

## Snow and Ice Removal

Buried by a blizzard? Follow our tips for digging out

BY SAL VAGLICA, THIS OLD HOUSE MAGAZINE

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### Don't Get Snowed In

The cold, wet stuff has a way of arriving without regard for our busy schedules. It's not a problem if the only items on your to-do list are making snow angels and taking a nap, but if you need to clear the path to the car quickly—and drive off safely—it pays to prepare. Start with the right equipment and deicers, then stick to these time-tested removal methods. You'll be on your way—or back inside making cocoa—in no time.

1

## PROTECT PLANTS

Before the ground freezes...

...drive tall stakes around plant beds near paths and driveways so that you know where to stop shoveling.

**Pro Tip:** "If your shrubs get loaded down with snow, leave them alone—you'll do more damage trying to shake it off." —Rick Kier, president, Pro Scapes Landscape and Lawn Care, Jamesville, N.Y.

A liquid magnesium chloride blend...

...applied with a garden sprayer a few hours before a storm, can melt slow accumulations of less than 2 inches and keep ice from bonding to hard surfaces. Count on using 1 gallon for every 1,000 square feet.

**2**

## USE A MELTER BEFORE IT SNOWS

**3**

## BUY THE RIGHT SHOVEL (OR PUSHER)



Look for a shovel...

...with a lightweight plastic or aluminum blade coated with a nonstick finish to make loading and unloading a breeze. Avoid a blade so big you'll be tempted to overload it; an ergonomic, S-shaped shaft will save your back by requiring less bending. Avoid using metal blades on softer materials, such as wooden decking. A pusher—basically a shovel with a C-shaped blade—is handy for clearing lightweight, fluffy snow.

**4**

## DON'T STALL

Pros recommend...

...shoveling several times, even while it's still storming, so that snow doesn't get a chance to bond to surfaces. (It's also a lot easier to shovel 2 inches of snow than 5.) Get down to the pavement beneath so that sunlight can warm it up and prevent ice from forming.

5

## AVOID PILEUPS

Don't heap snow...

...on foundation walls, where melting water can refreeze and cause cracks to widen, or against anything made of wood, which is also susceptible to water damage.

6

## PICK THE RIGHT DEICER



Rock salt is cheap...

...and works at temperatures above 12 degrees F, but it's tough on shrubs and grass and can eat away at concrete. Two other salts, magnesium chloride and calcium chloride, cost more but are less harsh (though still not great for plants) and work at much lower temps than rock salt (from 20 to 25 degrees below zero F). Still pricier is a nonsalt option called urea. It's usually used as a fertilizer, and it can be a little tough to find. Wear gloves when spreading any deicer by hand. For large areas, use a handheld spreader or a push spreader, but not a grass spreader (the deicing granules will gunk up its gears). Store deicers off the floor or in a sealed bucket to keep them dry.

7

## WATCH YOUR STEP



Use sand or kitty litter...

...to add traction to slippery surfaces. Choose sandbox sand over mason's sand, which is too fine. Or try alfalfa meal, a slow-acting fertilizer that also helps melt snow—your yard will thank you.

8

# LET IT BLOW

A snowblower is quickest...

...to clear large flat areas. Use one when there's at least 1 1/2 inches of white stuff on the ground. Before each use, spray the exit chute with silicone to keep snow from sticking (furniture polish also works). When you're done, let the machine run for a few minutes to dry out, which will help prevent vital parts from being damaged by freezing. Then drive carefully—or stay home and build a snowman with the kids.



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