your HOME

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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers



Hosting tip: Don't worry about fitting everyone around one table. A mix of seating and standing areas can keep conversation flowing without squeezing guests into one corner.

How to Make a Small Space Work for Holiday Hosting

You don't need a large dining room to make holiday guests feel welcome. With a little rearranging, even a compact living area can become a comfortable place to gather.

First, clear the traffic lanes. Walk from the kitchen to the seating area as though you're carrying a full plate. Move any extra furniture that makes the route awkward, then bring in lightweight chairs or ottomans only where they're needed.

Give guests a few places to spread out. A cleared console can hold drinks and glasses, while a folding table dressed with a tablecloth becomes a temporary food station. Keep serving dishes on sturdy surfaces and leave room for people to pass comfortably.

If the kitchen feels cramped, serve food in courses instead of setting everything out at once and clear used dishes between rounds.

Finally, make the room feel warm rather than crowded. Use a couple of lamps instead of harsh overhead lighting, put coats in a designated spot and keep decorations simple. A welcoming atmosphere matters more than the square footage.

PROTECT HARDWOOD FLOORS FROM WINTER MUD, WATER AND SALT

Winter can be rough on hardwood floors. Wet boots track in water, mud and road salt, which can leave stains or tiny scratches in the finish. Meanwhile, indoor heating can dry the air and cause wood boards to shrink.

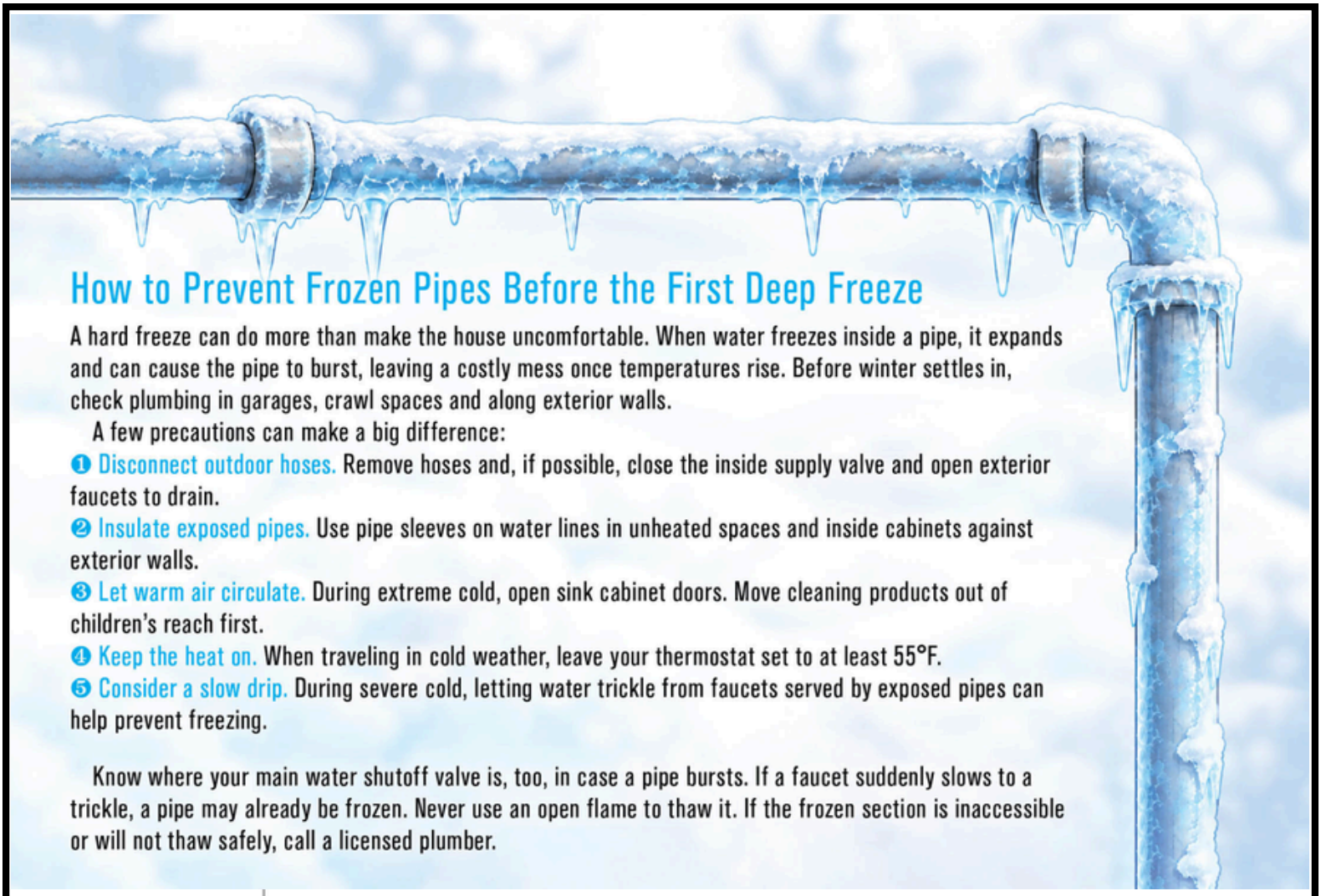
A few small habits can help your floors weather the season:

- **Set out two doormats.** Place one outside to catch grit and another inside to absorb moisture.
- **Make a shoe-drop zone.** A boot tray or bench keeps wet footwear off the hardwood.
- **Wipe up water quickly.** Don't let puddles sit where they can seep between boards.
- **Sweep regularly.** Loose dirt and salt crystals can scratch the surface when walked on.
- **Watch the humidity.** Many hardwood floors do well with indoor humidity around 30% to 50%.

When the weather is wet, check entry mats often so they don't become soggy themselves. Breathable rugs can also protect busy hallways, but avoid trapping moisture underneath them. When cleaning, use products recommended for your floor's finish rather than soaking the wood with a wet mop.

Small gaps between boards may appear in dry winter air and close again later. If gaps become large or remain after humidity returns, ask a flooring professional to take a look.

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How to Prevent Frozen Pipes Before the First Deep Freeze

A hard freeze can do more than make the house uncomfortable. When water freezes inside a pipe, it expands and can cause the pipe to burst, leaving a costly mess once temperatures rise. Before winter settles in, check plumbing in garages, crawl spaces and along exterior walls.

A few precautions can make a big difference:

❶ Disconnect outdoor hoses. Remove hoses and, if possible, close the inside supply valve and open exterior faucets to drain.

❷ Insulate exposed pipes. Use pipe sleeves on water lines in unheated spaces and inside cabinets against exterior walls.

❸ Let warm air circulate. During extreme cold, open sink cabinet doors. Move cleaning products out of children's reach first.

❹ Keep the heat on. When traveling in cold weather, leave your thermostat set to at least 55°F.

❺ Consider a slow drip. During severe cold, letting water trickle from faucets served by exposed pipes can help prevent freezing.

Know where your main water shutoff valve is, too, in case a pipe bursts. If a faucet suddenly slows to a trickle, a pipe may already be frozen. Never use an open flame to thaw it. If the frozen section is inaccessible or will not thaw safely, call a licensed plumber.

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