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Kitchen cabinets: reface or replace?

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spent on major kitchen remodels grew by 14 percent from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25 percent. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94 percent of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered.

Homeowners have different options when it comes to cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to replace or reface their cabinets.



Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource, The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor-grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

Did you know fall is not a time to rest

Gardening enthusiasts recognize that fall is not a time to rest on their laurels. In fact, fall is a great season to spend time in the yard. The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst indicates fall is the ideal time to improve the soil for next season. Amending the soil in the fall allows it to react accordingly over time and reap the benefits in spring. UMass suggests getting an accurate soil test to see what is needed in the garden. Samples should be taken from various areas. Avoid doing so when the soil is very wet. At-home kits can test for nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous and determine the soil's pH.



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Replacement: Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor-grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

Refacing: Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same. The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30- to 50-percent cheaper than a replacement.

Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately. Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.

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How to prepare a fireplace for the winter

As hours of daylight shorten and fall gives way to winter, thoughts shift from fall foliage to spending time cuddling under warm blankets and being cozy indoors. A fireplace can improve the ambiance of any room and help to create a warm and welcoming gathering spot. Home fireplaces typically are wood-burning or gas. Though maintenance for these fireplaces differs, certain preparatory steps must be taken to prepare a fireplace for winter. Clear the clutter. Items can accumulate in areas that are not in use, and a fireplace is no exception. Take a few hours to remove any belongings from in front of the fireplace and clean the mantle thoroughly. Have the chimney cleaned. Hire a professional chimney cleaning company to inspect the chimney and clean it thoroughly before winter. According to Bob-Vila.com, a chimney should be cleaned once a year, or after about every 80 fires. The National Fire Protection Association says failure to properly clean chimneys is one of the leading contributors to home fires. That's due to creosote, a highly flammable residue that builds up in the flue that lines the chimney. Inspect the interior. The interior of a wood-burning fireplace is likely lined with fire bricks. Check for cracks and loose joints. Hire a professional mason to make any repairs, as special materials are needed to withstand the heat of fires. Install a chimney cap and screen. According to Family Handyman, a chimney cap is a protective covering that goes over the top of the chimney. It is made of steel or copper mesh with a cap on top. This protects the chimney from rain and downdrafts and keeps animals and debris from getting into the chimney. Prune overhanging branches. If there are trees close to the home and the chimney, cut them back, as they can be a fire hazard. Branches and leaves also can restrict the proper draft of the chimney. Assess the outdoor vent. Gas fireplaces typically emit exhaust through a vent in the home. Remove any blockages from the vent, including leaves, cobwebs and debris. Check glass or other coverings. The glass or face of the fireplace helps regulate carbon monoxide exposure and protects people from the flames. Be sure the glass covering is intact. Clean ceramic logs. Gas fireplaces use ceramic logs, rocks or beads that can become dusty. Clean them prior to use. Dirty ceramic logs can be a fire hazard and produce an unpleasant burning smell. Check the blower and pilot. If the fireplace has an electric blower, clean and dust it so it doesn't become clogged. Inspect the pilot light for any wear and tear that includes wiring or structural issues. It takes several steps to prepare fireplaces for cold weather seasons when they're most likely to be used with frequency.

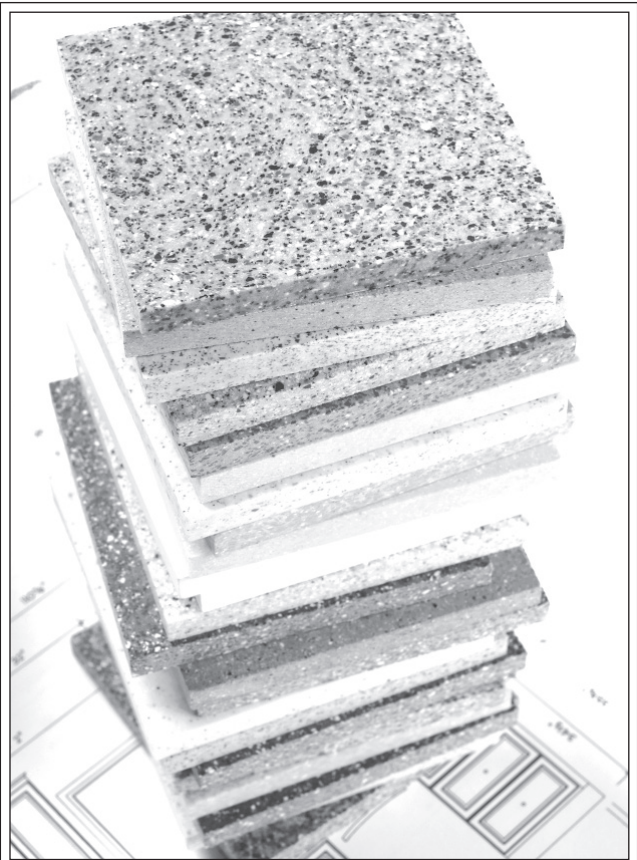


Contributed photo
There are several steps that need to be taken to prepare your home's fireplace for the cooler weather, especially those fireplaces that are used frequently.

What to know about kitchen countertop materials

Kitchens are the busiest rooms in most homes. Kitchens have become more than just places to prepare meals, with many functioning as gathering spaces and even go-to dining spots in homes that do not feature formal dining rooms.

So much time spent in the kitchen makes it worthwhile to invest in these popular spaces. Kitchen renovations are high on many homeowners' to-do lists, and there's many decisions to make once they commit to redoing the room. When renovating a kitchen, homeowners will have to choose which countertop material they want to install, and the following rundown of popular options can help simplify that decision.



Kitchen countertops can define how the room looks, and today's homeowners have many options to choose from when designing a new kitchen.

Quartz

Quartz is considered a low-maintenance and durable countertop material. The home improvement experts at This Old House note that quartz countertops are typically 94 percent ground quartz and now come with a honed, sandblasted or embossed treatment, which makes them appealing to homeowners with varying ideas on the ideal look of a kitchen countertop. Quartz can crack if it's not handled properly, and edges and corners can chip over time. Rounded edges can minimize the risk of chipping. Costs vary by location and product availability, but quartz typically costs about the same as natural stone.

Granite

Consumer Reports notes that no two slabs of granite are the same, and that uniqueness has long appealed to homeowners. Tests run by Consumer Reports found that heat, cuts and scratches did not harm granite, though this material, like quartz, can crack around edges and corners. Granite is a durable material that, if properly maintained, can last several decades. Granite also is nonporous, which makes it resistant to bacteria.

Laminate

Laminate countertops appeal to budget-friendly homeowners and Consumer Reports notes that they're easy to install. Home Depot also notes that laminate

countertops come in a wide range of colors, textures and designs. Laminate countertops also are durable, which helps budget-conscious homeowners stretch their dollars even further. Laminate countertops are easily maintained, though it's also easy to permanently damage them with knives, so Consumer Reports recommends always using a cutting board when preparing meals on laminate.

Butcher Block

Butcher block countertops are among the more unique options homeowners may consider. Sometimes referred to as "wood countertops," butcher block countertops are made from wooden strips that are fused together. The home im-

provement experts at BobVila.com note that butcher block is among the more affordable materials, but the final cost will be dictated by location and availability. BobVila.com notes that butcher block countertops are highly sensitive to liquid, so exposure to moisture should be limited. Sealing butcher block countertops immediately after installation can help protect against bacteria and warping. Though butcher blocks can be high-maintenance, many homeowners find the unique look is well worth the extra elbow grease.

Kitchen countertops can define how the room looks, and homeowners have many options to choose from when designing a new kitchen.

Top tips for a more organized kitchen

(StatePoint) Better organization in the kitchen means spending less time searching for the right ingredient or tool so you can have more time for savoring meals with family and friends and more time for personal pursuits.

Whether you're throwing together weekday lunches for the kids or hosting an elegant dinner party, here are some tips to keep your kitchen - and meal prep - organized.

Declutter

Not only can clutter make you feel less comfortable, it can impact your efficiency. Take some time to sort through those areas of your kitchen that tend to

collect unused food products, such as the pantry, the refrigerator door and the back of the fridge. You'll be surprised how long certain items have been sitting there. Toss anything that has expired, and donate anything unopened and in good condition that you can't or won't use to a food pantry. Transferring items, such as grains, sugar and flour, to labeled containers of the same size makes for more uniform storage that can help you maximize shelving. You might also consider alphabetizing spices so they are easier to find and grab when you need them.

Upgrade your fridge

Trading in your refrigerator for a newer model can be a game changer, and not just because modern appliances tend to be more energy efficient. Today's refrigerators can also be a world apart in functionality and organization, offering you more storage space, greater control and even the ability to multitask.

Improve go-to tools

Coordinated, efficient meal prep relies on your go-to tools being in good working order. To that end, a knife sharpener can make a useful addition to your kitchen, whether you opt for a simple sharpening stone or an electric model with dif-

ferent settings. If you're low on counter space or would prefer having this task handled professionally, check your local hardware store. Many provide this service at an affordable cost. Other small items, such as can openers, zesters and peelers, are all prone to rust, which can make them difficult to wield over time. Likewise, plastic spatulas can become cracked and damaged with use, and wooden spoons can become splintered.

With a few small tweaks and updates, your kitchen and all the items within it big and small can make your life easier, more organized and more convenient.

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Don't get shocked by home electric safety issues

Electricity helps run the world, including our homes and businesses. Without electricity, we'd have no access to lighting, our interior spaces may not be heated or cooled effectively, and the computers and other devices we rely on so heavily would not run.

Even though electricity is designed to make people's lives more convenient, it's easy to take it for granted and become complacent about the safety needed to use it effectively. The Electrical Safety Foundation International says each year electrical malfunctions account for 35,000 home fires, causing more than 1,130 in-

juries, 500 deaths and \$1.4 billion in property damage. Since the average American home was built in 1977, many existing homes of this age and older simply cannot handle modern demand for electricity without modification.

The following are some warning signs that electrical issues could lead to bigger problems:

- Tripping of circuit breakers or blowing of fuses regularly
- Dimming of lights when other devices are in use
- Buzzing sounds from outlets or switches
- Discolored outlets
- Seemingly underpow-

ered appliances. Additional warning signs can include a tingling feeling when an electrical appliance is touched, rubbery smells or an aroma of burning.

Individuals can take certain precautions to ensure electrical safety at home and at work. Here are nine guidelines to follow, courtesy of the National Fire Protect.

1. Have any home you are buying or renting inspected by a qualified private inspector in accordance with local requirements.
2. When electrical work is needed, hire a qualified, licensed electrician.

3. Use only one heat-producing appliance plugged into a receptacle outlet at a time.

4. Do not use extension cords for major appliances like ovens, washers, stoves or microwaves. They should be plugged directly into a wall receptacle outlet.

5. Ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) should be installed in kitchens,

bathrooms, garages and basements to shut off an electrical circuit when it becomes a shock hazard.

6. Extension cords should only be used temporarily. Have an electrician install more outlets if they are needed.

7. Keep the area around the electric meter clear.

8. Make sure outdoor lights and other fixtures are

rated for outdoor use.

9. Label the circuit breakers to understand the different circuits in the home and know which to turn off when electrical work is being conducted.

It doesn't take much for an electrical issue to become serious and start a fire or cause shocking. Treat all electricity use in a home or business seriously.

How to decide if a home remodel makes financial sense for you

(BPT) - There comes a time when every homeowner looks around at their house and ponders a few upgrades. Sometimes, those ideas turn into full-on renovations as you reimagine your space to better meet your lifestyle. But before you start calling contractors, ask yourself: Does remodeling make financial sense?

Here are three tips to help you decide if a home renovation benefits your home and your finances.

Identify your wants vs. needs

How necessary are the improvements you want? Some home projects may end up costing you more than the value they provide. That doesn't mean certain projects aren't worthwhile. "Home renovations

come in all shapes and sizes. For some, it may be about the investment and increasing the home value; for a good few it might be about what looks the best, while others might not have a choice," said Adam Fingerman, assistant vice president of equity lending at Navy Federal Credit Union. "Whatever the reason, it's always a good idea to understand how a large renovation might impact your finances and the overall value of your home."

Know your budget

Consider creating a chart with all of your cost estimates and include columns for high-, medium- and low-cost options. Don't forget supplies for do-it-yourself projects and always allocate a certain percentage for un-

expected expenses.

Also be sure to get estimates from different contractors and compare them. Carefully check references and business licenses.

Explore financing options

Ideally, you've already established a home improvement savings plan. But if you're planning to borrow, explore your financing options through your trusted bank or credit union.

"Think about the size of your project, whether or not you'll have ongoing expenses and your current finances," said Fingerman.

Home renovations of any size - large or small - can be overwhelming. Consider these tips to help make it easier and more affordable in the long run.

Homeowners who decide to renovate one or more rooms in their homes may be excited about the changes that are in store. Even simple modifications to paint color or accessories can change the look of a space. Larger renovations can produce even more dramatic effects.

When contractors provide cost estimates, they may predict how long they expect the job to take from start to finish. It is impossible to plan for every scenario, however. Jobs may be delayed for various reasons, and it's rarely the fault of the contractor. Here are some reasons a renovation could experience snags along the way.

Pre-existing conditions: Opening up walls or removing flooring could reveal hidden problems. These include prior insect damage, leaks and water issues, asbestos, mold or even pests. The presence of unforeseen issues will require remediation that can extend the project timeline.

Schedule backup: Contractors often have busy schedules. When one job experiences delays, that causes a domino effect on others on the calendar. Homeowners should realize that the estimated start date of their own project is just an estimate and not necessarily set in stone.

Lack of materials: Builders sometimes have difficulty procuring materials from vendors. Whether it's concrete or a special-order appliance, the contractor is at the mercy of the vendor. If there are shipping delays or other issues, the job will have to be pushed back. Many steps to a project hinge on the one before. For example, walls cannot be put up until electrical work and plumbing has been completed.

Prior errors: Corrections may need to be made to what a previous contractor or even the homeowner did. Problems need to be fixed or they may compromise the look and safety of the project. Issues may arise if prior renovations were not done to code.

Obtaining permits: The application process for obtaining permits can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, depending on the municipality and the scale of the project. Long permit lead times can delay the start of the job.

Weather: Mother Nature can affect everything from the availability of materials to the job itself, particularly if work is being done outdoors.

Finances: The overall cost of the job may change, especially if issues arise during the work. If funds dry up, the project may stall.

Certain factors can affect how long a renovation project will take. Homeowners should know that timelines are estimates and not set in stone.

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Ask an expert: seven most common questions about automatic home generators

(BPT) - Do you know how much a power outage costs? When the power goes out, it affects more than just your ability to watch TV or read with the lights on. Food and medicine in your refrigerator and freezer can go bad. Your basement may flood if the sump pump goes out, and you may need to relocate to a hotel for your family's safety and comfort. If any home systems fail, you may be looking at costly repairs.

An easy way to protect your home and avoid power outage-related costs is to invest in an automatic home generator. To help you understand the benefits of owning your own automatic home generator, Kohler expert Melanie Tydrich offers the following seven most commonly asked questions.

What is an automatic home generator? How is it different from a portable generator?

An automatic home generator provides backup power when you need it and stands by when you don't. Like an air conditioning unit, the generator is permanently installed outside your house. When the power goes out, it turns on. The unit shuts off when the main utility power is restored.

Portable generators are useful when you don't have utility power available, like camping, tailgating or at a work site. However, you'll need to refuel them regularly, so you'll have to remember to safely store fresh fuel in your home. Also, you'll

have to operate them outside, which means running outdoor-rated extension cords.

How does an automatic home generator work?

Your generator runs on your home's existing natural gas or liquid propane system, which makes it incredibly convenient. When the power goes out or drops below an acceptable level (brownout), your automatic transfer switch (ATS) signals the generator to start. In just 10 seconds, the ATS transfers your power from the utility grid to the generator. It powers your home until utility power is restored, then transfers power back to the grid.

What can it power?

A home standby generator can power corded items like electronics, cell phones, refrigerators and freezers. More importantly, it can power products hardwired to your home, such as central air and heating systems, sump pumps and lights. Security systems and even garage doors are sometimes difficult to operate when you don't have power.

Do you need to be home to operate the generator?

You don't need to be home to operate the generator. An automatic home generator is just that, automatic. This completely hands-off unit turns on during a power outage and turns off automatically.

What features should a quality home generator have?

Because your automatic

generator will power your home during a power outage, you'll want a durable and reliable engine. Generators are equipped with heavy-duty, commercial-grade engines that fire up quickly and can handle heavy electrical loads.

Even though generators are working hard to supply power to your home and appliances, you don't have to settle for a noisy model. Look for a generator that has been designed and built to operate with minimal noise. Remote monitoring via an app is also a helpful feature to have because you can see the status of your generator when you aren't home and a power outage hits.

What size generator do I need?

The right size generator for your home depends on your power needs. Kohler has a handy Generator Selector tool to get a ballpark cost. However, if you're serious about buying one, you'll want to receive a detailed estimate from your

local Kohler Generators dealer. These professionals will analyze your home's electrical load and specify and install your generator system.

Is installing an automatic home generator a DIY project?

Installing an automatic home generator isn't a project you'll want to do yourself. Because it requires working with gas and electrical connections, you'll want to hire a qualified professional who can make sure it's installed properly.

Automatic home generators aren't a luxury. They are an investment in keeping your family safe and secure during a power outage. They give you the ability to live life uninterrupted because they can power anything in a home, from lights and HVAC to appliances and tech. These generators provide peace of mind - and more importantly - they provide resilience for you, your family and your community.

Use baking soda to deodorize carpet and more

Baking soda is one of the most versatile natural cleaning ingredients. Known for its ability to absorb scents and deodorize, it's great for cleaning tough spots around your home. Have a carpet that could use a refresh?

Sprinkle baking soda on the carpet, let it sit for half an hour and then vacuum. You can also do this for other soft-surface areas of the home that are hard to deodorize, such as couches, chairs and mattresses.

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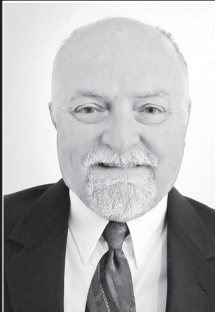
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What to know about floor-to-ceiling windows

Modern homes showcase many dazzling features, but perhaps none draw as much as instant attention as floor-to-ceiling windows. Often seen in high-rise apartments that boast panoramic city views, floor-to-ceiling windows also are right at home in single-family dwellings.

Homeowners considering floor-to-ceiling windows may have lots of questions. The following rundown can provide some basic information that can help homeowners decide if floor-to-ceiling windows are right for their homes.

Cost

Cost is often the primary consideration when mulling a home renovation, and that's even more significant as the world confronts the rising costs associated with inflation. The cost of installing floor-to-ceiling windows depends on a host of variables, including how many windows will be needed and where homeowners live. According to Modernize®, a service that facilitates connections between renovation-minded homeowners and local contractors, a floor-to-ceiling window wall costs somewhere between \$700 to \$1,600 per linear foot. Framing and glazing will add to those costs. Homeowners considering floor-to-ceiling windows are urged to receive several estimates for the project prior to choosing a contractor.

Lighting and energy efficiency

One of the more appealing aspects of floor-to-

ceiling windows is all the natural light they allow in. Of course, all that light also can drive up energy costs on sunny summer days. One way around that is to install energy efficient windows. Such windows include extra insulation to prevent cool air from escaping the home on summer days, which can reduce the need to lower the thermostat on your air conditioning. A wall of glass also can provide less insulation against the cold. The extra insulation in energy efficient windows also helps keep warm air from escaping a home in the winter. Energy efficient windows may cost more than less efficient alternatives. However, over the long haul, a wall of less efficient floor-to-ceiling windows will likely cost more due to excess energy consumption.

Privacy and fading

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the view floor-to-ceiling windows provide, especially in homes surrounded by serene natural settings like woods or properties that abut waterways. But that view outward also provides a view in, potentially compromising privacy. All that extra exposure to sunlight also can cause fabrics to fade over time. Floor-to-ceiling blinds and shades can protect homeowners' privacy and reduce fading on furniture, but this extra feature will add to the final cost of the project. Smart window tinting is another way to improve privacy and reduce fading, but this fea-

Contributed photo
It's easy to be overwhelmed by the view floor-to-ceiling windows provide, especially in homes surrounded by serene natural settings like woods or properties that abut waterways.

ture also will drive up the cost. Floor-to-ceiling windows can be awe-inspiring. Those homeowners consider-

ing such windows for their homes are urged to do their homework to ensure their homes are well-suited to this unique feature.

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Buying without a home inspection can be a mistake

(BPT) - When many buyers purchased homes during the height of the pandemic homebuying frenzy, they may have skipped adding a home inspection in an effort to win bidding wars. While this may have worked out for some, others were hit with hidden problems and expenses that would have been discovered through a proper home inspection. A thorough inspection can reveal hidden issues with a property, allowing you to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with the purchase or negotiate repairs.

“A home inspection is one of the most important steps in the home buying process,” said Adam Bakonis, Mercury Insurance product manager for homeowners. “It helps protect the buyer from purchasing a home with undisclosed problems and then being saddled with costly repairs.”

Licensed home inspectors can help identify potential problems. For example, a home inspector may be able to identify whether a roof requires repair or replacement. They may also find evidence of structural damage from water leaks or rain water drainage issues or evidence of land movement that could indicate a property’s foundation lacks stability.

“I’ve inspected and repaired thousands of buildings that had damages due to earthquakes, landslides, poor engineering designs and collapse issues from construction defects,” said Kyle Tourje, structural assessor for Alpha Structural. “The most obvious signs of structural or foundation damage is visible cracking in walls, ceilings or floors. Any sort of gaps or cracks on the outside of the house that catches the eye should also be noted. If someone who isn’t a trained expert

can spot an uneven floor or substantial sloping, that’s a bad sign.”

Researching and creating a home inspection checklist before contacting an inspector will give you a general idea of what to look for. It can help identify significant issues and areas of concern in the house, which you can then discuss with the assessor. This can prepare you for any surprises that may arise and make you more informed about the condition of the home you are considering.

Create a home inspection checklist

* Inspect the roof: Find out how old the roof is and ask questions about any damage or discoloration you see from ground level. Check to see if any nearby trees make contact with the roof, as branches can cause damage to roofing tiles and falling leaves can easily clog gutters or impede the natural flow of water down the roof.

* Look for water damage: Water can rot wood, damage foundations and cause mold to grow. Look to see if anything would cause rainwater to flow onto or under the house. Rain gutters should be clean and direct water away from the property. Water stains on ceilings, walls or floors could indicate a roof or pipe leak. Check for leaks or water stains inside sink cabinets, and make sure they drain properly. Bubbling paint on a window frame could be evidence of water intrusion and a poor seal.

* Foundation: Problems with the foundation could prove costly. Watch out for big cracks in the ground, raised foundation or large cracks along the wall. Pay attention to any trees growing close to the house since roots underground can cause damage that you can’t easily see.

* Smart technology:

Confirm that any smart home devices left behind by the previous owner, including thermostats, security measures and voice-activated systems, can be easily cleared and reset for your needs.

* Note the age of the home: Older houses can be charming, but you might need to upgrade certain features. Original plumbing may need replacement, and older windows may not be energy efficient. Wiring that has not been modernized could pose a fire hazard and may not be able to accommodate the multiple appliances and systems used in many homes today.

Tips for home inspection day

Bakonis offers some tips to get the most out of your home inspection:

* Be there. You don’t have to go to the inspection, but it is highly advised that you do so you can see any potential problems for yourself.

* Be prepared. Bring an

inspection checklist and jot down questions to ask the inspector.

* Check for disclosures. Review any seller disclosures you received before inspection day. Be sure to ask your inspector to look at those areas and verify repairs.

* Let the inspector work. While you may have concerns, avoid unnecessary interruptions during the inspection process.

* Make sure there’s time to ask questions. Set aside some time with your assessor after their initial inspection to go over any questions you may have.

The home inspection process is a crucial step for both buyers and sellers. It provides buyers with peace of mind, knowing that their investment is sound and free of any major issues. For sellers, it can help prevent a deal falling through by being proactive and identifying problems that may require repair.

Tips for pet-proofing a home

Any animal that is given free rein of the house, whether it’s a puppy, rabbit or kitten, can get into trouble. These tips can help pet parents ensure the safety of their pets at home.

Lock away chemicals

Certain cleansers, automotive fluids, paints and even some foods and beverages can be toxic to pets if ingested. Animals often seek things with their noses first. Products such as antifreeze can smell sweet and appealing. The pet resource, Porch, suggests researching which foods, beverages, plants and

other items can be harmful. Keep those items away from pets — even under lock and key, if necessary.

Get down to business

It may seem silly, but pet owners can get down on all fours and crawl around spaces to see just where their new companions might get into trouble. Put those “downward dog” yoga moves to work and try to see where electrical cords may generate curiosity or if any low-level cabinets are accessible. Utilize locks and covers to keep pets away from these hazards.

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Let the outside in with all-season rooms

Many homeowners express interest in creating fewer barriers between the interior and exterior of their homes. Some may have backyards built for entertaining and want to facilitate the transition between the inside of the residence and the outside when guests arrive. In other instances, homes may back to a nature preserve that homeowners want to enjoy more readily. Whatever the reason for bringing the outside in, all-season rooms can serve as a welcoming bridge between indoor and outdoor spaces.

What is an all-season room? Also known as a four-season room, all-season rooms are specially engineered spaces that provide a connection to the outdoors no matter the season. They are like sunrooms, but climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer, and fall.

What is the difference between a three-season room and an all-season room? The biggest difference between these two spaces is the level of usage and the capacity of the room to be heated and cooled. Individuals who reside in climates with moderate year-round temperatures may get by with a three-season room. However, those who experience all four seasons may need a more insulated space to make the room usable throughout the

year.

One of the more notable features of an all-season room is an abundance of windows, which allow plenty of natural light to shine in. All-season rooms also can feature creature comforts like a reading nook, outdoor kitchen spaces and televisions. Retractable screens can be installed when privacy or shade is desired.

All-season rooms can be built with adequate thermal insulation and energy-saving features. Insulation will be installed in the walls and roof, and homeowners may have a choice of window ratings for efficiency. Some all-season rooms are specially equipped with HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems that may or may not be tied in to the home's general heating and cooling system. Some people use portable heaters or air conditioners to control the temperature in all-season rooms. It's best to speak with an all-season room contractor to identify heating and cooling needs.

Prices vary by region and are contingent on the features homeowners desire. According to the outdoor resource Garden Center Care, a three-season room can cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$50,000 to build. A four-season room can cost \$20,000 to \$80,000 to add. If there is an existing three-season room, it may be



Contributed photo

All-season rooms are specially engineered spaces that provide a connection to the outdoors no matter what season it is. They are like sunrooms, but they are climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer and fall.

more affordable to upgrade the space into an all-season room, but an architect and contractor should inspect the space to determine the scope of the project.

All-season rooms can be an ideal addition to a property, providing extra space for entertaining or lounging and a connection to the outdoors.

A rundown on DIY demos

Homeowners looking to make improvements to their homes likely want to make such projects as budget-friendly as possible. After soliciting estimates from contractors, homeowners may seek to do some work themselves in an effort to cut costs. That is why many

individuals opt to handle demolition and other preparatory tasks before contractors get started. There are important things to keep in mind when doing demo.

- Prybars are your friend. These tools, sometimes called crowbars, can be used to remove nails or pull materials apart.

- Cover vents in the space where you're working. Construction dust can be sucked into the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) system and cause furnaces to clog. This

also may cause the distribution of dust throughout the home.

- Use safety gear. Always wear safety goggles, gloves, boots and other equipment as needed to remain safe.

- Get a power saw. Circular saws and reciprocating saws can cut through various materials, making faster work of demolition.

- Exercise caution when removing drywall. You don't know what is behind the drywall, including electric wires, so be careful when choosing a spot

to make the first hole in the drywall.

- Get a trash container with a gate. You'll save yourself some aches and pains by being able to fill a wheelbarrow and dump it into the container, rather than having to toss debris over the top.
- Bust up heavy or bulky items. Cast iron tubs and shower surrounds can be heavy and difficult to move. Unless it's a family heirloom, cut or break large items into pieces to remove them more easily.

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How to care for winter birds that visit your yard

The pristine, white backdrop of a snowy winter day can be a wonder to behold. While fresh snow on the ground can make for awe-inspiring landscapes, the absence of greenery amid

the starkness of winter poses challenges for animals that do not ride out winter in a state of hibernation. Several bird species stay in colder climates over the winter. Red-winged crossbills,

snow buntings, bohemian waxwings, evening grosbeaks and cardinals are just some of the birds one may find while gazing outside on a chilly winter's day. Birding in the winter can be a rewarding hobby because, despite the chilly conditions, birds tend to be easy to find in bare trees. Furthermore, the colder temperatures may keep many people inside, meaning neighborhoods, trails and parks can be very quiet, making it easier for those who brave the cold to see birds.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds indicates that winter is a difficult time of year for birds due to the weather and the scarcity of food. Furthermore, birds must consume a lot of food in a short amount of time to have the energy and body warmth to survive each day. Even birds that store food in caches or have developed special scavenging strategies to find as much food as possible can benefit from a little wintertime help.

Penn State Extension suggests providing a variety

of foods to attract the greatest number of species. Small, black-oil sunflower seeds are preferred by many smaller species of bird and have a high oil content that is nutritionally important for birds. Other sunflower seeds will be appropriate for blue jays and cardinals. Some other popular foods include white proso millet, thistle seed, niger seed, and peanuts.

Consult a wild bird store, which likely sells a birdseed mix that enables you to place a variety of seed into one feeder. In addition to seed, suet, which is made from high-quality animal fat, is crucial for birds in the winter. Families can get crafty by spreading peanut butter onto pine cones and sprinkling seed on top. Hang the pine cones tied to pieces of string from tree branches for homemade feeders.

Birds likely need a little help surviving the winter, when conditions can be bleak. Offering food and observing backyard visitors can be a great way to unwind on winter afternoons.



Contributed photo

Several bird species stay in colder climates over the winter. Birds must consume a lot of food in a short amount of time to have the energy and body warmth to survive each day, so its important to offer a variety of foods to attract the greatest number of species.

Steam clean the microwave

Instead of scrubbing a grimy microwave, use the power of steam. Place a cup of water in a large microwave-safe bowl or container, like a glass measuring cup, and add a splash of lemon juice for a citrus scent. Run on high for 3-5 minutes so the water steams the micro-

wave and softens the food and grime. Carefully remove the container and wipe down the inside with a soft cloth - no scrubbing required.



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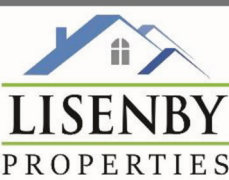
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How to build a firewood rack for your backyard

(StatePoint) If you're like many outdoor enthusiasts, bonfires with sing-a-longs, scary stories and s'mores in your backyard are part of fall events. Having a wood-burning firepit requires having a dedicated place to store firewood.

"A firewood rack is not only important for an organized yard, it protects your fuel source from moisture, making for less smoke and more efficient burning. While it might seem like a complicated build, it can be a simple, easy and quick weekend DIY project that will greatly improve your backyard experience," says Jamie Briggs, director of marketing at Exmark, a leading manufacturer of lawn care equipment.

That's the idea behind this "Done-In-A-Weekend Project" from Exmark:

- Tool List
- Miter saw
 - Eye and ear protection
 - Gloves
 - Tape measure
 - Level
 - Pencil
- Cut List
- Large Rack:
- (2) 10-foot 2x4s (pressure treated)
 - (2) 8-foot landscape timbers (pressure treated)
 - (3) standard cinder blocks
- Small Rack:
- (2) 10-foot 2x4s (pressure



Contributed photo

A firewood rack is important for an organized yard. It also protects wood from moisture, making for less smoke and more efficient burning. A firewood rack build can be a simple, easy and quick weekend DIY project.

treated)

- (2) standard cinder blocks

Build Steps:

1. Measure, mark, and cut your 2x4s into 5-foot pieces.
2. For the smaller rack, lay the two cinderblocks side by side, holes up. For the larger rack, place two of the cinderblocks at either end of the length of the landscape timber, holes up. Place the third cinderblock in the middle of the other two to work as support.
3. For the larger rack, lay the two lawn timber planks

across the cinderblocks and then check to ensure they're level.

4. For the smaller rack, turn the 2x4s so the wide sides are facing inwards. For the larger rack, place the cut 2x4 pieces into the holes of the cinderblocks, small sides facing inwards.
 5. To ensure the security of your build, resituate the two lawn timbers so they're as tightly placed against the 2x4 planks as possible.
 6. Load up your wood!
- To view the full video tutorial, visit Exmark's

Backyard Life site at <https://backyard.exmark.com>, a multimedia destination that provides homeowners with everything from grilling tips and design projects to gardening and lawn care advice.

"Our firewood rack gives you plenty of storage so you can keep your bonfire blazing for an entire party. It's also one of the simplest builds we've ever done, and you'll be able to make quick work of it over your weekend downtime," says Briggs.

Home cleaning hack

Many would love to spend less time sprucing up and more time with family and friends. This is when a few good cleaning hacks can come in handy.

Use ice to clean your garbage disposal

A lot of crud goes down your kitchen sink drain. If you have a garbage disposal, it can get dirty and stinky over time. The blades of the disposal system are dangerous to clean directly, so instead, toss in a few ice cubes and run the system for a minute. Better yet, freeze a bit of lemon or orange rind into the cubes to clean the blades and leave behind a fresh scent.

Use biobased cleaners and reusable cloths

Avoid bringing toxins into your home

by using biobased products, like the new USDA Certified Biobased Bona All-Purpose Cleaner. As one of only a few 99% biobased surface cleaners available, it's safe for all the surfaces in the home while still being tough on grease and grime. In addition, skip the wasteful paper towel by using washable and reusable microfiber cloths, like the Bona Microfiber Cleaning Cloths. These new cloths are customized for every cleaning chore - from the kitchen cloth's tight zig-zag weaves to catch food particles, to the bathroom cloth's looser zig-zag design to help clean hair and soap scum. Made from 80% post-consumer recycled material, these cleaning cloths can be washed and re-used up to 300 times.

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Small renovations that can make a big impact

Home renovations provide a host of benefits. Such projects can increase resale value and improve on the safety, aesthetics and functionality of a home.

Some homeowners may employ the mantra “go big or go home” when they embark on home improvements, thinking that only the largest renovations produce noticeable change. Various smaller renovations can provide a lot of bang for homeowners’ bucks as well.

• Countertops (and hardware): A complete kitchen overhaul may stretch some homeowners’ budgets. However, changing an older countertop for a new material can provide the facelift a kitchen needs. And while changing the cabinets may be homeowners’ ultimate goal, swapping hardware in dated finishes for newer handles and pulls can provide low-cost appeal.

• Paint: Painting a space is an inexpensive improvement that adds maximum impact. Paint can transform dark and drab rooms into bright and airy oases. Paint also can be used to create an accent wall or cozy nooks. Homeowners also can showcase their personalities with their choice of paint colors.

• Lighting: Homeowners should not underestimate what a change in lighting can do. When rooms or exterior spaces are illuminated, they take on entirely new looks.

It’s worth it to invest in new lighting, whether it’s a dramatic hanging light over the dining room table or task lighting in dim spaces.

• Weatherproofing: Improving windows, doors, weatherstripping and insulation in a home can offer visual appeal and help homeowners save money. The initial investment may be significant, but those costs will pay off in energy savings. According to One Main Financial, space heating is the largest energy expense the average American homeowner has, accounting for around 45 percent of all energy costs.

• Mudroom: Turn an entryway into a more functional space with the addition of cabinets, benches or custom-designed storage options that perfectly fit the area. Cubbies and cabinets can corral shoes, umbrellas, hats, bags and much more.

• Accent updates: Any space, whether it’s inside or outside a home, can get a fresh look with new decorative accents. Invest in new throw pillows and even slipcovers for living room sofas. Use new tile, or paint the brick on a fireplace in a den, then update the mantel with decorative displays. Purchase wall art that can bring different colors into a room. Change the cushions on deck furniture and buy color-coordinated planters.



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New survey reveals Gen Z and millennials
struggle to keep a tidy home

(StatePoint) Home organizing is more than a trend; it's a lifestyle. From streaming shows demonstrating how to color-code your pantry to magazines offering tips to unclutter quickly and even a litany of organization products, there's an abundance of information in the world of home organization. Yet, despite all this great content, younger generations still struggle with staying organized. In fact, a recent survey conducted by Pollfish on behalf of Duck brand finds that nearly 75% of Gen Z and millennials, ages 16 to 42, need a better organizing system or routine at home. Here's what these generations struggle with the most:

Clutter is Chaos: While about half of Gen Z and millennials clean and organize up to an hour a day, they still have an issue with clutter. The survey finds that the kitchen counter is the biggest clutter hotspot, and car or house keys are the top misplaced items. Among their worst organizing habits, 54% of the younger generations throw everything into a junk drawer, while 40% say they don't hang up their purse or jacket. Additionally, their top challenges to staying tidy are too much clutter and not enough room.

Family Dynamics: Liv-

ing with messy family members is another top challenge. Less than half of Gen Z and millennials say their spouses and children pick up after themselves, and more than 40% wish their significant other was neater/tidier at home. Most Gen Z and millennials (nearly 64%) feel they are the best at staying organized at home compared to others they live with: about 30% of Gen Z say their parents are the tidiest and 16% of millennials say their partner is the neatest.

Personal Preference: A quick and easy installation is at the top of their priority list when it comes to picking an organizing system, but 29% of Gen Z also favors stylish and modern aesthetics. Among the products they're willing to try, Gen Z is more likely to use shelves while millennials chose a wall organizer. As for the cost, most will spend \$26 to \$50 on organizing products.

Space-Saving Solutions: More than 75% of survey respondents feel they have limited space to store items and 70% wish their backpacks, jackets and hats were better organized.

From the entryway to the garage, Duck brand's Easy-Mounts Heavy-Duty Dry-wall Hooks and Heavy-Duty Drywall Tool Holders help restore order to high-traffic



Contributed photo
Organizational tools can minimize mess and stress at home for all generations, providing a less is more lifestyle with clutter-free home spaces.

areas and give out-of-place belongings, such as key, bags and garage gear, a designated home while keeping them off the floor. The universal mounting system comes in a modern matte finish and installs in drywall without the need for tools, solving the problem of limited storage.

For other expert tips on

home organization, visit Tidy Up with Duck brand at www.duckbrand.com.

While some factors are beyond one's control, such as the amount of storage space available and the behavior of housemates, smart organizational tools can minimize mess and stress at home, for all generations.

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Top five benefits of laminate flooring: a must-read guide for homeowners

(BPT) – With changing temperatures, laminate flooring tends to outperform other options, offering durability that can stand up to snow, mud, puddles and more. Laminate flooring has made a massive comeback in recent years, as builders and interior designers have embraced the material with renewed enthusiasm. Laminate is more refined than ever, offering sophisticated style options and impressive durability without the excessive cost of other flooring materials.

Here’s what every homeowner should know about the benefits of laminate flooring so they can make the best choice for their home improvement projects:

Durability
Jennifer Meska, director of merchandising for LL Flooring, says, “Moist weather and rainy seasons, plus everyday spills that happen all year long, can cause serious damage to your floors. With waterproof laminate flooring you can have peace of mind and be worry-free for whatever weather or messy spills might come your way.”

Affordability
The cost of laminate flooring is highly appealing, especially as consumers are tightening their budgets and looking for more cost-effective home improvement solutions. Laminate flooring typically starts at around one dollar per square foot, making it an affordable option with many styles to choose from.

Style
A design chameleon of



Contributed photo
Today’s laminate flooring is more refined than ever, offering sophisticated style options and impressive durability without the excessive cost of other flooring materials. Laminate is designed to closely replicate the natural look of real hardwood, stone and even mosaic patterns.

sorts, laminate is available in a huge variety of tones and textures so you can find the perfect style option for your home. Designed to closely replicate the natural look of real hardwood, stone and even mosaic patterns, laminate flooring offers the best of both worlds - impeccable style and practical function.

Wood-like options
If you want the look of wood without the maintenance concerns, laminate is a go-to choice. With a core made from wood byproducts bonded with resins and a hard plastic surface protecting the printed design layer, laminate closely resembles hardwood in appearance, texture and depth.

Easy maintenance

General cleaning on laminate floors is as easy as using a standard soft-bristle broom or dust mop on a weekly basis. If you vacuum, be sure to disengage the beater bar with hard bristles that can scratch or dull the surface. For periodic deep cleans (every two months is recommended), use a laminate-friendly product, like the Bellawood Floor Cleaner applied to the mop - not directly to the floor - and avoid oil-based cleaning agents or anything containing wax or polish.

Not all laminate is created equal

A lot of laminate on the market isn’t reliably water-resistant, which is why it’s important to look for options tested and proven to

stand up to the elements. One high-quality laminate option is the LL Flooring Dream Home Collection that is completely waterproof, making it a game-changer when it comes to selecting flooring for anywhere in your home. Plus, with a clear aluminum oxide top layer protecting the boards, this laminate is exceedingly durable and stain resistant.

If you’re thinking it’s time for new flooring, laminate is an excellent choice for its durability, easy maintenance, style and cost. With so many benefits, it’s a go-to choice for bathrooms, kitchens, mudrooms, basements and beyond.

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By selecting the right products during a renovation, you can prepare your home for greater comfort and energy savings in cool weather. There are a number of design tips that will help the inside of your home stay warm and comfortable.

(StatePoint) When the temperatures drop and the precipitation turns cold, efficiently keeping your home cozy and warm is likely a top priority.

As you make home upgrades this fall, be sure to use materials designed to withstand extreme weather events and which help manage indoor climate control. Doing so will mean greater comfort and more affordable energy bills, not only when it's cold, but all year long.

Roofing - As your first defense against all kinds of weather, your roof sustains a lot of wear and tear. Consider prioritizing durability, strength and weather resistance in a new roof by opting for metal. The good news? You can get a classic appearance with this material, thanks to updates in roofing technology. For example, the energy-saving metal roofing offered by ProVia has the textured appearance of natural slate or shake shingles, but is constructed of highly durable 26-gauge steel, for added strength and lifetime protection from wind, rain, hail and corrosion.

Siding - Is your home ever drafty or chilly when the temperatures drop and the wind kicks up? The culprit may be insufficient insulation. Keep in mind that most wall insulation is placed only between the studs, and wall studs make up to 25% of the wall surface of an average home. You can fill in these insulation gaps with insulated vinyl siding that's been tested and proven to increase the R-value (a measure of a material's re-

sistance to heat flow) of an exterior wall. One of the most energy-efficient exterior claddings on the market, CedarMAX insulated vinyl siding, is one such choice that can help reduce energy bills. Plus, its strong, rigid foam backing offers greater impact resistance against rain, hail, sleet and snow, making a siding upgrade a good project to consider before the first winter storm.

Windows - Windows are a common point of

heat transfer, and as such, they play a huge role in the comfort of your home. It's not often that you have to purchase windows for your home, but when you do, you'll want to ensure that they deliver the best in energy efficiency and comfort. ProVia's vinyl windows, for example, are ENERGY STAR-certified, to help keep your home warm in winter (and cool in summer).

Interior décor - You may not think about your in-

terior decorating choices as something that could potentially improve your home's energy efficiency, but many such updates will not only make your home look more cozy, they'll actually help keep it warm. Thick area rugs are a good place to start, as they provide insulation underfoot. Likewise, cellular shades or Roman shades can help stop heat transfer around windows and wall tapestries or fabric-like wallpaper can provide a touch more insulation on walls.

To learn more about building and renovating with comfort and energy savings in mind, visit provia.com.

By selecting the right products during a renovation, you can prepare your home for greater comfort and energy savings in cool weather.

Soak shower heads in vinegar

There's nothing like jumping into a shower and looking forward to a warm cascade of droplets, only to be met with a frantic spray with unsatisfying pressure. Over time, minerals in the water can build up on the shower head and block

the flow. An easy solution is to remove the head and place in a bowl of vinegar. A quick soak loosens buildup that you can easily clean off with a small brush so your shower flows again.

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Five off-the-wall uses for retaining wall systems

(BPT) - Segmental retaining wall (SRW) systems make attractive walls, but they also are used to build many beautiful and functional outdoor features for homeowners and professionals alike. As the most versatile resource in a professional landscaper's tool box, SRWs can also be used by do-it-yourself landscapers with a little know-how. Whether you need to transition a slope, shore up soil or create beautiful hardscaped features, one retaining wall system - the VERSA-LOK retaining wall system - can do it all.

YouTube creator and construction pro Stanley "Dirt Monkey" Genadek calls VERSA-LOK the "gold standard" of retaining walls. "VERSA-LOK's solid, pinned units are superior to hollow, lipped blocks that require fill and might trap water," says Genadek, who owns a landscaping and excavating company in Mendota Heights, MN. "It's the one block that can do it all."

"Retaining walls are most often employed to address grade changes in the landscape and to retain soil," says Scott Arnold, manager of Villa Landscapes, a design and install landscaping firm in St. Paul/Minneapolis. "But as the 'Legos' of landscaping tools, retaining wall units can be used to create many beautiful and functional features, such as outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and seating."

Seating

From creating seat walls to stadium seats, retaining walls are for sitting. One popular application is a free-

standing seat wall around a patio or fire pit. Retaining walls are perfect to set into hillsides, such as amphitheater seating, where they retain soil while offering a place to sit. Other options include stadium seating, replacing cold, noisy and more expensive aluminum bleachers as well as a couch or bench designed with SRWs.

Functional features

Retaining wall units can make beautiful tiered gardens, raised garden beds, planters, tree rings, plus fire and water features. One common application is a raised patio, where retaining wall units serve as a foundation for a paver patio surrounded by freestanding walls in place of a wood deck. Creative homeowners and installers have used retaining wall units for lighted column posts, waterfalls, hot tub platforms or mailbox columns.

Steps/stairs

Going up and down a slope is easier with solid stair foundations created from retaining wall units. From stairs out the back patio to steps for access within a hardscape design, such as a multi-level patio, retaining wall units are a safe support for stair treads and pavers.

Fencing

Keep people moving the right way with freestanding walls used as fencing or partitions. A parapet wall is a back-to-back wall that serves as a barrier for vehicles and pedestrians. Stepped-down freestanding walls are used alongside ramps for easy access. Custom columns designed with

lighting and fencing with timbers or rail posts can serve as a fence solution.

Signage

Both residential and commercial signage can be created with retaining wall units. Stately columns with house numbers at the end of a driveway, a hardscaped entrance sign to a community development or a mailbox pillar are features

easily created with retaining wall units. Monument signs can be built as freestanding walls, with channel letters, a signboard or neon mounted on the surface.

The endless design options afforded by retaining wall systems are limited only by the imagination. With a variety of colors and textures, retaining walls can do it all, beautifully.

Protecting your items – and the Earth – when moving

(StatePoint) Moving is a big job – and it can be a wasteful one, too, considering all of the packing material required. Make moving more sustainable with these eco-friendly tips:

Space saving: Using thinner sustainable wrapping to secure your breakables avoids the need for excess storage and boxes. Flourish Brand Honeycomb Cushion Wrap, made with 40% recycled content, offers a customizable way to pack boxes efficiently. The die-cut honeycomb stretches easily with interlocking paper that attaches to itself, so no tape is needed. Once you unpack, the paper can be directly recycled or stored to be reused.

Folding in: Instead of using tape, fold your box tops in an interlocked, neat manner. They'll stack up easily inside your vehicle,

maximizing packing space, plus you won't need to use any additional materials. Unpack your items without tearing or ripping your box, then recycle or fold it flat to store for future use.

Stacking up: Ensure your plates and serving ware stay scratch-free by using a protective layer between each item. Made of recycled content, Flourish Brand 100% Recycled Kraft Paper provides lasting security for traveling to your new home.

Blanketed: Oversized or uniquely shaped home décor can be exceptionally fragile and isn't always easy to squeeze into standard storage containers. When packing your vehicle, incorporate padding by wrapping these items in spare blankets, comforters or oversized towels. You'll minimize the risk of damage to the items and have zero waste.



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Taking care of a home is more than surface deep

(BPT) Real estate industry sources report that home purchases are rising once again, despite record high prices and interest rates, and many of these new homeowners might be strapped for cash should an unforeseen issue occur. As a homeowner, you need to make time for routine maintenance to keep your home in good condition. Regular maintenance can help reduce the possibility of costly and time-consuming repairs.

“We’re taught to have our vehicle’s motor oil changed every few thousand miles to keep it in good running condition, and a home is no different in that it needs regular attention too,” said Bonnie Lee, Mercury Insurance vice president of property claims. “Putting off tasks until something breaks or needs repair can lead to much larger and more expensive headaches.”

Four areas homeowners should check regularly to keep it safe include:

TLC for the airways. Heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) is the system that keeps the temperature inside a home comfortable. In order to not only keep running costs low but also extend the life of it, owners need to give it love and attention. A small leak or failure to replace an air filter could cause your annual energy bill to skyrocket.

A dirty air filter is the most common cause of problems for an HVAC system. When the air filter is dirty, the blower has to work harder to force air through the debris, increasing the system’s energy consumption or overworking its capabilities. Regularly checking, cleaning and replacing your filters can help prevent this problem.

“The last thing a homeowner wants to deal with is an unexpected cost, especially one that can be as expensive as having to replace a furnace or air conditioner,” said Lee. “If you’re concerned about having to come up with the funds to replace a system that fails before reaching the end of its life expectancy, there are insurance coverages.”

Look up at what protects you. The first step of roof inspection begins inside the home. Look for damp spots or water stains on the ceiling or for cracked plaster along the wall as these can be signs of water damage. During dry, warm months, conduct a visual examination of your roof’s exterior for any cracked or missing shingles. Notice if you have to trim back tree branches that make contact with the roof, as they can cause damage. If you suspect it needs attention, contact an experienced roofer who can perform a thorough inspection with drones and provide a condition report. Remember, roof repairs required because of damage caused by severe weather are covered by your insurance. Roof repairs that are necessary due to lack of maintenance, age, or standard wear and tear are not.

Clean the gutters. Gutters are necessary to direct water away from your home’s foundation. Their exposure to the elements means that they need to be cleaned and inspected regularly. While cleaning out dirt and leaves, make sure the gutters are securely attached to your house. The weight of heavy snowfall, rain and dirt can cause gutters to loosen and pull away from the home.

“Our data shows that routine maintenance means lower homeowner costs by addressing small issues before they become problematic,” said Lee.

Preparing for extreme weather. What might have been considered once-in-

a-lifetime extreme weather events in the past are now becoming more frequent. Natural weather events, such as flooding, cause billions of dollars in property damage every year. Homeowners must be aware of all perils that can impact their homes as well as the type of coverage needed. Damages caused by an earthquake or storm flooding, for example, are not covered by a standard homeowner’s policy. Homeowners may want to consider purchasing policies or endorsements specifically designed to cover such perils.

A few minutes a day to inspect and take care of your home can make a difference. Make sure to review what policy coverages and home warranties are in place before issues arise and take care of routine maintenance before it becomes a bigger problem. This will help you keep a happy and safe home.

How homeowners can turn attics into livable spaces

Houses typically feature various areas that are traditionally designed for storage, such as garages, basements and attics. However, with some renovation, these spaces can be transformed into livable areas.

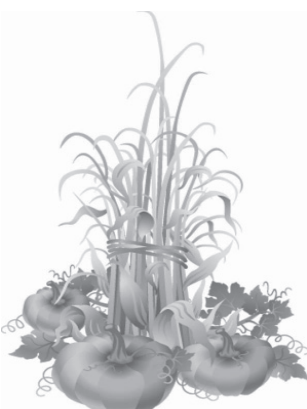
Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project. While the attic may seem like it has plenty of room and is structurally sound enough to walk in, that’s not necessarily so. To be converted into usable living space, an attic must be brought up to the standards of modern building codes, according to the design experts at Board & Vellum. Retrofitting beams and insulation can eat up available space in an attic. Thus, it is best to consult an expert to see if an attic can be converted.

Furthermore, an attic that was not initially designed as a room when the house was built can add extra “load” upstairs if it is converted. That could present certain structural problems. That means a structural engineer also must be consulted to see if adding beams, flooring and drywall will necessitate other changes elsewhere in the home to accommodate the extra load.

In order to have a functional attic room, building codes will dictate that it needs to be accessible by a full-size staircase. Also, it will need to have another exit in case of an emergency so that will likely be an accessible window, according to the home information site, The Fill. Homeowners’ budgets and renovation plans will need to factor into these considerations. Homeowners also are advised to check local permits to determine what else may be required to go forward. It is best to follow the rules. Lack of a permit for work can affect the ability to sell a home down the line.

Individuals also should plan for heating and cooling upgrades, as the home will need to have ductwork installed in the attic, or at the least, a stand-alone heating and cooling unit. As heat rises, it can get quite warm in an attic, so ventilation and comfort should be considered. The attic will need to be wired for electricity for lighting and other needs. Air sealing and additional insulation can make the attic space more comfortable as well. Consult with a qualified electrician and an HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) technician and have an energy audit done to discuss needs.

Attic renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners. This is no small undertaking and all of the right steps need to be followed to ensure a legal, safe and successful renovation.



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What to know about replacing gutters

Certain home renovation projects are more glamorous than others. A remodeled kitchen is sure to garner its share of “oohs and aahs,” while a newly paved driveway is much less likely to dazzle guests.

A gutter replacement is another job that might not have the wow factor. But fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced.

Signs gutters should be replaced

Various signs indicate it's time to replace existing gutters. Homeowners should act promptly if any of the following signs arise, as poorly functioning gutters can make it hard for water to get into the downspouts, ultimately pushing it backward and likely underneath roof shingles, where the result can be costly water damage - peeling paint, cracks, pooling water in the gutter, mildew in the gutter, which can sometimes be seen even from the ground, water damage (water damage on the gutter can be limited to certain spots and

will be noticeable on the underside of the gutter), soffit damage, sagging gutters, detached gutters, which can be detached from other pieces or the house, and rust.

Who should replace gutters? Many home improvements can be completed successfully by skilled do-it-yourselfers, but a gutter replacement is best left to the professionals. Homeowners who live in single-story homes may be able to replace gutters on their own, but the issues that can arise when gutters are not functioning at optimal capacity make this a job best suited to professionals, even in residences without high roofs.

Some gutters may be under a manufacturer's warranty, so homeowners can check to see if their gutters qualify for a free upgrade. Experience is one of the best reasons to work with a professional gutter installation team. Experienced professionals can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size of the house. In addition, gutter installation requires the use of various tools that many DIYers may not have on hand, which can cut into



Contributed photo

Fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced. It's best to work with a professional gutter installation team who can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size of the house.

the cost savings of doing the project yourself.

Homeowners also should not underestimate the challenges of working on ladders that are high up off the ground. Professionals are accustomed to such challenges, while DIYers may not be comfortable or used to climbing ladders

with materials and tools in hand.

A gutter replacement is a worthwhile investment that can ensure rain water efficiently and effectively runs through gutters and away from the roof. Leaving this task to the professionals can ensure the job is done right.

Pre-winter perennial pruning advice

Pruning is one of the keys to keeping perennials coming back for years to come, and fall is an ideal time to take on this important task. According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, some perennials can be cut down after the first killing frost, while others can be left to benefit wildlife, including birds and insects. Understanding pruning and when to do it this fall can help gardeners lay a strong

foundation for their gardens that will benefit them next spring.

Cutting these plants down to the ground after several hard frosts allows the base of the plant to remain dormant over the winter but makes the plant less hospitable to disease and insects.

The first step to pruning perennials is to recognize which need to be pruned and which can be left in-

tact for the winter. The Old Farmer's Almanac notes that bee balm and phlox are prone to powdery mildew and should be cut back once they're gone. Hostas harbor slug eggs, so they, too, should be pruned after a hard frost. Hosta leaves that have fallen on the ground should be removed as well. Hardy geraniums do not require pruning in the fall. Hardy perennials like garden mums are more likely

to survive a cold winter if they're left intact. That's because the tops of such plants will collect leaves and snow for insulation and moisture over the course of winter.

Gardeners need not rush to prune perennials in the fall. Diseased or infested plants can be pruned at the first sight of disease or infestation, but gardeners can wait until several hard frosts have occurred before they prune healthy perennials.



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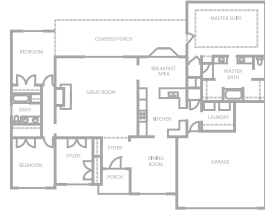
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Renovation inspiration: top five home trends that combine elegance and purpose

(BPT) - Balancing beauty with practicality is a common challenge when renovating and upgrading a home. Designers are creating concepts and products to make life easier while adding visually appealing elements. Popular trends especially cater to tech-savvy homeowners looking for innovative products that can make their home lives more convenient.

If you want to create a home that combines personal style with practicality, check out five top home trends for 2023 and beyond.

Wide open spaces

Homeowners are looking for ways to create more space in their homes to increase their square footage and functionality. According to the National Kitchen and Bath Association, 74 percent of homeowners want to tear down walls to open up the kitchen to other areas of the home. These open spaces allow for rooms to have multiple functions. Whether you want to work, learn, entertain or relax, opening up the design and architecture of your home will make it easier to flow throughout your day.

Design and function

There's no need to choose between beauty and practicality. Today's modern appliance brands are finding the intersection of design and function for homeowners who want the best of both worlds. The latest

counter depth refrigerators are great examples of how you don't have to sacrifice space for design or vice versa.

One such sleek, stainless-steel fridge from LG offers maximum food storage in a small footprint, creating a more stylish kitchen that sits flush with cabinetry and offers a built-in look. Thanks to “InstaView” technology, you can check the inside without opening the refrigerator door by knocking twice on the mirror-coated glass panel that illuminates, reducing cold air loss.

This refrigerator can also keep food fresh longer with advanced cooling technologies. With its convertible drawer, featuring adjustable dividers and five temperature settings, there's plenty of space and flexibility to store and preserve your favorite foods.

Sustainability matters

Like many other industries, sustainability is a popular trend for kitchens. According to a 2023 Kitchen Trends survey by Houzz, 92 percent of homeowners are incorporating sustainable features when renovating kitchens. From LED lights to water-efficient fixtures and Energy Star-certified appliances, homeowners are looking for ways to make more environmentally friendly choices in their homes.

Sustainability goes be-

yond efficiency of natural resources and both homeowners and designers are taking that into account. Most of the designers surveyed at KBIS said that, when recommending products, they oftentimes consider the manufacturer's sustainability practices.

Steam power

Many appliances showcased at KBIS 2023 harness the power of steam. From steam ovens to steam closets, companies are innovating appliances to make a homeowner's day-to-day life cleaner and tidier with minimal fuss.

For example, sneakerheads and shoe lovers will appreciate the LG Styler ShoeCare and ShoeCase, which offers a novel way to clean, organize and display footwear. ShoeCare uses steam technology to sterilize and deodorize shoes inside and out. Whether leather, suede or sports footwear, you'll find the right controls to refresh your shoes between uses.

Meanwhile, the Styler ShoeCase offers a modern, streamlined shoe storage solution to organize and display your shoe collection. Transparent panels allow users to display and store their footwear in an ideal environment that protects against humidity and fabric-decolorating UV light. When combined, you'll have a total shoe care solution that extends the life of



Designers are creating concepts and products to make life easier while adding visually appealing elements. Popular trends especially cater to tech-savvy homeowners looking for innovative products that can make their home lives more convenient. According to a recent survey, homeowners said their dream kitchen remodel focuses on increasing space, with 50 percent of respondents saying they were specifically looking for an extra-large refrigerator.

your shoes while providing convenient storage.

Space and versatility

Space and versatility are top of mind to homeowners. According to a recent survey, homeowners said their dream kitchen remodel focuses on increasing space, with 50 percent of respondents saying they were specifically looking for an extra-large refrigerator.

A larger fridge doesn't just mean more room. It also means more flexibility for food storage. For example, one luxury brand, Signature Kitchen Suite, has leaned into this trend by launching the industry's first 48-inch French-door refrigerator. It offers a combination of spacious capacity, preservation technology to ensure food freshness, smart organiza-

tion and a sleek design. It's also equipped with ThinQ Care technology that proactively monitors the appliance and alerts homeowners if needed.

Are you ready to start on your kitchen upgrades? You'll be ahead of the curve in style and functionality by incorporating a couple (or all!) of these trends into your home renovations.

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- MG20F Mechanical Grapple
- 6-yr/2,000 hr. Powertrain warranty¹
- 4-Wheel drive
- Power steering



← 835M Honor Edition Gator Utility Vehicles

← In Stock and Starting at: \$22,899

- 54hp, EFI engine
- Two-range CVT transmission
- Poly half doors
- Deluxe power lift cargo box with bed liner, brake and tail lights
- Special 'Honor' Edition limited to dealer stock
- 0% financing for 36 months!²
- Ask about our low-hour rental returns!
- 4-Wheel drive, power steering
- Hard surface radial tires with alloy wheels
- Poly roof and brush guard



20% OFF Thousands of Compact and Utility Tractor parts, NOW through September 30th
Available in store and at online at shop.deere.com. Use code: **Save20Tractor**

Offer valid on qualifying purchases made between August 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023. Receive 20% off the agreed-upon purchase price of OEM replacement parts for 1 – 5 Series Compact & Utility Tractors and equivalent older models, savings applied to the total before applicable sales taxes, shipping rates, and delivery charges. Limit of \$500 per customer or household. Not applicable towards the purchase of attachments, accessories, field installed kits, weights, hardware, labor costs, fluids (including oils, antifreeze, or DEF), grease, John Deere Merchandise, and Licensed Products. Some restrictions apply, redeemable at participating John Deere dealers. See dealer or Shop.Deere.com for full details.

Compact tractor offers valid on qualifying equipment purchased between August 1 and October 27, 2023. Some restrictions apply, see dealer for details. ¹Warranty based on years or hours used, whichever comes first. ² Financing subject to approved installment credit by John Deere Financial, f.s.b. ³ Available on purchases of new residential riding lawn equipment. ⁴ For residential use only.

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