

Home LAWN & GARDEN

GET A JUMP ON SPRING

Simple outdoor weekend projects help maintain a "healthy" home

(NC)—It's spring cleaning time again, and this means getting out more than just a broom, sponges and squeegee. You may have to tackle a few simple maintenance projects outdoors because winter's wrath can sometimes damage the exterior of your home.

Before surveying what needs to be done, take a trip to the garage and organize your tools. You're going to need them, so why not have them ready to go beforehand? Next, check the condition of your gutters, mailbox post, fences and shutters. If any of these are showing signs of decay, now is the best time to replace or repair them.

It's also a good time to restore a weathered deck to its original wood colour with a deck brightening solution, says Ray Bourque, an outdoor expert with The Home Depot Canada. Replace nails and smooth splintered boards before applying the preservative.

"Foot traffic and weathering can cause nails to pop up on a deck," Bourque explains. "If this is the case, replace them with corrosion-resistant deck screws and you won't have the same problem again."

Furniture that has been outdoors during the cold months may need a good cleaning. Plastic outdoor furniture probably will benefit from a good scrubbing using a solution of water and bleach, or even a dousing with the power washer.

Check around the sides and back of your home to see if your flowerbeds, shrubs and trees survived. Are they ready for the spring months ahead, or do they need some tender loving care?

"Many varieties of shrubs need to be trimmed back in the spring to stimulate growth," says Bourque. "Get rid of broken or dead branches and replace shrubs that didn't make it."

Finally, take a look at your grill and make sure the gas hose is in good condition. Tanks and hoses have a tendency to rust, crack and corrode over time, so replace them

when necessary. Also, check the burners when turning on your grill. A faulty or broken burner will drastically cut the grilling capacity.

Spring is a great time to tackle some of these simple outdoor projects and bring your house and yard back to its original glory.



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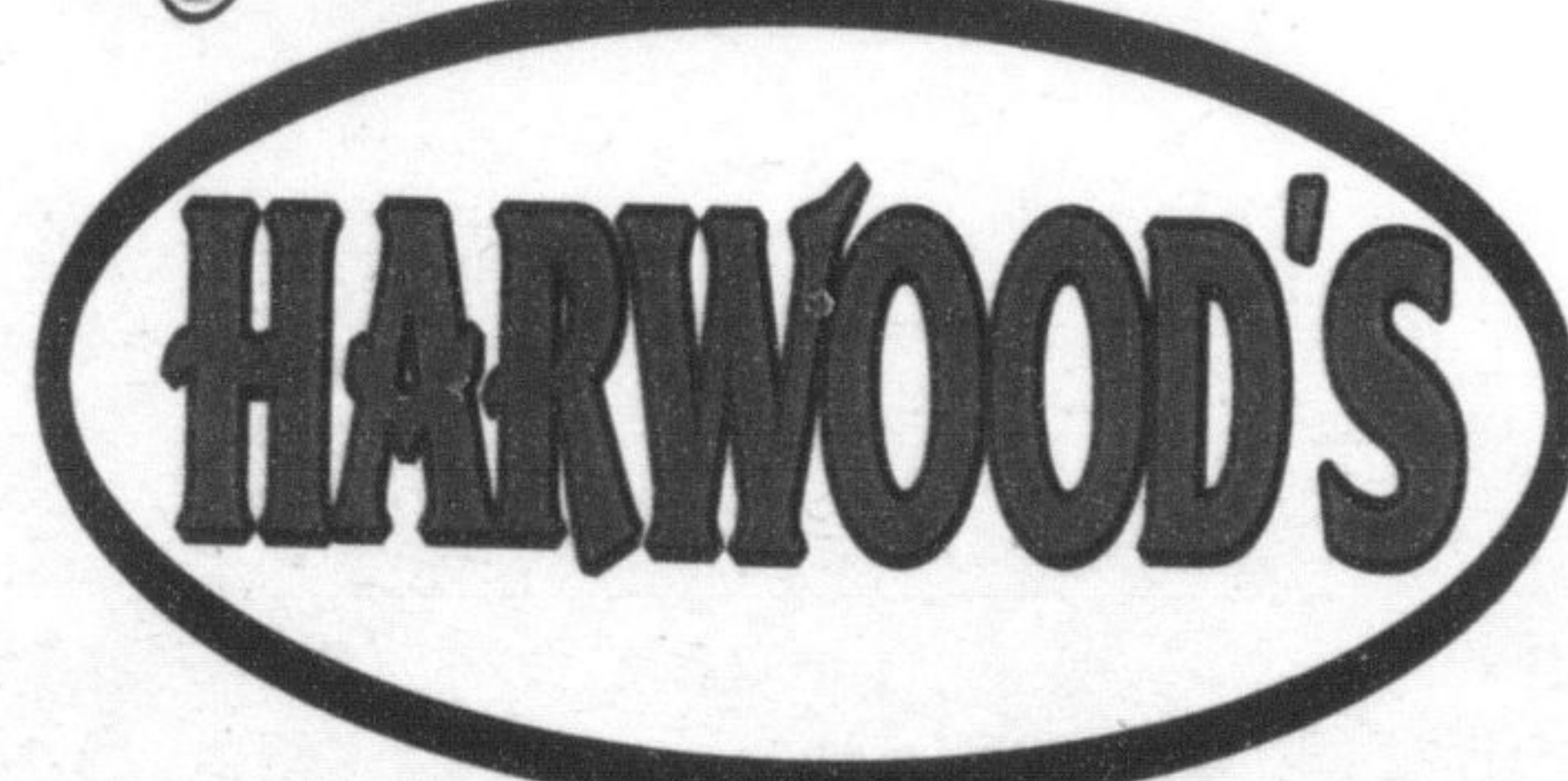
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