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YOUR SECOND HOME

Care for the Pool Now

By AMY GUNDERSON

Each spring, Paul R. Racicot inevitably gets a frantic phone call from some homeowner who, after a long winter, has peeled back the swimming pool cover only to find a festering black lagoon where an inviting pool ought to be.

“Algae will have taken over, and the pool will be black,” said Mr. Racicot, vice president for operations at Lakeside Pools in North Smithfield, R.I., which counts second-home owners in nearby [Newport](#) and Narragansett among its pool-service clients.

The mess stems from not properly prepping the pool for winter. And to clean it means at least a week of multiple chemical treatments and, of course, the delightful task of vacuuming up algae.

As summer wanes, weekend afternoons spent lounging by the pool are numbered. But that hint of a chill in the air means that it’s time to give the pool serious attention. Winterizing a swimming pool is a job for any pool owner in cooler climates, but for second-home owners, who are away from their homes for months at a time, extra care should be taken.

“The spring is much easier if you do some extra work in the fall,” said Alan Sanderfoot, of [Madison](#), Wis., who has written several books on pool maintenance and design. “You can’t just throw a cover on it and forget about it until spring.”

First, clean the pool and adjust the chemicals so that the pH, which measures the water’s alkalinity, is balanced. Adding concentrated chlorine will help deter algae growth, while adding an algaecide can further fend off latent slime.

Timing is important, because warm weather can deplete those crucial pool chemicals faster than milder temperatures. “There is a danger in closing a pool too early,” said Terry Arko, a product specialist at the chemical maker SeaKlear in Bothell, Wash. “If possible, go by the water temperature, rather than the calendar, when deciding when to close a pool. As long as it is above 65 degrees, hold off.”

Owners in frigid climates will want not only to shut the pool pump and drain water from the filter, but also to bleed underground pipes and blow out the rest of the water with an air compressor to make sure that pipes don’t freeze and burst. Lower the water level in the pool by least six inches below the skimmer, allowing plenty of room for rain and melted snow to accumulate, but never fully drain a pool, because that could lead to damage of its liner.

Finally, the pool should be covered to keep out debris (and perhaps overcurious animals). A mesh safety cover allows water and dirt to seep through, and a solid cover keeps out everything, including water that

could build up on top of the cover and create a hazard if not regularly cleared. Like solid covers, mesh covers can be bulky, which probably makes bolting them to the deck a two-person job.

And safety covers are the more expensive option. “They run anywhere from \$800 to \$1,500 installed,” said Woody McDowell, who owns [Aquanet.net](#), a [Virginia Beach](#) online pool supply store. Traditional solid covers cost from \$50 to \$200.

As pools have become more elaborate — with waterfalls, fountains and attached [spas](#) — tucking them in for their long winter’s nap has become more complex. But even pool professionals acknowledge that the well-versed do-it-yourselfer can handle the job. For the first year or two, hire a professional, said Mr. McDowell, who owned a pool- service company for 28 years.

“Take notes, so you know what to do,” he said. “None of it is too difficult.”

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