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## Prepping Your Hot Tub for Fall Fun

SEPTEMBER 2011

by Matt Alderton

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Although [hot tubs](#) are designed for year-round use, they're most popular when it's cool outside. Thanks to record temperatures across the United States this summer, spas from Los Angeles to New York have sat empty and unused since June. But now that the weather is finally cooling down, the spa season is heating up.

If you haven't used your spa in months, now is the time to lift the lid and flip the switch. Just follow these steps, and you'll be ready in no time for an entire season's worth of soothing heat, jets and bubbles.

### 1. Fill it up

If you have been using your hot tub all summer, it should be ready to roll come autumn. But if your spa has sat unused and off, you have some work to do.

"If you don't maintain your spa or forget to set it in economy mode when it's not in use, your spa will begin to collect bacteria in the water, the jets, the plumbing—everything," says Shiva Noble, executive vice president of Cal Spas, a Pomona, Calif.-based hot tub manufacturer. "If your spa has been sitting all summer without use or maintenance, you need to drain it, add the proper sanitizing compounds and let the spa water run through the jets for 24 hours prior to use."

John Hasselbach, owner of All Seasons Pools, Spas and Billiards in Lumberton, Texas, agrees: "You don't want to get in the spa after several months, turn it on and have untreated water discharge into the system."

### 2. Clean it out

Once you've drained your water and the spa is empty, it's the perfect time to scrub everything clean. Use a non-abrasive surface cleaner made specifically for spas because household cleaners can scratch the surface, contribute to foam and cloud the water. And while you're in a cleaning mood, don't forget to scrub the cover—top and bottom.

"A lot of times, people tell me they have an odor in their spa, and it's actually the cover," Hasselbach says. "After sitting all summer in the heat, it's a good idea to clean the cover so you don't get that smell."

You should also change your filter every six months. "If you don't change it, you should chemically clean the filters once a month to remove the grease and oils, which reduce circulation and supply nutrients for harmful bacteria," Noble says.

### 3. Balance the water

After you've emptied, cleaned and refilled your spa, you need to treat and balance the water. Hasselbach suggests taking a water sample to your local Arch ClearCare™ Dealer at the start of the season to have it professionally balanced to prevent scale and corrosion.

After that, balancing your spa water at home is a numbers game. If you're the sole user, you should only need to balance your water about once a week. "But if people are using the spa more often or more people are using it, you should check the water literally every time out," Noble says.

The same products you use all year—i.e., chlorine and bromine—are also necessary at the start of the fall spa season. The key is using them correctly.

"Adding additional product to your spa doesn't mean it will be cleaner," Noble says. "If the instructions say one tablet, one teaspoon or one cup, it means one. Consumers often think that more is better when it comes to cleaning their spa, but adding excess product can damage the plumbing and irritate your skin."

### 4. Check for problems

If your hot tub has taken the summer off, it might need a mechanical check-up. Noble recommends calling a professional once a year to look at your pump, heater and other mechanical parts. She says the biggest signs of trouble are noisy pumps, which indicate a worn seal; plugged jets or filters; cold water, which suggests a damaged heater; and weak jets, which indicate a problem with pressure.

Also, watch for water in places that shouldn't be wet. This could mean a leaking pump seal or gasket. Check between the motor and the wet end of the pump to make sure you don't have any pools of water.

"That's probably the biggest thing that goes wrong in spas: seals going bad in the motor and the pump, and water getting into the motor and corroding it," Hasselbach says. "If water is coming out of the bottom, you definitely have a problem."

### 5. Wait—and enjoy!

Once your spa is filled and functional, wait at least 24 hours before using it so the water is heated and fully sanitized. Noble says one way spa owners can eliminate problems at the start of the season is by using their hot tub year-round—not just in the cool autumn months.

"It doesn't matter if it's hot or cold outside; you can use your hot tub," she says. "The whole purpose of buying a hot tub is for the hydrotherapy, physical rehabilitation and relaxation benefits. You should be enjoying those benefits year-round."

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