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As the Leaves Turn: Autumnal Home Rituals from Around the World

Across cultures, the arrival of fall invites quiet shifts within the home – layers reappear, candles are lit and time-honored rituals bring warmth to the colder months ahead.

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As the air crisps and daylight wanes, homes around the world begin to reflect the deepening rhythms of fall. Whether it's swapping light linens for wool, gathering natural elements from the forest or preparing ceremonial spaces for remembrance, many cultures turn inward at this time of year to welcome the season consciously.

These quiet, meaningful gestures tether us to tradition and place, transforming the home into a canvas for seasonal transition. Here, we explore how households around the world honor fall not with grand gestures, but with tactile, thoughtful rituals that help ground us through change.



Photo courtesy of Mona T/Unsplash

Germany: Welcoming the Candle Season

As the winter months draw near, German homes begin to glow from within. [Candles](#) are lit in windows, lanterns are hung and wax tapers take pride of place on dinner tables. The tradition, often associated with the broader cultural concept of *Gemütlichkeit*, speaks to a desire for intimacy and comfort – a soft resistance to the darkness creeping in from outside.

This simple act of lighting a candle transforms the home's atmosphere. It's tactile, fragrant and deeply symbolic: a ritual of turning toward warmth, of creating light as days grow shorter. For many, the first evening lit entirely by candlelight marks the unofficial arrival of fall.

Japan: A Seasonal Change of Textiles

In Japan, the centuries-old ritual of koromogae, meaning 'changing of clothes', extends well beyond the wardrobe. Around early October, families replace summer bedding, mats and fabrics with warmer alternatives. Tatami mats may be covered, gauzy curtains swapped for heavier drapes and futons thickened with extra padding. Even decorative scrolls and flower arrangements are updated to reflect the hues of fall; think golden leaves, chrysanthemums and harvest motifs.

This quiet domestic choreography is about more than comfort. Rooted in a cultural philosophy of *kisetsu o tanoshimu*, or 'enjoying the seasons', it's a way of aligning the internal world of the home with the external rhythms of nature. Change is embraced, not resisted.



Photo courtesy of Denis Oliveira/Unsplash

Mexico: Preparation for Día de los Muertos

Though Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is often associated with vibrant public parades, its heart lies in the home – specifically, in the preparation of the ofrenda or altar. In the weeks leading up to November 1st and 2nd, Mexican households carefully construct multi-level shrines that pay homage to deceased loved ones. Photographs, marigolds, sugar skulls, incense and favorite foods are arranged with reverence.

This ritual transforms domestic space into a site of memory, connection and love. The home is cleaned thoroughly, scents of copal and cinnamon linger in the air and candles are kept burning to guide ancestral spirits. It is both a spiritual and seasonal act, welcoming the dead as the living prepare for winter's quiet.

Morocco: Returning to Texture and Warmth

In Morocco, fall marks a subtle but tactile transition inside the home. The lightweight cottons and bare floors of summer give way to plush rugs, layered blankets and heavy drapery. Homes that once encouraged airflow now invite enclosure and softness. Rich, earthy colors – saffron, rust, ochre – begin to dominate interior palettes.

This change is as much practical as it is aesthetic. In regions where evenings grow suddenly cold, the return of texture and weight is essential for warmth. But there is a deeper current, too: a desire to cocoon, to insulate the body and spirit as the outside world slows.



November blooms by Colin King. Photo courtesy of Colin King



Photo courtesy of Katya Azimova/Unsplash

France: A Shift in Scent and Atmosphere

While the French *rentrée* (return) typically refers to the resumption of work and school, it also signals subtle changes in the home. Summer's breezy citrus scents are replaced by richer aromas such as fig, cedarwood and amber. Linen sprays, candles and soaps are carefully selected to match the mood of the season.

Fragrance is treated not as afterthought, but as atmosphere. Alongside scent, French homes often undergo a quiet refresh, replacing lightweight throws with woollen ones, rearranging vases with dried hydrangea or pampas grass and embracing muted lighting. It's an earthy approach to fall, rooted in care and deliberate pacing.

Scandinavia: Bringing the Outdoors In

Throughout Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the return of fall encourages a deepening connection between the indoors and the natural world. This is not done through grand gestures but small, grounded rituals. Twigs, moss, pinecones and fallen leaves are gathered during weekend walks and brought home. These elements are not necessarily arranged as formal displays; they're lived with, celebrated in bowls, jars or baskets that blur the boundary between house and forest.

It's a manifestation of *friluftsliv*, the Nordic ethos of outdoor living, but turned inward. Even as the weather discourages open windows and long strolls, nature is kept close, a tactile reminder of cycles and continuity.



Chestnut branches styled by Colin King. Photo courtesy of Colin King

China: Mid-fall Festival and the Ritual of Tea

While mooncakes are the most recognizable feature of China's Mid-fall Festival, the real ritual often unfolds quietly at home. Families gather to sip tea, light incense and admire the full moon from their courtyards or balconies. Homes are tidied in advance, lanterns are hung and the act of pausing to observe the moon becomes a collective moment of reflection and reunion.

The teas brewed during this time, such as osmanthus, pu'erh and oolong, are chosen for their seasonal qualities, offering warmth, comfort and digestion as the body adapts to cooler nights. It's a time of respecting not only the celestial but the domestic, through ritualized rest and reconnection.



Chinese tea. Photo courtesy of Sergey N/Unsplash

Across cultures, these moments invite us to slow down, look inward and realign our spaces with the season's pace. They remind us that the home is not simply shelter, it is a living, breathing reflection of time, memory and transition. As the world darkens and cools, these small gestures become acts of care for ourselves, for others and for the changing world we live in.

Feature Image: Ling Strella/Dupe

Photography: Mona T/Unsplash, Denis Oliveira/Unsplash, Colin King, Katya Azimova/Unsplash, Sergey N/Unsplash

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