

In many parts of the country, snow shovels and ice scrapers are a wintertime mainstay. Although shoveling snow may sound easy enough, there's a lot that can go wrong if you don't take the proper precautions. In this article, we'll review some tips and tricks that'll help you get that white stuff off your driveway and walkways and get you back inside, where it's warm and toasty.

How to Shovel Snow

Removing snow from your property isn't everyone's favorite chore, but there are many things you can do to make it go smoothly. Let's look at some tips that'll help you shovel your snow more effectively.

Choose a Good Shovel

- Choose a shovel that matches your strength. A heavy steel shovel will work well in the hands of a stronger person. A smaller person might do better with a smaller, plastic shovel.
- Choose a shovel handle length that matches your height for better leverage. A tall person will want a taller handle, while a shorter person will want a shorter handle. Be sure to try cushioned grip handles for added comfort.
- Make sure the diameter of the shovel handle is comfortable to hold so you'll avoid blisters.
- Choose an appropriate shovel blade size. A large shovel blade will be heavier when filled. Aim for a size you can comfortably handle without straining when you pick it up.

Dress Appropriately

- Wear waterproof shoes with traction to keep you from slipping.
- Wear the right gloves. The best gloves for shoveling snow are designed to keep your hands warm and dry, with grippy palms and a non-bulky fit that make it easy to maneuver a snow shovel.
- Dress in layers while you're working outside in the cold. As you shovel, you'll become warm, and you can remove one or two layers to prevent overheating.

Take Breaks and Stay Hydrated

- Shoveling snow is an exercise. Be sure to stop working every 20 or 25 minutes to take a short break and get a drink of water. To help remind yourself of this important safety step, keep a water bottle in sight while you're working.
- Because it's cold outside and people are normally bundled up, it's easy to get sweaty and lose fluids. Begin your shoveling early and go out a few times rather than all at once. This strategy will naturally put breaks in your schedule.

Stretch

- Stretch your core with some torso rotations. Stand straight and slightly bend your knees. Rotate your upper body side to side. Keep the movement smooth and don't twist so far that it's uncomfortable. Do this 10 times on each side.
- Get the lower body loosened with some squats. Squats target the bigger muscle groups in your legs, which you'll be using during shoveling. Do two complete sets of 10 to 12 squats.
- Loosen the upper body. Make windmills — large circular movements you do with your arms — to wake up the shoulders and the back. Complete two sets of ten arm circles, going both forward and backward.
- These warm-ups shouldn't take you more than five minutes.

Know When to Shovel

- If the forecast calls for a heavy snowfall over a long period of time, don't wait until it's over to pick up a shovel. Plan to clear the snow at least once while it's still falling and then again after the storm is over. Shoveling snow more often may sound counterintuitive, but it actually makes the job faster and safer. Shoveling the snow after it's fallen will make your work harder and invite injury.

Use Salt

- Although rock salt can be manually spread using a shovel or scoop, a garden spreader is much easier to use. An added benefit is that a spreader gives you excellent control over the amount of salt being dispersed. More salt doesn't equal more melting.
- Only four pounds of salt is needed for every 1,000 square feet being treated. If salt crystals are visible after the surface has dried, you've used too much salt and can use less the next time.
- Sweep up any extra salt and store it in a marked storage bin in the garage for reuse during the next snow. Remember that after a snowstorm the salt doesn't just disappear. It can melt into nearby creeks, wetlands and lakes, and it doesn't take a lot of salt to cause problems for the environment.
- Use safety precautions when spreading salt. Wear safety gloves to protect your skin during application and be careful when navigating slippery areas. Ice that thaws during the day may refreeze at night, so regularly check surfaces that may need to be retreated.

Alternatives to Shoveling Snow

- If you have physical difficulty shoveling snow, it may be a good idea to consider a snow blower. The first decision you'll need to make is whether you want a gas snow blower or an electric snow blower.

- Each machine comes with its own pros and cons. Generally speaking, if you have a long driveway and you get a lot of snow in your area, you may need a gas-powered unit. For smaller spaces, electric snow blowers are ideal. You can buy corded electric snow blowers or cordless electric snow blowers.
- Electric snow blowers are easy to maneuver, easy to store and easy to maintain. For these reasons, they're a good choice for people who are trying to avoid physical strain.

With the right tools, preparations and safety considerations, shoveling snow can be an enjoyable task.