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Winter Prep for Your Outdoor Living Space

Soon it will be time to leave outdoor living spaces and ride out winter's cold indoors. But before you batten down the barbecue and stow the patio cushions, don't forget to take care of wooden structures - like decks, pergolas and play sets - that must remain out in the elements.

Routine maintenance of these structures - often made from Western red cedar - can ensure they weather the winter well and are ready for you to enjoy come spring. Plus, beautiful, well-kept outdoor structures enhance curb appeal and your home's resale value.

"Western red cedar is a popular material for outdoor structures because of its natural durability and beauty," says Paul Mackie, or "Mr. Cedar" as he's known in the Western Red Cedar Lumber Association (WRCLA). "Preparing your outdoor living structure for winter is an important step to help maintain that beauty."

Mackie and the wood experts of the WRCLA offer the following tips for winterizing your wooden outdoor structures:

- * Clean leaves, dirt and pine needles from between the boards of your deck. This will increase airflow around the boards and reduce the opportunity for mold and mildew to grow. Even though Western red cedar contains natural chemicals that resist insects and decay, excessive dirt, debris and moisture can still harm the wood.
- * Remove planters and flower pots - even those that are just ornamental - from the deck. Moisture can collect under planters or pots and leave stains on your deck. If it's not possible to remove a planter from the deck, or you just have nowhere else to store flower pots, be sure to elevate them off the wood. Built-in planter boxes can be an attractive, permanent alternative than portable planters or pots.
- * Clean wooden structures with a broom, a garden sprayer, a little bleach and a water hose. Kill any existing mold or mildew with a solution of three parts water and one part oxygen bleach applied with your garden sprayer. While the bleach in the solution is very dilute, be sure to avoid excessive spraying of the solution and keep it away from children, animals and plants. Rinse the treated areas with clean water once the mold and mildew are gone.
- * Don't pressure wash Western red cedar. "You can make it look like your grandfather's corduroy pants," Mackie says. Pressure washing can also disrupt the wood's natural

moisture resistance by forcing water into the wood. If you absolutely must pressure wash, keep the washer set below 800 pounds per square inch.

* Water, pollen and mold tend to collect and sit on horizontal surfaces throughout the summer. Left over the winter, they become a harmful cocktail that can speed deterioration of otherwise healthy lumber.

Winterizing outdoor structures is simple and quick - and ensures your outdoor living space will be in great shape, and ready for you to enjoy, once warm weather returns.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Wewerka Construction Mgmt., Inc. at (703) 330 – 3400 or wewerka@wewerkalandscape.com