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Landscaping New Home Construction

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New Home Landscaping

By: Patrick Breen

Let's hope that the economic indicators are correct and the new home construction trend continues to rise. If you are thinking about a new purchase the times couldn't be better. It's hard to imagine interest rates being this low again. But, just because you are in a new house doesn't mean your home maintenance routine can be forgotten. As a home inspector, and past contractor, I know the challenges of a new building site and have seen the results of believing a new home is maintenance free.

One of the biggest factors in caring for a home is the landscaping. Depending on the type of soil and the precautions taken in backfilling around the foundation most new homes will undergo some degree of settling surrounding the structure. The full compaction can sometimes take a couple years or more, so either compensate by raising the level of dirt within the first couple feet or periodically evaluate for developing low areas. A good rule of thumb is to try and always have one inch of slope per foot away from the foundation extending out at least six to ten feet.

Down spout extensions are meant to be down and directed away from the structure. Those handy straps or Velcro tabs for keeping the extensions in the upright position are for lawn care purposes only. When you're not mowing the lawn keep them down. Nothing saddens me more than inspecting a fairly new home and finding stress cracks in the foundation because the backfill has settled, down spout extensions are up so the children don't crush them, and moisture from the roof is draining down next to the foundation.

Stress cracks in driveways and walkways can also be avoided by channeling moisture away from concrete or at least over the surface. The number one cause for cracking concrete is from moisture getting underneath and heaving the soil. To help mitigate this from happening seal the crack between the driveway and garage slab, and the cracks between walkways and the foundation. Even if the walkways have neutral or a slightly positive slope, moisture can get into cracks and expand the underlying soil.

To help save on costs many new homeowners will do the finished landscaping themselves. Lawn edging is very popular but many installations don't accommodate for weep holes that will migrate water out into the lawn and away from the foundation. Always keep a positive slope away from the foundation, even inside your hedge and flower gardens, and give any trapped moisture an exit path out and away.

Leave small gaps strategically spaced in concrete and brick, or drill holes through wood or plastic edging. In this zone it is not necessarily rain that might cause foundation and basement water problems, but snow drifts that slowly melt and have no place for the water to go but down to the foundation. So, pay special attention to where blowing snow is likely to drift.