

811

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call to 811 makes it easy for your local one-call center to notify all appropriate utility companies of your intent to dig.

2. Call a few days prior to digging to ensure enough time for utility lines to be properly marked.

3. When you call 811, a

representative from your local one-call center will ask for the location and description of your digging project.

4. Your local one-call center will notify affected utility companies, who will then send a professional locator to the proposed dig site to mark the approximate location of your lines.

5. Once lines have been properly marked, roll up those sleeves and carefully dig around the marked areas.

There are nearly 20 mil-

lion miles of underground utility lines in the United States that your family depends on for everyday needs, including cable TV, high-speed Internet, landline telephone, electric, gas, water and sewer.

Unintentionally striking one of these lines can result in inconvenient outages for entire neighborhoods, harm to yourself or your neighbors, and repair costs. Digging damages an underground utility line once every three minutes nationwide, according to a recent CGA report, and one out of three incidents are caused because someone did not call 811.

Restore Your Property Once Winter Weather Is Gone

Restoring a yard after a long winter is a springtime rite of passage for many homeowners. Harsh winds and heavy snow can take their toll on even the most beautiful landscape.

Spring is a homeowner's first chance to survey the damage and begin restoring the yard to where it was before all those strong winds and snowstorms. To get started on your yard this spring, consider the following tips.

- Don't begin too early. The early bird might get the worm, but the early homeowner might get a damaged lawn. If temperatures for an upcoming free weekend are unseasonably warm, it's best to avoid doing spring yard cleanup until there have been several warm weekends to thaw the ground. Unless the ground has completely thawed, footsteps on the yard will damage the grass, compacting the soil and preventing the air and moisture that soil needs from doing its job and penetrating the soil. What's more, if the yard is raked before the ground has thawed, the rake might just be pulling the grass out by its roots.

- Survey the property. A close survey of the property will give homeowners an idea of just how big or small their restoration project will

be. A thorough survey will reveal any problem areas and may also reveal some unexpected guests. Rabbits and squirrels often nest in yards during the winter. Rabbits will nest in the ground, while squirrels typically build nests made of leaves in the trees. Unless it's entirely necessary, avoid removing any nests, and be sure to carefully inspect the yard before the season's first mow.

- Out with the old.

When the cleanup process is ready to begin, it's time to remove remnants from last season. This includes removing any dead plants as well as last year's mulch. If new mulch is simply thrown on top of old, plants could suffocate.

Dead leaves also tend to gather during the winter, often up against fences or a home's exterior walls. Rake up these dead leaves and add them to the season's compost.

- Get rid of thatch. Thatch can be soil's worst enemy, preventing its access to the sunlight, air and moisture it needs to make the lawn look beautiful and healthy. Thatch removal can be tiresome, but visit the local hardware store and pick up a dethatching rake to make the job a little easier. Thatch removal isn't always necessary every spring. Many homeowners have found removing thatch every other year is effective enough.

- Aerate the yard to revive the soil. Soil often becomes compacted as spring becomes summer and summer becomes fall. This is especially true of yards that are heavily used, be it by kids playing outdoors or families who love to host warm weather gatherings in the yard. Aerating in the spring removes plugs of sod from the soil, loosening it up and making it easier for air and water to reach the roots.

- Address those ugly bald spots. Bald spots in a yard can result from any number of things, be it a dog urinating in the yard or even disease. Early spring, when temperatures are a little cooler and promote grass growth, is a great time to address the yard's bald spots. Do so by clearing away the spots and sprinkling the freshly exposed soil with some grass seed. Then add some fertilizer and be sure the newly seeded areas get some water until the new, healthy grass begins to grow in.

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