand.

Attention to detail

When you first walk into your new home, it is rather like when you buy a house that has been standing for years – you can't spot everything in the time you are shown around by the owner or estate agent. A creaky floor, for example, will only reveal itself when you are actually walking on the floor any number of times. A light switch or light fitting that doesn't work will only become apparent when you try and fail to switch it on at night. Some aspects of a new-build property will only become apparent over time. Cracking to the corners of rooms, or across ceilings may be a symptom of

the plaster or paint drying out. But when do these problems and defects qualify to be termed 'snags' that should be rectified by the builder at no additional cost – and when are they deemed additional work that needs to be settled at the owner's expense?

Quality guaranteed

Anyone who has been involved in either side of the process of building or buying a new build home will have encountered the term 'snagging'. It usually refers to minor remedial work that occurs as the project draws to a close. It is sometimes in the news, as developers are occasionally taken to task if they have carried out bad workmanship, or have delivered a poor response to customer concerns.

There's a code of conduct and an authority to deal with the complaints process. The New Homes Quality Board (NHQB) is an independent not-for-profit body. It was established in 2021 for the purpose of developing a new framework that will oversee reforms in the build quality of new homes and the quality of customer service provided by developers. The framework was



introduced in 2022 and has already delivered a huge change in developer behaviour, ensured a consistently higher standard of new home quality and service, and strengthened the ability to rectify work that hasn't been carried out to the expected standards.

The NHQB was formally constituted as a legal entity in January 2021 and the board members were appointed with representatives from various consumer bodies and stakeholders from the lending industry, Homes England, independent members, developers and new home warranty providers. Since then, it has also created a New Homes Ombudsman Service, to develop a new industry code of practice – the **New Homes Quality Code (NHQC)**. This framework is ongoing however, with the opportunity for further amends made as new challenges arise. The board's mantra is that it is 'Championing quality new homes and better consumer outcomes'.

Getting it right

Usefully, the NHQC has provided a standardised definition of what exactly constitutes a 'snag'. Snags or Snagging mean a minor imperfection or malfunction in the New Home which does not meet the expected tolerance or finish as set out in the Contract of Sale. Typically, something which is damaged, broken, not fitted properly or looks unfinished and can be categorised as either 'Omitted or incomplete work', or 'Faulty or defective work'.

Snags that are highlighted by the customer are not automatically considered a complaint. But if the developer has not responded and looked to rectify the issue within 30 calendar days, then a formal complaint process can begin. A snagging checker such as a surveyor can be employed, if customers are unsure what exactly constitutes a snag and what quality of workmanship they should reasonably expect. For example, snagging doesn't count if you choose an aspect of the design, or a finish, that you

then don't like. It's not a matter of taste or choice, it's an aspect of the work that is not carried out to the expected standards. Therefore, an extra cost would be incurred if the niggle is 'self-inflicted'.

Another key point is the length of time after completion a customer can complain. The longer the period, the more likely the defect is down to poor maintenance. However, while most snags will be revealed reasonably quickly, others – such as settlement due to poor foundations – may take years to surface. In these cases, the timing argument is a valid one. Some aspects of a new-build property will only become apparent over longer periods, for example, cracking in the plaster may be caused by the house settling as the construction materials cure. In general, if an independent assessor agrees that the workmanship fails to reach reasonable expectations and standards, then the case for the rectification of the snag can be made.



How to snag your new home

As a new homeowner, you should make a full inspection of the property, both internally and externally. The average new-build can have a range of defects or snags, that may require remedial work. Snagging issues aren't unusual, but need to be addressed early, before they become bigger problems.

When your new home is completed, in some cases there may be some snagging work required. This occurs when the workmanship on the new-build fails to meet expectations and standards. Actually, a customer can raise a query or complaint regarding a snag at any point in the construction process. If you are unsure about the quality of workmanship, you can also engage an industry expert, an independent voice who can advise you on whether you have a case or not, regarding snags and rectifying them. The main thing is – if something is not to your satisfaction, ask the question, so you can then independently verify as to whether it meets industry standards.

Keeping track

Some snags are obvious and will not be difficult to spot. Missing components, such as coping stones on walls or the wrong type of material used, will be easily verifiable by referring to the agreement and contract that was signed and by double-checking the design specification. If you are carrying out regular site visits to keep up-to-date on progress, make a note of any issues that you think may qualify as a snag. You don't have to wait until the contract is completed to address this with the contractor. You should always mention something you are not sure about as soon as you can. But it is usual to prepare snagging lists at the end of a contract, when the new-build is complete and you can take a proper, close-up look at the property. Primarily, it's important to keep track of anything that you think may constitute a snag.

The New Homes Quality Code (NHQC) has introduced the chance for customers to carry out a pre-completion inspection – either by themselves, or by an accredited professional – after notice has been given that the property is completed, but within the five calendar days prior to settlement. The New Homes Quality Board (NHQB) advises how to make complaints about workmanship. If you are unhappy with the quality of your new home or the service provided by us at any time, then you should contact us.

Code of conduct

If you are dissatisfied with how your complaint is dealt with, you can ask the New Homes Ombudsman to investigate your complaint. The easiest way is via their website at **www.nhos.org.uk** or by calling **0330 808 4286**.

Some obvious questions to ask when you are looking out for defects:

- Windows – are there scratches on the frames or the glazing? Do they operate how you'd expect, and open and close easily on their catches and latches?
- Doors and doorframes – do the doors open and shut properly? Also check that the door furniture works well, so locks and handles work. Remember that if you have added a thick carpet, you may need to get the bottom of doors trimmed to fit
- Walls and ceilings – is the plasterwork smooth and are there any obvious blemishes, such as screw or nail pops? Are the walls and ceilings straight and are there cracks appearing that are not covered by decoration? Is the decoration carried out satisfactorily, with no drips or runs?
- Floors – if they are concrete, are they level and free from cracks and if they are timber, are they level and do they creak?
- Lighting – do all the light switches and fittings work properly? If there are faders fitted, do they work and do the right switches operate the correct lights?
- Central heating and plumbing – do the boiler and radiators work properly and efficiently, and is the pipework free from leaks? Also, do the taps work and not drip or leak, and the toilets operate as they should?

If in doubt on these issues and many more, always ask us in the first instance.





As with anything new, there can occasionally be teething problems with new-build homes that need to be addressed. Here are 10 particular maintenance issues that can sometimes be found in new homes.

1. Cracking and gaps in new plaster

When new-builds are constructed, it will usually take around nine to 12 months for the entire structure to dry out. It's not unusual to spot small cracks in the walls, often along hairline joints, such as along plasterboard edges, or in corners of ceilings. Joinery too, such as skirting and architrave, can show gaps and they are a sign of shrinkage. They can easily be concealed using a gap filler and a coat of paint. As a tip, gaps can be reduced in the drying process by allowing the new construction to dry out gradually.

2. Silicone sealant problems

Silicone sealant – around windows for example, or sanitaryware – should be smooth and secure. Sealant is designed to create a barrier between a wall or tiles and a component, such as a window frame or bath. When it's not a true

seal, it can cause problems. Water ingress is the most common issue and also the most damaging. If water can penetrate the seal, it can cause damage over time to timber and plasterwork. Another common fault with sealant is shrinkage. This causes the sealant to reduce in dimensions and pull away from where it is fixed, leaving a clear gap for moisture to penetrate. Simple repairs can be done by taking out and replacing the problem sealant with new.

3. Doors and door frames

We've all moved in somewhere and found that there's one irritating door that doesn't shut properly. The paint's too thick, or the lock's not quite reaching the receiver. This can be caused by warping. This usually occurs where there's a rise in the humidity. A common place to find a warped door, even in old houses, is on the airing cupboard or bathroom door, where there's a contrast between temperatures. It is caused by moisture in the air soaking into the wood. It is most common in external and bathroom doors, which is why it's imperative to have adequate ventilation, especially in bathrooms. Door frames can crack when the wood swells due to moisture and then reduce as it dries out. This ongoing process can cause the frame to buckle and can even cause disruptive problems to the wall.

4. Misaligned or stiff patio doors in a new house

Another door-related problem relates to patio doors. Misalignment can develop over time due to gravity and warping of the frame can occur, due to expansion or shrinkage. Patio doors, especially the type that meet and close in the middle, are awkward to hang. Getting both doors to meet and close perfectly in sync is an art in itself. But if the doors become difficult to open or close, this can make the door stiff and difficult to use. As the tolerances are set within very fine degrees to reduce draughts, an expansion of a couple of millimetres can cause major problems. It may mean that over time, the doors need to be planed and rehung.

5. Boiler Issues

Newly-fitted boilers can take some getting used to, especially when they're making noises, such as whirring, gurgling, whistling, tapping or banging. If a boiler is making noises above what you'd expect when it's operational, it's probably got air trapped in the system. Unless the problem is obvious, you'll need a heating engineer to look at your boiler. Low water pressure could be another cause and venting/bleeding your radiators can stop them gurgling when in use. That knocking sound you hear when the central heating system kicks in is expansion and contraction of the heating pipes. Nothing can be done about this, but make sure pipes are not fixed with brackets to floorboards, skirting or joists too tightly, which will be constraining their movement.

6. Radiator issues

Another common fault with new-builds can be where radiators don't function properly. This can either be them getting only partially warm or not getting hot at all. This is usually caused by air trapped in the system. A heating engineer can help you out, but it's usually simply a case of 'bleeding' the radiator. This opens a valve, that allows the air to escape and the heat to flow through properly, as now the heated water can pass freely around the system.

7. Painting and decoration of a new house

When it comes to decoration, painting touch-ups are among the easiest of maintenance jobs. With a new-build, there may be some areas that need another coat, due to patchy coverage, or to cover up after settlement cracks or making good after a minor leak. It's a good idea to make sure that you have a supply of any paint that was used in the decoration, so you have an exact match. You should be able to ask the contractor which specific brand and colour was used.





8. Condensation forming in your new home

New-builds in particular are susceptible to condensation, as the building dries out. This can be exacerbated by the use of boiling pans, showers, or drying clothes on airers. Use any ventilation you may have, or open windows if not, to allow the air to circulate and condensation droplets to dry out. If condensation is allowed to linger, it can cause mould.

9. Windows

A further problem with windows is loose or broken handles, and stiff, broken or dropping hinges. These can be irritating, but can usually be simply replaced. Many windows come as units these days, but individual components can be ordered and replaced if need be. Sometimes a window that isn't working correctly needs something as straightforward as the screws tightening up on the brackets (the same is true of kitchen cupboards that are not opening properly). Another window-related fault is scratches or marks on the glazing. A scratch is difficult to rectify, especially in layers of double-glazing which will need the pane replacing. Marks and blemishes however can generally be removed using a window cleaning solution.

10. Toilet Flush

Any newly-fitted sanitary goods can cause problems, from dripping showers to stiff taps. One of the most problematic items is toilet flushes. Sometimes they can be stiff to operate, but more often it's the cistern refill part of the process that causes problems – being too noisy, dripping after the cistern is filled, or the handle or push button not operating properly. As with other plumbing-related snags, it's best to engage a professional engineer to rectify the fault.

LOOKING AFTER APPLIANCES, HEATING SYSTEMS AND WARRANTIES

When you move into your new build home, there is so much to take in. From the décor and spaces that you can fill with your own items and tastes, to the working elements of your new home, there is plenty to get to know. It is important from the outset that you 'test drive' your home and check that everything is in full working order.

Integrated appliances

There will be a certain number of integrated appliances in your new home, as items such as cookers, toilets and showers will be part of the structure of the building, with plumbed-in hidden pipework, electrics and wall fixings. It is very important that you make sure that these appliances are in full working order from the outset, as replacing them could be a costly issue that requires considerable remedial work. It might mean tiles being removed, for example, to access pipework or a power supply, or floorboards or carpeting lifted up.

From our turnkey self-build projects to exclusive new-build developments, we offer a variety of specifications on bathroom suites, cookers, hobs, sinks, fridges, freezers and dishwashers. As they are brand-new, these appliances will be covered by guarantees and warranties, so in the event of any problem, they should be able to be easily replaced. You will find full details of these guarantees and warranties in your homeowner pack.



Heating and water

It's important too that you check the heating system works to its optimum performance. These days, heating systems are designed to be hyper-efficient and also environmentally-friendly. But any mechanism can develop minor or major faults, irrespective of their type. If a joint on a run of pipework hasn't been adequately sealed, then it is going to leak, regardless of how well the rest of the heating system is installed. The whole system – the water supply and the central heating system – is only as strong as its weakest point. This could mean that a leak on a radiator could require the system being drained, which is a much bigger job than a simple repair.

If your new-build property features solar panels for its power generation, make sure that they are working efficiently and as they should. If you have a boiler for hot water and heating, make sure it's functioning and its settings are optimising your energy usage. To familiarise yourself with its operation – how to set the boiler for various timings, how to override the settings – ask a member of our team at the point of handover, consult the manual or have a plumber explain it to you when he visits to service your boiler.

Servicing is important and in order to validate any warranties, regular checks should be carried out on the central heating system and boiler. A common fault is leaking radiator valves. These can be difficult to spot, particularly if they are behind furniture. They are harder to notice on carpeted floors, while on tile, vinyl or wooden floors, any leakage from a radiator – or indeed a water pipe – will become obvious quite quickly. If the leak is upstairs, water will also appear on the ceilings of rooms below.

Get to know your property

Regarding your heating and water system, one thing you should always check is where your stop tap is situated. This controls the mains water supply to your property and is essential in an emergency, as if you have to cut the water supply off due to a leak, this is the quickest way to do it. If an urgent issue arises with a leak, if you can't locate the stop tap you may be able to shut the water off in the road or driveway outside your property. Your water meter is often situated under a metal plate that can be lifted on a hinge. This is a last resort however and you should try to locate the stop tap inside the house, garage or outbuilding. CB Homes' homeowners will find the location of their stop tap noted in their homeowner manual.

It's vital that you make sure that you are happy with all aspects of your new home and you address any issues early on. It's important both for your own peace of mind, but also for the practicalities of getting anything amiss rectified as quickly as possible. Be aware of any warranties that apply to appliances and material, so you can address any problems and have them repaired – while they are covered – at no extra cost.





When you first move into your new home, the interior design aspect is one area where you can really make an impact – and also put your own personal stamp on the décor.

A lick of paint

When it comes to preserving that high-quality finish, it is worth taking the extra effort to make sure this standard is retained. Any surfaces that have been painted can pick up occasional knocks. This can even happen as you move in – it is all but impossible to avoid unless every box and item of furniture is swathed in bubble wrap. Having a selection of the paints that were used by the decorators is useful – even if it's simply a small 'tester pot'. This ensures if you need any

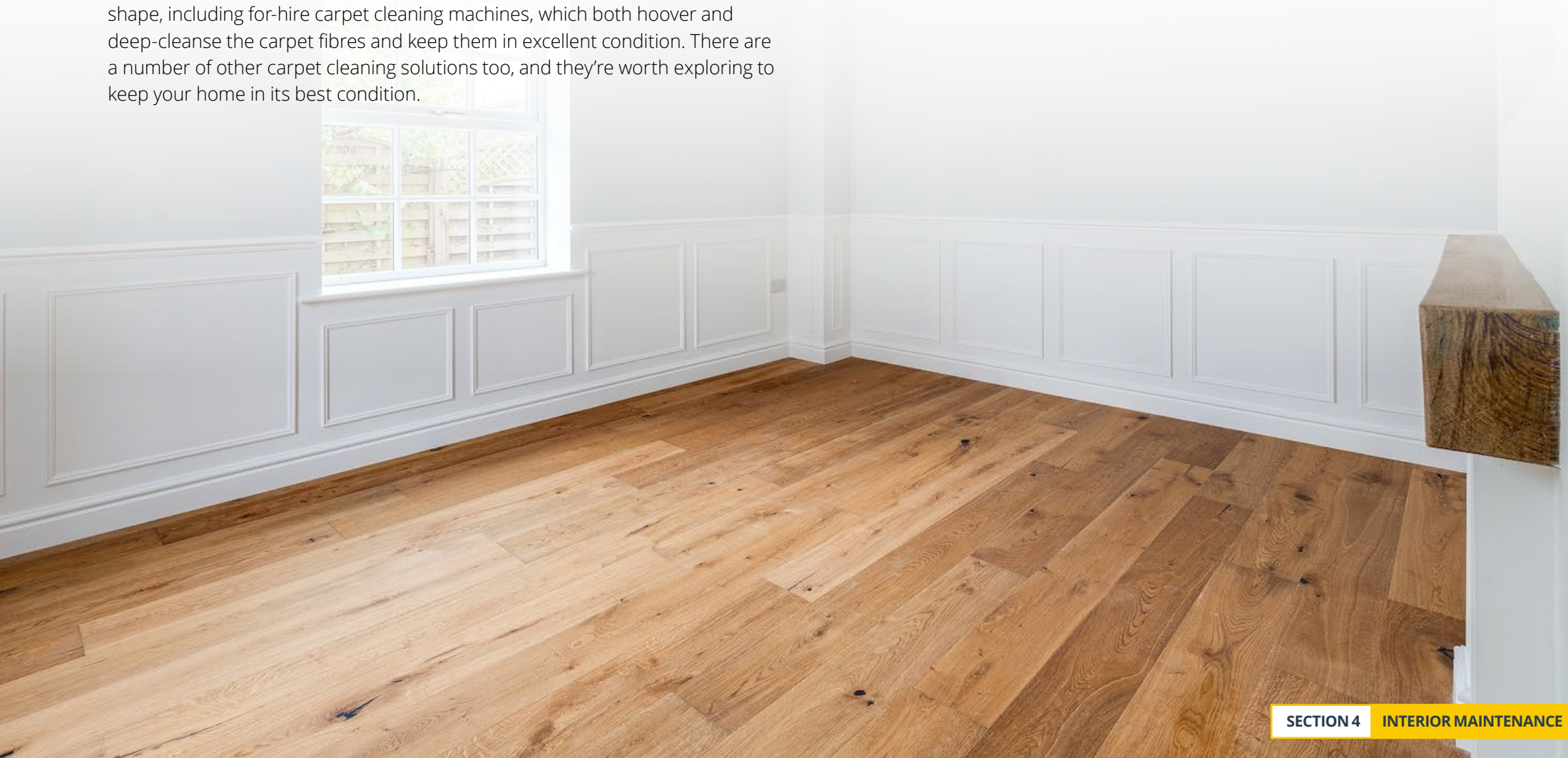
touching up with a colour match, you have something readily at hand. You can check with us as to what colour shades were used. Of course, it is easy to carry out your own decoration these days – if you find that you do not like your initial colour choices, you can always change them. In an ideal world, to maintain a good quality finish, a repaint should be carried out every four-to-five years. But in thoroughfares that have higher usage, such as halls, landings and passageways, this may need to be redecorated more frequently.

To carpet or not to carpet?

Carpeting is another aspect that is very much down to personal taste. It is getting the balance right between being practical and looking stylish. Maintaining carpets can be difficult however, especially if they are getting a lot of use by a large number of people. Households with a number of children and/or pets will be using (and wearing out) their carpets much more than single people or couples. Location has an impact too, as rural properties often have to endure much more wear and tear, by dint of the 'outdoors' often being brought inside on footwear. There are some handy ways to keep your carpet in great shape, including for-hire carpet cleaning machines, which both Hoover and deep-cleanse the carpet fibres and keep them in excellent condition. There are a number of other carpet cleaning solutions too, and they're worth exploring to keep your home in its best condition.

Hard floor options

Carpeting is not your only option when it comes to flooring however and there are several alternatives that offer certain advantages – especially in terms of maintenance. Hard floors such as tiles and timber are so much easier to maintain than a carpet. They can be cleaned much more easily and are often much more hygienic. If you have maintenance issues with the new-build, your flooring may be the worst affected. A water leak, for instance, might cause a wooden floor to warp, or wash grouting away from tile joints. But any replacement or repair will be easier than a ruined carpet.





The exterior of your house is the part that experiences the worst wear and tear. From inclement weather to the general passing of time, the exterior elements of your house will need keeping a close eye on. Your new-build will be finished to a high-quality spec, so there should be little chance that you will have to address external issues immediately – unless it's simply a matter of personal preference for colour scheme or design, of fascias and guttering for example. However, as you will have no doubt given a great deal of thought to the designs, this is the exception rather than the rule. But over time, it is important to keep an eye on the exterior of the house.

Keep yourself covered

The outside of your house needs to be functioning properly, as everything from the roof down is doing a job. Take the roof itself. The roof covering will need to be kept in good order, so that there can be no leaks allowing water to penetrate the roof covering. Any tiles or slates that become chipped or broken will need to be replaced at the earliest opportunity. Although there will be a membrane below the roof covering, the water getting in can cause problems over time. The same is true of any problems with the ridge or hip tiles, the specially-angled tiles that protect the extremities of the roof covering. If they or the mortar that holds them in place become damaged or dislodged – by high winds or a storm, for instance – they will need attention as soon as possible.

Clear the channels

The gutters too need to be doing their job. This is one maintenance aspect of a new-build that will need addressing regularly from year one. It's especially important if your property is near any deciduous trees, which lose their leaves in the autumn. The falling leaves and dead twigs can clog up guttering channels and eventually this can cause an issue. The layers of leaves can build up, especially if the conditions are damp for extended periods, and meld together or become mouldy. This can cause major clogging issues in the channels and means water cannot drain to the downspout. At the bottom of the downspout, the same process can occur and block the gulleys, so rainwater will then pool at ground level. A general building maintenance contractor can help you clear them if needs be.

Groundwater drainage

Below ground, your drains need to be working properly too, so that any surface water can drain away well. Surface water flooding from gullies and manholes will not only cause problems to ground surfaces, but also cause damp problems with brickwork and pathways, due to lying water. If you think that debris has been washed down your drains, you will need to engage a drainage specialist to examine the drains and clear any blockages. Surface water can be problematic if it's allowed to stand for too long. If drainage away from a property is a problem then this will need to be addressed. Is there too much hard standing and not enough drainage, and how can this be remedied?

Outside views

Other aspects of exterior maintenance include windows and walls. Windows will need some attention if there are any cracks or scratches to the glass. The best thing about modern UPVC window units is that the glazing can easily be replaced. It's simply a case of removing the beading and replacing the glass. Older timber units may have putty and tacks holding the glass in that can be more difficult to replace. If cracks in glass – especially in double-glazed units and VELUX roof lights – remain, they can cause problems over time, such as condensation and mould. Even if the glass is not letting water in, it can be doing damage in other ways. Seals around windows should also be checked regularly, and repointing to brickwork or any cracks in the mortar render need to be addressed too sooner rather than later – especially before winter arrives.



EXTERIOR LANDSCAPING: LOOKING AFTER YOUR NEW OUTSIDE SPACE



When you move into your new home, your mind may be focused more on the interior of the property than what's going on outside. But once you have settled into your new space, you can spend time to express yourself on the exterior too. This includes the garden and other aspects of the outside. The extent to which the exterior is finished will depend on what type of project it was. Sometimes the landscaping will be completed to a finish – this tends to be the case on large developments of groups of properties. On projects such as self-build schemes, however, the outdoor spaces may include access drives and patio areas, but other areas will be a blank canvas for the owners to express their own taste and style.

Time and convenience

Whatever the extent to which the outdoors has been developed, it is worth bearing in mind how much time it will take to maintain the outdoor spaces and also the ways to make sure that they are easy to take care of. Large open lawns of perfectly-laid turf may look amazing, but they can be very time-consuming and costly to maintain. The convenience of something more low-maintenance should not be underestimated. In fact, immaculate designer lawns may even require regular professional maintenance assistance and treatment, in a way other designs do not.



Personal designs for your outside space

Another option is large patio areas, paving, decking, tiling or paths. These can dispense with the need for mowing and can be kept tidy relatively easily with regular weeding. You must ensure that you have adequate drainage and that any standing water during prolonged periods of heavy rain can drain away without causing any flooding. The beauty of areas of decking, patios and coverings is that you can incorporate your chosen colours, patterns and designs to your own personal taste. There are so many options these days that the sky really is the limit.

You can also think about ornamental structures, like pergolas and summer houses, to make places to spend time outside, whatever the weather. You can also site garden sheds and other storage spaces in your outside space. You will need to make sure that you have taken care of any weatherproofing of fences and other timberwork, such as sheds, from the start. This will make sure they are going to last and look their best.



Let your imagination run wild

If you are after a very low-maintenance garden, there are options such as rewilding. This is allowing the space to grow and develop as a natural space. This will encourage wildlife to your garden and provide a natural habitat for wild animals. If you have pets, this may also provide a space to exercise them. In the summer, a rewilded space can look glorious, with wild flowers and grasses, while in the winter it will die back ready for the next year.

There are other ways you can make sure your garden is low-maintenance. The layout will matter a lot and the materials you use too, with the plants you choose and how they are planted and displayed. Flowerbeds can look great, but they do require a fair amount of work to keep them looking their best.

Hedges and trees are also lovely features to make a garden appear more natural, but they require maintenance too. If they are allowed to grow unhindered, they can become an issue if they become overgrown and difficult to trim. They can also become problematic if they grow to overhang neighbouring gardens, buildings or access. They should be cut back regularly, as some plants such as leylandii and laurel grow in seasonal spurts and at pace. In autumn, fallen leaves from deciduous trees and plants can also clog gutters, downpipes and gullies. Like paving and other hardstanding, this can cause flooding issues and water retention, so think carefully before you plant.

ESSENTIAL GARDENING TASKS FOR SPRING AND SUMMER

Express yourself

What you can do with your outside space is only limited by available space, budget and your imagination. New-build developments vary in shape and size, and provide the scope for you to express yourself. If you have a generous garden, then the sky's the limit in terms of scope and creativity. Unfortunately, the grander your plans the more work will need to be carried out all year round, to keep on top of tasks and ensure that the garden doesn't become overgrown or overwhelming.

We finish our new-build projects to a very high standard and often the exterior landscaping will have been discussed beforehand. This will mean that there may already be garden features, such as lawns, borders and hedges, incorporated as part of the project's construction. Because of the nature of the construction process, landscaping and exterior construction will be the last part of the construction to be carried out. This is usually due to access issues and the fact that the surrounding land will be needed to access the site and the building as it takes shape. As a result, the garden landscaping is the finishing touch to the project, a locale to set-off the completed building.

Seasonal changes

Spring is also the opportunity to make sure you are making the most of your garden and to concentrate on new plantings and features. This could mean installing a patio, building a wall or erecting a pergola. Spring is a great time to do this, before any of the plants begin to become too established and bloom, and so your garden and its new additions will look their best throughout the summer.

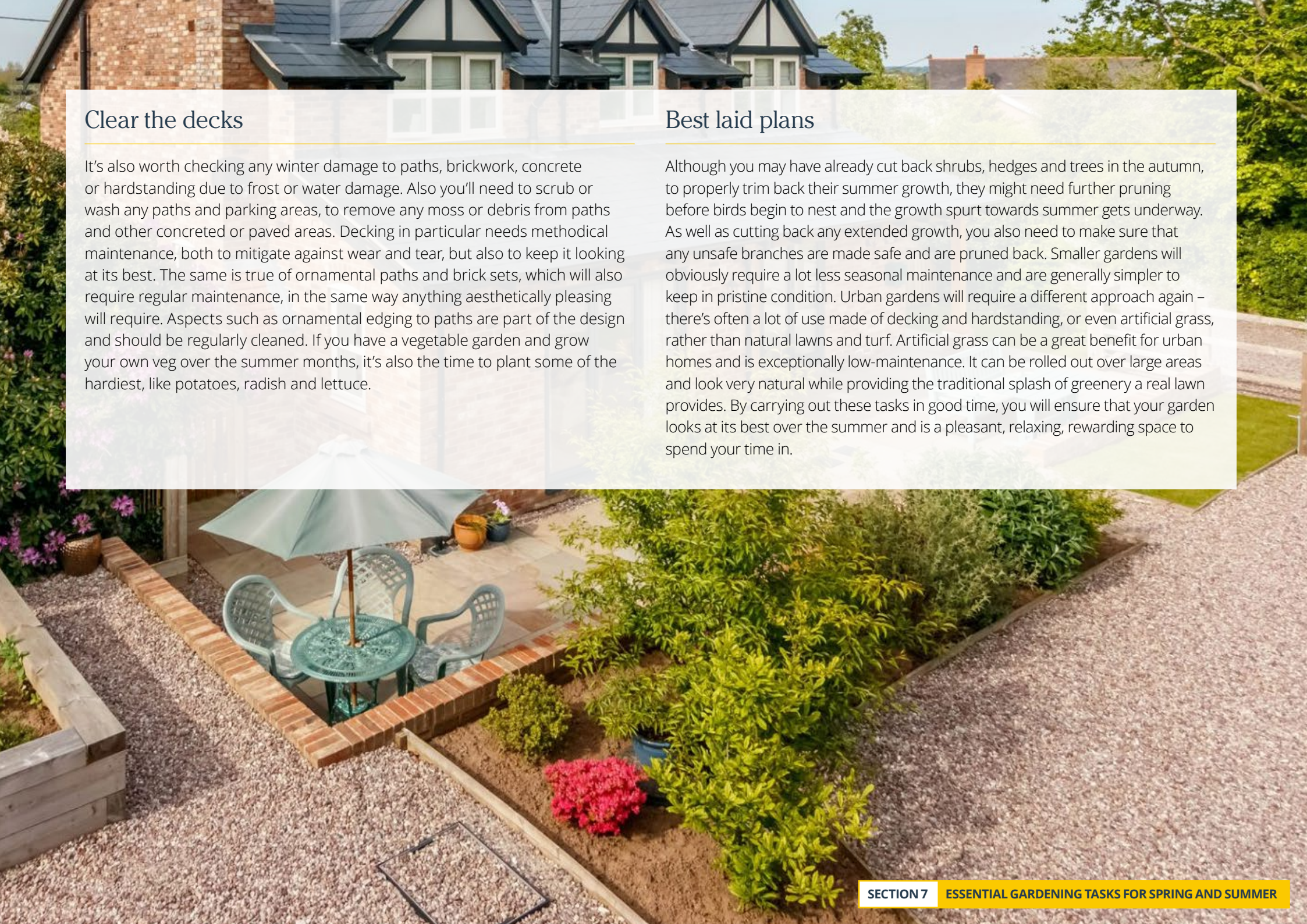
As with any long-term project, breaking down maintenance jobs into bitesize chunks is a good way to stay on top of tasks all year around. Aspects like lawns and borders need attention at regular points in the year and are an ongoing project for keen (and not-so-keen) gardeners. Spring is usually defined by lighter nights and a rise in temperatures. Keeping your flowerbeds weeded and topped up with mulch or fertiliser will give the plants there the best chance to grow.

Clear the decks

It's also worth checking any winter damage to paths, brickwork, concrete or hardstanding due to frost or water damage. Also you'll need to scrub or wash any paths and parking areas, to remove any moss or debris from paths and other concreted or paved areas. Decking in particular needs methodical maintenance, both to mitigate against wear and tear, but also to keep it looking at its best. The same is true of ornamental paths and brick sets, which will also require regular maintenance, in the same way anything aesthetically pleasing will require. Aspects such as ornamental edging to paths are part of the design and should be regularly cleaned. If you have a vegetable garden and grow your own veg over the summer months, it's also the time to plant some of the hardiest, like potatoes, radish and lettuce.

Best laid plans

Although you may have already cut back shrubs, hedges and trees in the autumn, to properly trim back their summer growth, they might need further pruning before birds begin to nest and the growth spurt towards summer gets underway. As well as cutting back any extended growth, you also need to make sure that any unsafe branches are made safe and are pruned back. Smaller gardens will obviously require a lot less seasonal maintenance and are generally simpler to keep in pristine condition. Urban gardens will require a different approach again – there's often a lot of use made of decking and hardstanding, or even artificial grass, rather than natural lawns and turf. Artificial grass can be a great benefit for urban homes and is exceptionally low-maintenance. It can be rolled out over large areas and look very natural while providing the traditional splash of greenery a real lawn provides. By carrying out these tasks in good time, you will ensure that your garden looks at its best over the summer and is a pleasant, relaxing, rewarding space to spend your time in.



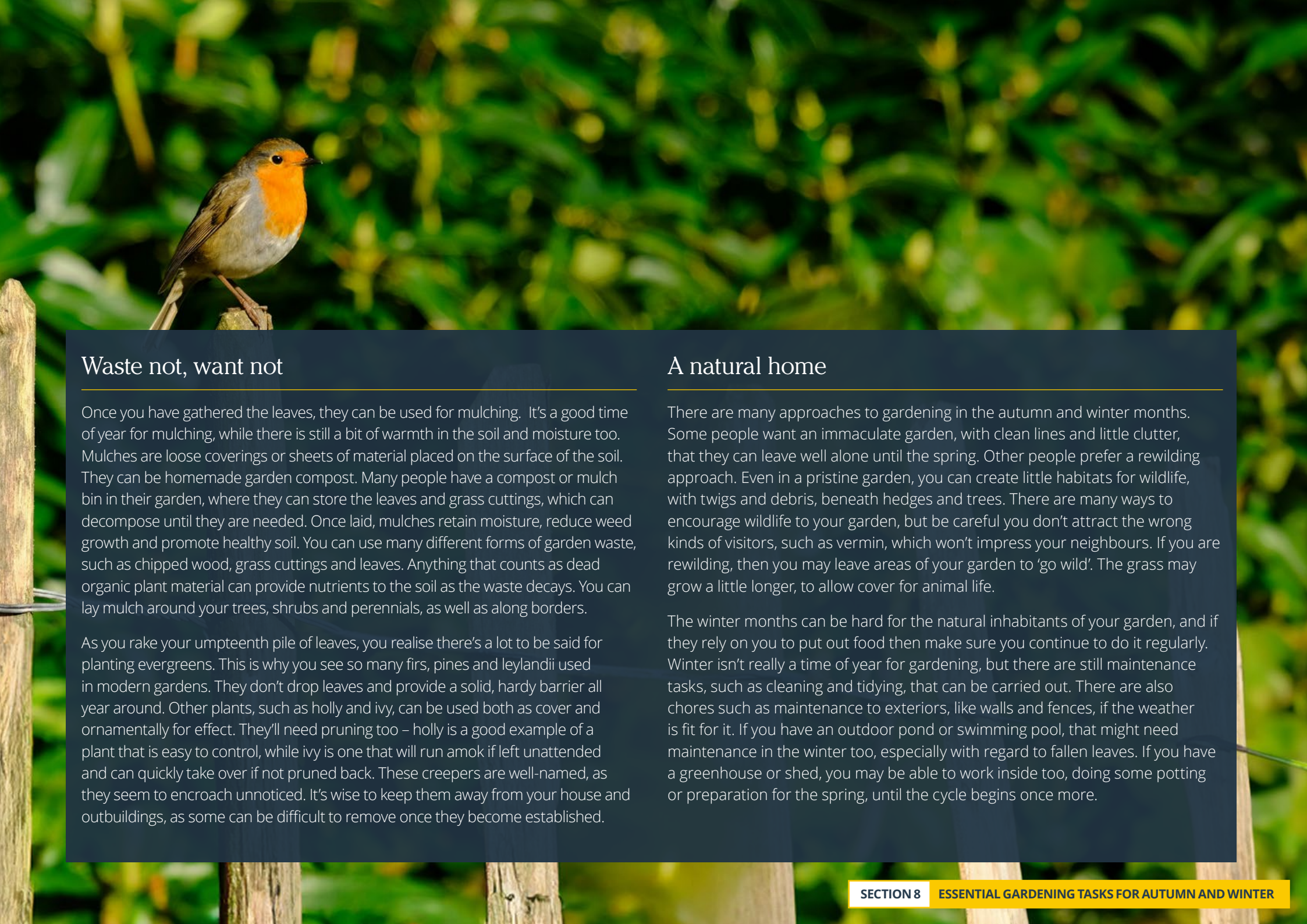
ESSENTIAL GARDENING TASKS FOR AUTUMN AND WINTER

The changing colours of autumn mean there is a load of work to get done in the garden, which, depending on the size of your plot, will keep you busy throughout the darkening weekends.

Time for a trim

Depending on the time of year you moved into your new-build, this will define how established it is by the autumn. If you have already planted a lot of shrubs and bedding plants, then you will need to tend to them. Pruning is one of the most important tasks to carry out, as many plants depend on regular trimming for new growth. This is especially true of fruit trees, which rely on regular pruning for growth. There are two times of year for most plants to be cut back – spring and autumn – and how comprehensively you carry out this work in spring will decide how much you will have to do in the autumn.

One of the biggest jobs that you'll have to tackle is clearing up all the leaves that now litter your garden. Any deciduous tree, bush, shrub or hedge will drop its leaves when they finish their lifecycle and you can't always rely on a strong autumn wind to blow them all away. They will need raking up and disposing of. A leaf blower is a useful tool to acquire, if you're going to take on the garden yourself and these can be used to collect the leaves too. Clearing leaves from the ground will allow the air and nutrients to your lawn. Leaves can block water from getting to the ground and as we've already seen, can clog gutters, downspouts and gulleys, which will also need clearing out too.



Waste not, want not

Once you have gathered the leaves, they can be used for mulching. It's a good time of year for mulching, while there is still a bit of warmth in the soil and moisture too. Mulches are loose coverings or sheets of material placed on the surface of the soil. They can be homemade garden compost. Many people have a compost or mulch bin in their garden, where they can store the leaves and grass cuttings, which can decompose until they are needed. Once laid, mulches retain moisture, reduce weed growth and promote healthy soil. You can use many different forms of garden waste, such as chipped wood, grass cuttings and leaves. Anything that counts as dead organic plant material can provide nutrients to the soil as the waste decays. You can lay mulch around your trees, shrubs and perennials, as well as along borders.

As you rake your umpteenth pile of leaves, you realise there's a lot to be said for planting evergreens. This is why you see so many firs, pines and leylandii used in modern gardens. They don't drop leaves and provide a solid, hardy barrier all year around. Other plants, such as holly and ivy, can be used both as cover and ornamentally for effect. They'll need pruning too – holly is a good example of a plant that is easy to control, while ivy is one that will run amok if left unattended and can quickly take over if not pruned back. These creepers are well-named, as they seem to encroach unnoticed. It's wise to keep them away from your house and outbuildings, as some can be difficult to remove once they become established.

A natural home

There are many approaches to gardening in the autumn and winter months. Some people want an immaculate garden, with clean lines and little clutter, that they can leave well alone until the spring. Other people prefer a rewilding approach. Even in a pristine garden, you can create little habitats for wildlife, with twigs and debris, beneath hedges and trees. There are many ways to encourage wildlife to your garden, but be careful you don't attract the wrong kinds of visitors, such as vermin, which won't impress your neighbours. If you are rewilding, then you may leave areas of your garden to 'go wild'. The grass may grow a little longer, to allow cover for animal life.

The winter months can be hard for the natural inhabitants of your garden, and if they rely on you to put out food then make sure you continue to do it regularly. Winter isn't really a time of year for gardening, but there are still maintenance tasks, such as cleaning and tidying, that can be carried out. There are also chores such as maintenance to exteriors, like walls and fences, if the weather is fit for it. If you have an outdoor pond or swimming pool, that might need maintenance in the winter too, especially with regard to fallen leaves. If you have a greenhouse or shed, you may be able to work inside too, doing some potting or preparation for the spring, until the cycle begins once more.

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