

2024 Fall Home & Garden Guide



- ~ Indoor/Outdoor Lighting
- ~ Roof Repair & Replacement
- ~ Furnace & Chimney Inspection
- ~ Landscaping



- ~ Insulation
- ~ Gutter Maintenance
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- ~ Window & Door Replacement
- ~ And Much More!



Supplement to the Arrow Shopper and The Shopper

Color tips to make your home’s exterior pop

(StatePoint) Home exteriors make a first impression, setting the tone for neighbors, guests, and if a property is on the market - prospective home buyers. So, how do you boost your curb appeal and make your exterior pop? According to those in the know, a lot of it has to do with color.

“Choosing deep, bold colors for your door or siding can provide eye-catching focal points and dramatically increase curb appeal,” says Jon Lapp, vinyl siding product manager at ProVia.

To help you make selections that work best for your home and vision, ProVia is offering the following insights.

Siding

Color and texture play significant roles in the overall look and style of a home, so consider pairing your vinyl siding with other materials, such as manufactured stone, decorative shake or board and batten. Whether you go for soft earth tones or deep hues of primary colors, color retention technologies will maintain the look through the years. To that end, here are a few qualities to look for in your siding:

- UV protection: Think of it as sunscreen for your house. This layer of protection helps shield your siding from the destructive effects of the sun’s

UV rays.

- Weather barrier shield: Anti-weathering materials on the siding’s surface can help ensure long-lasting color fidelity and low-maintenance freedom for your home’s exterior.
- Heat resistance: Heat-resistant inorganic pigments ensure exacting deep colors, reflect heat from exterior walls and deflect solar rays to reduce solar heat build-up and unsightly weathering.
- Anti-fade protection: A strong molecular chain, found in super polymer vinyl siding, is engineered for superior color retention.

“At first, it might be difficult to tell the difference

between a good vinyl siding panel and an outstanding one. But over time, the true strength and quality of each panel will be revealed,” says Lapp.

The Entry Door

The entry door is an amazing place to make a color statement. However, if you buy an exterior replacement door and try to finish it yourself, achieving the flawless finish you’re hoping for is easier said than done. Then there’s the trim, and possibly sidelights and a transom that also need to be painted to match or coordinate with the door color.

From classic hues, such as rustic bronze or forest green, to trending colors like avocado or burnt orange, you can ensure a consistent, beautiful and lasting finish by having your manufacturer paint the door before it leaves the factory floor. Bonus: the color will also be under warranty. Look for a manufacturer that crafts custom doors, allowing you to choose different interior and exterior colors and other specifications tailored to your taste.

To get inspired for your home exterior project, visit provia.com. In addition to photo galleries of finished projects, the site’s home designer tools allow you to visualize how various elements will look on your home.

By selecting professional-quality exterior products, you can ensure long-lasting durability and a big boost in curb appeal.



Contributed photo

Home exteriors make a first impression, setting the tone for neighbors, guests, and if a property is on the market - prospective home buyers. Choosing deep, bold colors for the front door or siding can provide eye-catching focal points and dramatically increase curb appeal.

Risk factors for mold infestation in a home

Homeowners know that there’s no shortage of work required to maintain a home. Whether it’s a renovation project designed to make a home more comfortable or a safety-related remodel, homes require a significant amount of TLC.

Mold remediation falls under the umbrella of safety-related renovations. Various types of mold can grow in a home, and such infestations may develop just about anywhere in a house. According to the Rhode Island Department of Health, exposure to mold can contribute to an array of adverse health consequences, including allergy symptoms such as runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, difficulty breathing and headache. Prolonged exposure can cause allergic reactions to become more severe.

Various points in a home can be vulnerable to mold infestation. The New York State Department of Health notes that identifying and controlling moisture is the key to preventing mold infestations in a home. Certain points in a home, if left unchecked, are more likely to

promote mold growth than others. As homeowners work to maintain their homes so the environment inside their walls is as comfortable and healthy as possible, they can routinely inspect potential mold infestation points and do their best to keep these areas as free from moisture as possible.

- Roof: A sturdy, leak-free roof can help prevent a buildup of moisture that can contribute to mold growth.
- Indoor plumbing: Check the pipes beneath sinks throughout the home, including those in the kitchen and bathrooms. Homeowners whose washrooms have a slop sink or utility sink should inspect these areas for leaky plumbing as well.
- Outdoor drainage: Maintaining effective outdoor drainage is another way to prevent mold growth in a home. This typically requires maintaining gutters and drains so they do not become clogged during or after rainstorms. Gutter guards can prevent gutters and drains from clogging. Homeowners also may want to work with a landscaper or landscape

architect to ensure soil around the house slopes away from the foundation, which can prevent water from pooling near the walls. When water pools near the walls, this can contribute to foundation problems and make it easier for mold to grow.

- Basements/crawl spaces: Basements and crawl spaces are vulnerable to mold infestations because they tend to be dark and cool, which can contribute to dampness that facilitates mold growth. The Rhode Island Department of Health recommends using a dehumidifier in basements and crawl spaces.
- Bathrooms: Steam from hot showers also can contribute to mold growth if the bathrooms do not contain exhaust fans. Such fans can remove excess moisture that makes it easy for mold to grow.

Mold can pose a notable health threat in a home. But homeowners can keep an eye on various areas of their home and implement measures to keep such spaces dry and less mold-friendly.



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The future of home water heating: How heat pump technology is changing the game

(BPT) - The Department of Energy (DOE) recently released higher energy-efficiency standards for water heaters that will go into effect in 2029. Focusing on decarbonization,

the new standards emphasize how highly efficient water heaters, especially heat pump water heaters, will result in lower energy consumption and in turn, potentially save

Americans billions in household energy costs. Ultimately, the new regulation aims to improve performance and increase energy efficiency in the home, while

decreasing overall household emissions.

Since Rheem®, a leading manufacturer of water heaters, launched its first heat pump water heater in 2009, its technology and efficiency has continued to evolve. This cutting-edge technology relies on moving heat from outside the unit to warm the water within. In fact, some units can be up to four times more efficient than traditional models.

Installing a heat pump water heater can make a home more sustainable, while providing a high-performing, reliable hot water solution.

Tax incentives for energy-efficient home upgrades

Growing in popularity, it is estimated that by 2029, the majority of electric water heaters installed in the U.S. will be heat pump water heaters.

To help encourage adoption of the heat pump water heaters, tax programs such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) include incentives for homeowners to upgrade and install environmentally friendly equipment and appliances throughout the home. Since going into effect in 2023, the IRA set aside \$8.8 billion for consumer rebates on high-efficiency products to cover the cost of the appliance and the associated installation costs.

By taking advantage of the tax credit, homeowners can reduce their tax bill between \$2,000 and \$3,200, offsetting

some of the upfront costs of making energy-efficient home improvements. Specifically, the tax credit for a heat pump water heater is 30% of the unit cost, plus installation up to \$2,000. Additional tax credits are available if electric panel upgrades are necessary.

There are also long-term savings to consider. Designed to heat water in a more efficient manner, heat pump water heaters reduce energy usage, which can save consumers hundreds of dollars annually on their utility bills. In the end, these savings add up and can potentially help cover the cost for a heat pump water heater within less than two years of a unit's installation.

Advancing convenience: Smart features and innovations

Heat pump water heaters address a major consumer task: the ability to have control of home equipment from anywhere. As heat pump technology continues to evolve, manufacturers are integrating smart technology

into heat pump water heater systems.

It's now common to include temperature control via a wireless mobile app, leak detection tools, automatic water shut-off and more, making heat pump water heaters among the most intelligent and controllable pieces of technology in a home.

Energy efficiency is a key driver for heat pump technology. Benefits include monitoring energy usage of the water heater and additional utility savings.

Rheem continues to find ways to innovate on this technology, recently adding a plug-in model, making it simple for homeowners to replace a gas unit with a heat pump water heater. The plug-in units are easy to install with little to no electrical work, no venting or gas line requirements and Wi-Fi capabilities.

Installing a heat pump water heater can make a home more sustainable and energy efficient, while also providing a customizable and controllable hot water solution.

How to recognize when you can stop mowing

Each weekend in spring, summer and fall, millions of homeowners fire up their mowers and cut the grass in their yards. A few hours spent mowing the lawn can be a great time to get some sun and some exercise in the great outdoors.

As fall gradually transitions to winter, homeowners may wonder when to stop mowing their lawns. Each lawn is different, and when to stop mowing may depend on a host of factors, including local climate and the type of turf. In addition to climate and turf, homeowners can keep an eye on these conditions to determine when the time is right to put their mowers away for the winter.

- Frost: Warm-season grasses typically go dormant after a couple of significant frosts. Homeowners can jot down each frost during fall. Frosts are most noticeable in the early morning hours, so be sure to check lawn conditions each morning as the weather begins to grow cold. Frost may be noticeable without even going outside,

but homeowners may need to go outside to check on chilly mornings or on days when the previous night was especially cold. If you must go outside, stay off the grass to protect it. Two or three frosts might be enough to make warm-season grasses go dormant for the winter. Cool-season grasses may keep growing and require mowing even after a few frosts, so it's imperative that homeowners determine which type of grass is in their yards.

- Soil temperature: If it's hard to determine if frosts have occurred, homeowners can try checking the temperature of their soil to decide if they need to keep mowing. The lawn care experts at Pennington recommend homeowners continue mowing warm-season grasses so long as they keep growing. Lawns may not grow as quickly in fall as they do in spring or summer, and growth may not be as visible to the naked eye during this time of year as it is in other times. Homeowners can routinely check soil temperature to determine if their

grasses have stopped growing. Warm-season grasses tend to stop growing once the soil temperature is consistently at 55 F or below, while cool-season grasses tend to stop when temperatures are 45 F or lower.

Falling leaves have long been a barometer used by homeowners to determine if they need to keep mowing their lawns. That's not necessarily a reliable metric, as grass can still keep growing even if leaves have been falling for weeks. In addition, using a mulching mower when leaves begin falling is a great way to provide the lawn with nutrients it can use throughout the winter. Some trees shed their leaves more quickly than others, but it's a good rule of thumb that lawns will need to keep being mowed if trees are still retaining more than half their leaves.

A host of factors can help homeowners determine when it's safe to put their mowers away for the winter.

Be informed

Be Informed: The National Fire Protection Association reports that 60% of home fires are due to human error. It's important to realize that humans are flawed. We forget things, we mess up, and we're often distracted. Accepting the fact that a house fire is a real possibility is an important step in the right direction. There are simple actions you can take to help prevent accidents. For starters, cooking is the leading cause of house fires. Never leave cooking unattended. Keep the cooking area free of flammable items such as potholders, towels and packaging, and always maintain a three-foot safety zone free of pets and kids.



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New study shows 99% of materials causing sewage clogs should never have been flushed

(BPT)-Do you have good flushing habits? Flushing may seem like a simple, routine task, but unfortunately, many people flush items that can cause major problems for local and national sewage systems.

Wastewater agencies and wipes industry experts recently collaborated on the largest known domestic

sewage collection study to help determine what exactly is clogging sewer lines and equipment. The final study results are now available, and they add up to a massive problem.

The study captured, sorted and identified over 1,700 items collected during peak flow times. The materials found included:

- *34.1% non-flushable wipes labeled with the “Do Not Flush” symbol (baby wipes, cleaning wipes, make-up wipes, etc.)
- *64.9% other non-flushable items (paper towels, period products, trash, etc.)
- *0.9% wipes labeled as flushable
- Wipes labeled as “flushable” accounted for less than

1% of sewer system debris and were in the process of breaking apart, while the majority of the non-flushable items collected were fully intact.

It can be tempting to assume that flushing a non-flushable item occasionally may not be a big deal. However, items like paper towels, baby wipes, makeup wipes, rags and more are not

designed to pass through sewage systems at any point in their lifetime.

Unlike flushable wipes made from natural fibers that break down easily, non-flushable items can clog the pipes in your home. Even if they pass through your home’s waste system, they can cause problems in your local sewer system and beyond.

The pumps, augers and pipe networks of municipal wastewater systems are not made to transport or break down these materials. When enough non-flushable items come together, they can congeal to form cement-like fatbergs, which are expensive to remove.

Each year, a significant number of sewer spills occur, many caused when non-flushable products make their way into the wastewater system. These wastewater spills are messy and expensive to clean up. More importantly, wastewater spills threaten public health and the environment.

Fixing problems caused by non-flushable products is quite expensive. A home clog can cost homeowners anywhere from \$175 to more than \$1,000 to fix. Even if you don’t pay for a plumber for your pipes, you may end up paying for damage to wastewater systems.

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies estimates that local public agencies throughout the U.S. (and the ratepayers they represent) spend more than \$440 million each year to respond to sewer overflows caused by inappropriately flushing “Do Not Flush” labeled wet wipes and repair wastewater treatment equipment.

While non-flushable products clogging the nation’s sewer systems is a massive problem, everyone can do their part to solve it. You can help by learning and practicing smart flushing habits.

Common household items that you should NEVER flush include: baby wipes, household cleaning wipes and makeup wipes; paper towels and facial tissues; fats, oils and grease; food, trash and plastic bags; rags, cloth and disposable gloves; cotton balls, cotton swabs and dental floss; feminine products; hair and hair weaves and medications and syringes.

Be especially cautious when flushing wipes. In the U.S., 90% of wipes sold are non-flushable. When purchasing and using wipes, look for the “Do Not Flush” symbol on the front of the packaging. If you can’t find the symbol, err on the side of caution and dispose of the wipes in your garbage can.

Take care of your pipes and help reduce damage to the nation’s sewage systems by practicing smart flushing habits. To learn more about the study, visit FlushSmart.org/CA-Collection-Study-Report.

Update your window coverings to increase your safety, style and savings

(BPT) – Let’s explore the reasons why switching to cordless window coverings can enhance both the aesthetics and safety of your home.

Traditional corded window coverings may seem

harmless, but they pose significant risks, especially in homes with young children. The dangling cords can become entangled, leading to accidents such as strangulation. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), corded window coverings are one of the top hidden hazards in the home. Find out more from the Window Covering Safety Council.

Cordless options not only eliminate the risk of entanglement but also offer a sleek, modern aesthetic. Opt for durable materials that can withstand daily wear and tear and choose colors and patterns that complement your existing decor. With cordless window coverings, you can achieve a clean and clutter-free look while ensuring the safety of your loved ones.

Did you know using the right window coverings can help you save money? When selecting cordless window coverings for your home, consider energy-efficient window coverings, which can help you save on energy bills as window attachments help regulate the amount of sunlight and heat that enters



In addition to being safer, cordless window coverings can also help homeowners save money on utility bills.

and exits a home. With today’s high inflation costs, this is a no-brainer. Find out how you can increase your energy savings and comfort with AERC (Attachments Energy Rating Council)-certified products.





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What you should know before selecting cabinetry for your home

It's cliché, but the heart of the home is the kitchen! Where do guests gather during family celebrations? Where do families eat? Not the dining room anymore, the kitchen! It's where our children learn to bake, cook and it's often the hub of the home- a place where we chat about our day before racing off to school, baseball or work.

The kitchen is the heart of the home and the cabinets are the foundation of the kitchen. Oftentimes, cabinetry is in a home for 20-30 years. The quality you chose to invest in is not an area to cut corners. Since cabinetry is one of the most expensive items in the budget of a remodel or new construction project it's easy to consider going with the least expensive option. I mean, it's just cabinets right? As long as the color is right

then we're good?

Not really. There's so much more to it. For example, the finish. This is probably the most overlooked feature of cabinetry, but in my unpopular opinion, the most important. The finish will determine the life of the cabinetry. A common misconception is that construction is the most important but in my opinion after 10 years in the industry, it's second to the cabinet finish. The stain or the paint process used on your cabinetry can vary widely depending on the cabinet manufacturer or cabinet maker.

It starts with a controlled environment. Humidity and dust can wreak havoc on this process. If you've ever painted or stained anything, you know that you cannot get paint or stain to cure if it's super hot and humid, and if there's dust in the air.

you might as well forget the whole thing. You also know that you need proper ventilation and air protection for yourself while using certain products, breathing in those fumes can have both short- and long-term repercussions. Sadly, not all shops are using the proper conditions for a beautiful finish or a healthy environment for their finish team.

A factory cabinet finish is applied by talented application specialists who've gone through extensive quality control training, not machines alone as one might imagine when thinking "factory." The finish is then oven-cured between each coat creating a controlled cure you won't find in the smaller shops. The oven-cured finishes are what create the durability along with the amazing, consistent appearance. Think standard

nail polish versus a gel manicure at a salon ... which is going to last longer? Factory finishes are like the salon applied gel manicure.

It's not super sexy to consider a factory cabinet line compared to a "custom cabinet maker," but the word "custom" gets thrown around a lot, so let's specify what custom really means. Custom by definition means a "made to a particular customer's order;" it does not mean "made by hand." Most cabinet shops that label themselves "custom" are not making everything by hand and have more limitations when it comes to cabinet sizes. Factory cabinets can be made to a specific width, depth, height to the nearest 1/16 of an inch because they make all of their own doors - something most small shops purchase from an outside source.

With a solid foundation, you can then feel good about installing the beautiful quartz, granite or soapstone countertops you've heavily invested in. Hopefully you've chosen a sturdy, long-lasting foundation for that investment to rest upon. Stone countertops can be removed; I've done it, but there are many risks involved, and you'll need to sign a waiver to do so. The tops could break as they're being taken off; it's costly to have a team come out and remove them and you risk damaging appliances, backsplash tile and drywall by doing so. Thousands of dollars and peace of mind are at stake.

A factory cabinet typically comes with a warranty. Do your research. Has the company been in business a long time? Do they stand behind their product? Are they a good company to work with or work for? All of these factors will indicate the longevity of the company and the product they produce. A cabinet manufacturer's warranty will give you that added piece of mind that IF something goes pear-shaped, you're not hanging in the breeze. A warranty tells its customer that we don't do shortcuts; we don't want you to call us so we're producing a product that we feel you'll be satisfied with for years. They're there to make it right for you and the designers they sell to, the designers they've invested in through a specific vetting and training process.

Kitchen designers, ahhh

yes. The ones who put all the pieces together, take your vision and bring it to life. These souls are a unique breed. It takes a special skill to take a family's wants, needs, vision and budget and bring it all to life. Working with a kitchen designer who's familiar with what works and what doesn't, streamlines the design process. They make it fun! They make it easy! Imagine how many kitchens a designer creates in her or his career. They've used all the fancy pull-outs and organizers; they've seen ideas fall flat and they've brought new life back into homes and entertaining experiences. A good designer knows how to maximize any space. They know how to make a tiny bungalow kitchen look twice as big. They know how to incorporate an existing home's style with a remodel. They know how to keep the peace between all decision-makers and tradesmen. I often say that I'm a mediator, a marriage counselor, a fireman and a designer! Getting all parties input and creating a design that meets everyone's needs is a talent all on its own. Last but not least, they know how to make a house feel like a home. Choose wisely; a kitchen designer is someone you'll spend a lot of time with, someone who will usually help you make more decisions than anyone else involved. We're not just building kitchens and new homes, we're building relationships.

Duct Tape and Dad: A dynamic duo for everyday repairs

(StatePoint) From torn teddy bears and damaged tablets to leaky toilets and wobbly table legs, duct tape and dad will save the day. A new survey from Duck brand, maker of Duck Tape brand duct tape, revealed that 87% of fathers consider themselves the family's handyman, ready to swoop in with duct tape as their favorite fix-all. In fact, 95% of dads keep a roll nearby, whether on their workbench or in their toolbox.

“The survey confirms what we’ve long known -

that duct tape is a favorite fix-all for dads everywhere,” says Kerry Haugh, director of product marketing, Duct Tapes at Shurtape Technologies, LLC, the company that markets the Duck brand. “Duct tape is more than just a tool; it’s an innovative solution that fathers know they can rely on - so much so that they pass it down through the generations.”

The versatile tool empowers Mr. Fixit to tackle projects from ordinary to extraordinary. Ninety-one percent of father figures have

wielded the sticky stuff to mend something around the house, including everything from car bumpers and door-knobs to sneakers and toys, with 63% saying duct tape is their go-to tool for a quick repair. When a discreet fix is needed, a colored duct tape comes in handy to aesthetically patch rips in clothing, cracks in toys and leaks in household appliances.

The bond between dads and duct tape is a time-honored tradition. A heartfelt 71% of fathers recall watching their own dad use duct

tape to restore cherished items like phones, fishing rods, lawn mowers and light bulbs. The legacy of ingenuity and resourcefulness is one that 82% of dads hope to pass down to their children, with 74% of respondents saying that they've seen their dads repair something around the house with duct tape.

When it comes to fast fixes, nothing matches the reliability of dads and their trusty duct tape.

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A collage of various furniture items including dining tables, chairs, benches, and rocking chairs. The items are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some items overlapping. The furniture is made of wood and has a rustic, handcrafted appearance. The items include a large dining table with chairs and a bench, a round dining table with chairs, a rectangular dining table with chairs, a rocking chair, a bench, and a small table. The background is a light gray with a subtle floral pattern.

The basics of home inspections when buying a home

The process of buying a home involves a number of variables that present at various times throughout buyers' search for a home. For instance, real estate professionals typically advise buyers to receive a mortgage pre-approval prior to beginning their search for a new home. Once such preliminary measures have been taken care of, buyers can then search for a home and ultimately make an offer.

One of the more critical steps buyers can take when making an offer is insisting that the offer is contingent upon a home inspection. Home inspections offer a measure of protection that can save buyers from investing in properties that may look nice to the naked eye, but feature a host of costly problems beneath the surface. Individuals new to home buying may not know what to expect of the inspection process. In such instances, the following

rundown can shed light on home inspections.

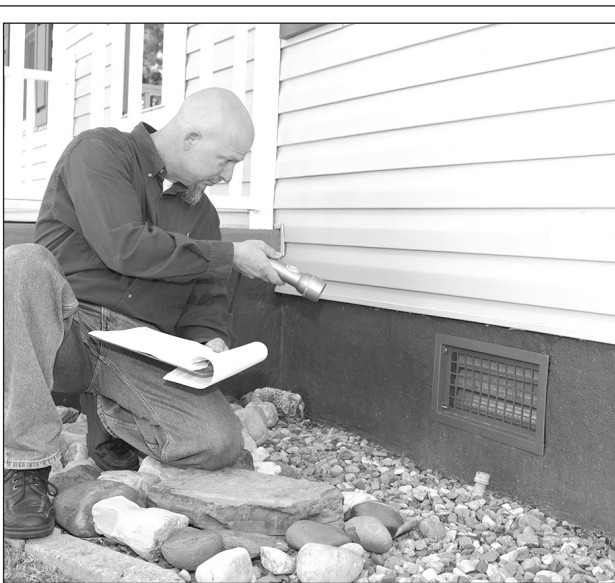
- Recognize inspection may be mandatory. Though it's not always the case, home inspections may be required by mortgage lenders. Lenders want to ensure borrowers can repay their loans, which might prove difficult if a home is in need of considerable repairs. That's why home inspections tend to be mandated by lenders, even if they're paid for by buyers. Estimates from HomeAdvisor indicate home inspections cost between \$279 and \$400 on average, but that cost is well worth the peace of mind of knowing you won't unknowingly be buying a money pit.
- You choose your own inspector. Buyers will choose their own home inspector, so it can pay dividends to start asking people you trust for recommendations even before you begin searching for a new home. Realtors also

may recommend inspectors they've worked with in the past. The International Association of Certified Home Inspectors® (nachi.org) also can help buyers find a home inspector.

- You can, and should, attend a home inspection. It's wise for buyers to attend a home inspection. Doing so allows them to see potential issues firsthand. Some seasoned home inspectors even prefer clients to attend an inspection so they can point out issues as they go through the house and answer questions directly rather than later on over the phone or via text or email. Though inspectors typically will answer questions off-site, it's easier for both buyer and inspector to discuss issues in person on the day of the inspection. And for buyers, this can be a great way to become more informed about the home inspection process.
- Expect to spend a good

deal of time at the inspection and not necessarily with the sellers present. The National Association of Realtors indicates inspections can take as long as three hours, so this won't be an in-and-out excursion. Buyers don't want to rush the process, so block out ample time on your schedule to attend the inspection. In addition, sellers typically are not home during an inspection, though it can happen. Buyers who don't want sellers present can request that they are not on the premises while the inspection takes place. There may not be anything to compel sellers to be off-site, but it can't hurt to ask.

Home inspections are a vital component of the home buying process. It's imperative that buyers take inspections seriously so they can feel confident they are not investing in a flawed property.



Contributed photo

One of the more critical steps buyers can take when making an offer is insisting that the offer is contingent upon a home inspection. Home inspections offer a measure of protection that can save buyers from investing in properties that may look nice to the naked eye, but feature a host of costly problems beneath the surface.

Renovations that help sell homes and reduce stress

The adage "there's a lid for every pot" suggests that, even in relation to the real estate market, there's bound to be a buyer for every home on the market. Price is a significant variable in the minds of potential buyers, but there are additional factors that can affect the impression people get of a given home.

Certain home features can tip the scales in favor of sellers. In fact, various renovations can help sell homes more readily. And these renovations need not cost a fortune. Putting a home on the market can be stressful, but these renovations may help it sell fast.

- A fresh coat of paint: Although painting is relatively inexpensive and a job that

some do-it-yourselfers can tackle, it's not a task relished by many. Painting is messy, it takes time and requires moving furniture. In fact, prepping a room for painting often is the toughest component of any painting job. But fresh coats of paint can create a strong first impression. Choose a neutral color and get painting. Jennie Norris, chairwoman for the International Association of Home Staging Professionals, says gray is a "safe" color that has been trending in recent years.

- Minor bathroom remodel: Remove dated wall coverings, replace fixtures, consider re-glazing or replacing an old tub and swap old shower doors for fast fixes in a bathroom. If there's more

room in the budget, replacing a tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity and fixtures can cost roughly \$10,500, says HGTV. You'll recoup an average of \$10,700 at resale, making a minor bathroom remodel a potentially worthy investment.

- Redone kitchen: The kitchen tends to be the hub of a home. This room gets the most usage and attention of any space, and it's a great place to focus your remodeling attention. The National Association of the Remodeling Industry estimates that homeowners can recover up to 52 percent of the cost of a kitchen upgrade upon selling a home. Buyers want a functional and updated kitchen. Trending features include drawer-style microwaves and dishwashers, commercial ranges, hidden outlets and even wine refrigerators.
- Updated heating and cooling system: Better Homes and Gardens reports that homeowners may be able to recoup 85 percent of the cost of new HVAC systems when they sell their homes. Heating, cooling and venti-

lation components are vital to maintain. You don't want buyers to be taken aback by an older system, and many millennial buyers are not willing to overlook old mechanical systems.

- Fresh landscaping: A home's exterior is the first thing buyers will see. If they

pull up to a home with eye-catching landscaping and outdoor areas that are attractive yet functional, they're more likely to be intrigued. Often buyers will equate a home that features an impressive exterior with upkeep inside as well. The American Nursery Landscape Association says

the average homeowner may spend \$3,500 for landscaping. Improving a home's chances to sell quickly and at a higher price often comes down to making smart improvements that catch the eyes of buyers.

Tip for electrical safety in your home

Check outlets. Overloading is a no-no. Make sure you're not plugging too many electrical devices into one outlet. But, just as important, and maybe more so, is checking the outlets themselves. Are any loose? Do any of them have discoloration or burn marks? That's a potential sign of electrical danger.

Be mindful of water. Remember to keep countertop appliances away from water sources like sinks and bathtubs. And check the outlets in your kitchen and bathroom to ensure they are ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets, which cut power if there's a ground fault.

Monitor extension cord use. If you have extension cords crisscrossing your rooms or using extension cords for appliances like window air conditioners that specifically advise against it, it's time to rethink that.



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Top reasons to consider a steel roof for your home

(StatePoint) Steel is increasingly becoming the go-to material used for residential roofing. According to industry experts, this is because steel offers both a range of design advantages, as well as features that align with sustainable living. Here are some of steel roofing’s biggest benefits and why you should consider it for your home:

Durability: Steel roofing is highly durable and can last for 50 years or more with proper maintenance. This longevity means that fewer roofing materials end up in landfills over time compared to shorter-lived roofing materials like asphalt shingles, which typically need replacement every 20-30 years.

Safety: Overall, steel roofing offers enhanced safety benefits due to its fire-resistance, wind-resistance, structural integrity, durability, resistance to pests and mold and low-maintenance requirements.

Recyclability: Steel has been recycled for over 100 years and is one of the most recyclable materials in the world. As a forerunner of the circular economy, it can be recycled infinitely into new steel products without losing its quality or durability. This reduces the amount of waste generated by roofing projects and conserves natural resources.

Energy efficiency: Alongside such technological innovations as solar panels and energy-efficient HVAC

(heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems, steel roofing is becoming integral to residential design, particularly for those looking to reduce their carbon footprint. This is because steel roofing reflects solar radiant heat, reducing cooling costs during hot weather. Many steel roofing products are also coated with reflective finishes that further enhance energy efficiency by reducing heat absorption.

Versatility: Steel roofing comes in a variety of styles, colors and profiles, allowing you to achieve the desired aesthetic for your home. Whether you prefer a traditional look or a modern design, steel roofing can accommodate a wide range of architectural preferences, enhancing the curb appeal and value of the property.

Long-term cost savings: Although the initial investment in steel roofing may be higher than some other roofing materials, its long lifespan and low maintenance requirements make it a cost-effective choice in the long run.

Adaptive and resilient design: Amidst the challenges posed by climate change and other environmental factors, responsible home design emphasizes resilience and adaptability. This entails using durable materials such as steel, which can withstand extreme weather events. By embracing innovative approaches from the outset, your home can be fortified to

withstand future uncertainties while helping ensure your safety and comfort.

Social responsibility: As a durable and versatile material, steel plays a vital role in home construction that

withstands the test of time while remaining affordable and accessible. Integrating steel into the design process can contribute to the well-being and prosperity of both individuals and communities,

ensuring that the future of housing is socially inclusive and responsible.

To learn more about how steel can benefit your home, visit <https://www.ussteel.com/hgtv-smart-home>.

Whether you’re building a home from scratch or you’re renovating your existing property, using durable, sustainable materials like steel from U.S. Steel can protect your wallet and the planet.

What to do to prepare your garden for winter

terring spots for insects and can contribute to disease. So, it’s imperative that weeds and debris are removed before the ground hardens in winter. Don’t wait until the ground hardens, as that can make it hard to remove the roots of weeds, adversely affecting the garden as a result.

• Prepare the soil. The Farmer’s Almanac advises homeowners to gently till the soil in their gardens so they can expose any insects before they settle in for the winter. Once garden soil is exposed, add a layer of compost, leaves, aged manure and, if necessary, lime, gently tilling it into the soil. According to the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, the only accurate way to determine if lawn or garden soil needs lime is to test it. Lime makes soil less acidic and reduces soil pH. Low soil pH makes it hard for certain plants to grow, but acidic soil is ideal when growing blueberries. Test the soil for lime and amend it depending on what you hope to grow in the spring

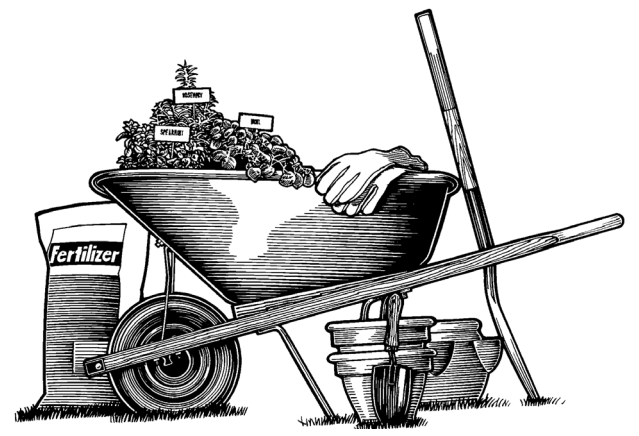
so it’s ready to thrive when winter ends.

• Remove dead or diseased plants. Dead or diseased plants should not be left in the garden through the winter. These plants can attract insects and are vulnerable to disease, which can make it hard for the garden to thrive in the spring.

• Protect fruit trees. If you have fruit trees, install mouse guards around the base to prevent mice and voles from killing the trees over the

winter. If left to their own devices over the winter, mice and voles may eat the bark of fruit trees, killing the trees as a result. The Farmer’s Almanac notes that mouse guards made of fine mesh hardware cloth can effectively protect fruit trees from hungry mice and voles over the winter.

A gardener’s work is never done, and the work to create beautiful spring gardens begins in the fall.



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TIPS from the Hansen Real Estate Group!

FALL:

The introductory season to Winter. But, before we button down the hatches and wait for whatever Mother Nature has in store, let’s consider yet another home project.

EXTENDING FAMILY SPACE: The Garage

More and more, people are gathering in their garage. You may not consider your garage a “gathering space”, but in a pinch it could be, and comfortably! And it’s what you do to make it “comfortable” that could also reap you rewards. When you think of comfort, think “basics”—insulation; eliminate the exposure to the outside.

INSULATION

True, good insulation will reduce energy costs even in the simplest of climate-controlled garages, but insulating the wall(s) between the garage and the house will also benefit your interior atmosphere. It will help in maintaining a more consistent temperature in those areas and reduce the cost to keep them warm.

DOORS

Don’t forget the garage entry door to the house. Worn weather stripping and gaps also allows exhaust, dirt, and pests to enter the home. Applying fresh weather stripping and/or using foam spray or caulk are all good to fill those smaller drafty areas. Speaking of doors, the quickest and most efficient way to control the elements in your garage is to replace the garage door! Some experts feel replacing a large garage door with two smaller doors is the most energy efficient, but that might not suit everyone’s needs. However, they do all agree that an updated door along with a good bottom seal WILL meet everyone’s goals! PLUS, it will enhance the exterior of your home.

MONEY WELL SPENT!

You win with extended family space, increased curb appeal, AND energy savings, all great selling points! If a spring sale is desired, work away those winter days by applying a fresh coat of neutral-colored paint; declutter, organize, and depersonalize—tedious, but effective tasks that will help you meet the spring housing market!

For even more tips on increasing your home’s value, obtain a Free Market Analysis by contacting a member of your Local, Trusted, and Professional Real Estate Team, the Hansen Real Estate Group!

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Dos and don'ts of bathroom renovations

Bathroom renovations are significant undertakings that cost homeowners sizable amounts of money. According to Remodeling magazine's "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," the average cost of a mid-range bathroom remodel across the United States in 2024 is around \$25,000. Homeowners who want an upscale remodel can expect to spend around \$80,000 in 2024.

Such a large financial commitment underscores the significance that homeowners get their bathroom remodels right. Mistakes will only increase the already substantial financial commitment homeowners must make, so it can help to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

DO work with a certified, reliable contractor. YouTube tutorials can give a false impression of renovation projects in relation to their degree of difficulty. Renovations as significant as bathroom remodeling projects require the skills and experience of professionals.

DON'T ignore return on investment (ROI). There's no denying certain projects provide a better ROI than others. The upscale bathroom remodel with a nearly \$80,000 price tag noted above may prove awe-inspiring, but homeowners looking to get as much of their money back at resale should know that such a renovation recovers 45 percent of homeowners' initial investment. By contrast, the mid-range bathroom remodel yields a 74-percent return, according to Remodeling magazine. Though ROI may not be the deciding factor for every homeowner, it definitely merits consideration when planning a project.

DO pay attention to the details. Planning a bathroom renovation can be overwhelming, as homeowners have many decisions to make before the project even begins. For example, homeowners will have to choose a vanity, fixtures for the vanity, light fixtures, toilet, showerhead, and an assortment of additional features when planning the project. Contractors work with clients to show them all of their options, and some will offer advice on products or materials if asked. But homeowners are ultimately the ones who will have to live with the choices they make during the planning process, so these details merit ample consideration and should not be treated as trivial.

DON'T emphasize cost over quality. Homeowners should do their best to establish a renovation budget and stay within that budget, but quality materials should take precedence over cost. Many budget-friendly furnishings and accessories are durable and aesthetically appealing, so homeowners need not enter a bathroom renovation thinking high-end products are their only options. But it's important that homeowners recognize the conventional wisdom that buyers get what they pay for when it comes to home renovations. If homeowners try to cut costs on materials, they may need to update or redo the bathroom much sooner than they would if they invest in quality furnishings and accessories the first time around.

Bathroom renovations can be costly. Remembering some simple dos and don'ts can give homeowners the peace of mind that their renovation investment will result in an impressive, durable space.

How to winterize a vacant home

A vast migration takes place when the temperatures begin to drop in the northernmost areas of the United States and even parts of Canada. No, it has nothing to do with feathered friends finding new roosts or certain mammals getting ready to hibernate. This migration involves the thousands upon thousands of people who retreat from one residence to head to another.

Snowbirds, as these migratory people are often called, are primarily retirees who split their living arrangements based on weather. Many spend the spring and summer months in one residence, generally in the northern portion of the country. Once the mercury begins to drop there, they trade that home for another in a more temperate locale, such as Florida, Louisiana, Texas, or even overseas. The Palm Beach Post reports that about 145,000 snowbirds flock to Palm Beach County alone each winter, raising the population by around 11 percent, according to the county's official figures. Across Florida, an estimated 900,000 to one million seasonal residents stay a month or more every winter.

When snowbirds or other people leave their homes for extended periods of time, it is essential they winterize properties that will sit vacant for months.

Protect against home damage

- Consider turning off the water supply completely if you will be away for an extended period of time; otherwise, a burst pipe may result in significant damage.
- Drain all water in pipes by opening the faucets and flushing the toilets to clear the water from the tanks and bowls. Place non-toxic anti-freeze in the toilet bowls to prevent any remaining water from freezing.
- If you will not be draining pipes and turning off the water, set the heating system to 55 F or higher to help keep the interior and wall cavities warm.
- Keep room and cabinet doors open to allow heat to circulate to areas where pipes are located.
- Shut off the water to outdoor faucets as well as the washing machine.
- Close up openings to the house so that rodents and insects cannot get inside and use a home for shelter.

Keep safe with snow and ice

- Make sure that gutters are free of debris, which can lead to potential ice dams and water collection around the foundation of the home.
- Hire someone to clear the sidewalks and driveway of snow and ice.
- Remove any tree branches that can be weighed down by snow and ice and fall onto the property.

Make the home look lived in

- Forward mail to your winter address, stop newspaper delivery and arrange to have any package deliveries picked up while you're away.
- Put motion-sensitive exterior lights and interior lights on timers. Set lights to come on at various times to discourage thieves or squatters.
- Ensure the alarm system is in good working order.
- Use deadbolts to secure doors and windows.

These steps and others can help protect a home while residents are away.



Bathroom renovations can be costly. Remembering some simple dos and don'ts can give homeowners the peace of mind that their renovation investment will result in an impressive, durable space.

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How to make a home more cozy

The meaning of the term “cozy” varies, as it pertains to home decor. For some, cozy may mean intimate spaces with lots of quilts and throws. For others, cozy could indicate bright and airy spaces enhanced by plenty of fresh foliage.

Regardless of how they define cozy, homeowners typically want their homes to be inviting and comfortable. With that in mind, the following are some ways to impart a cozy vibe to any living space.

- Make use of a fireplace. Flames lapping wood (or faux wood in the event of gas-powered fireplaces) can put anyone in a tranquil state of mind. Fireplaces add instant ambiance and make great places for people to congregate and engage in conversation. During warmer months when the fire isn’t blazing, decorative candles can be lit to mimic the same feel.
- Add texture in the design. Texture can be anything from a raised pattern on wallpaper to a knotty area rug to a mosaic piece of artwork. A home with texture tends to create cozier impressions than one with all sleek and smooth

surfaces.

- Enjoy a soft rug. Although many design experts say hardwood floors or laminate options are easier for allergies and keeping a home clean, a soft rug underfoot can be welcoming. Rather than wall-to-wall carpeting, place area rugs in spots that can use some cozying up, such as beneath beds and even under the dining table.
- Light candles. The warm, flickering light of candles adds cozy vibes in spaces. According to The Spruce and Paula Boston, a visual merchandiser for Festive Lights, candles can be used throughout a home to create instant atmosphere. Exercise caution with candles and fully extinguish them before retiring for the evening.
- Update bedding for the season. Crisp and light cotton and linen are cozy materials when the weather is warm. But when the temperature starts to dip, flannel or jersey bedding makes a bed that much more inviting, says Real Simple.
- Invest in lots of pillows. Pillows can instantly make a spot more cozy, whether it’s

the living room sofa or an outdoor lounging nook. Look for materials that are durable for the space in which they’re being used.

- Think about warm lighting. The transition from incandescent light bulbs to halogen and LED is beneficial from an environmental standpoint. However, LEDs illuminate with a more stark, blue light that can seem clinical in home spaces. Look for bulbs where the “temperature” can be customized. The more the color spectrum leans toward warm light, the more cozy a space will feel. This can be enhanced by putting some lights on dimmer switches, and toning down the brightness as needed.
- Install a bookshelf. Even for those who are strict devotees of e-readers, a shelf full of actual books interspersed with some well-placed knick-knacks can make a room feel more cozy. Books add texture, the feel of hallowed halls and libraries, and visual appeal.

Making a home more cozy doesn’t have to be complicated. A few easy modifications can improve interior spaces.



Contributed photo
There are any number of ways to make a home feel more cozy. Add some pillows, texture, lighting, rugs or candles; all will make a home feel more inviting.

Tip for electrical safety in your home

Check cords. When was the last time you checked the cords on your lamps, appliances and electronics? The obvious first step is to look for fraying or other damage. But also, be mindful of how they’re placed. Are your cords snaking their way under a carpet or furniture? Make sure they have a clear run from the unit to the outlet.

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One top trend to improve your home’s value: hardwood flooring

(BPT) - Whether you’re thinking about selling your home or just making some updates, it’s always smart to consider renovations that will enhance the enjoyment of your home and increase your property’s long-term value. One key improvement many homeowners consider is updating their home’s flooring to solid or engineered hardwood, an investment that can maximize a home’s style and value.

Hardwood flooring instantly transforms a space, and you can choose from many types and hues of wood to suit the design style that’s just right for you. You can also stay on-trend by using hardwood flooring throughout your home to achieve a seamless, cohesive look.

The National Realtor Association’s 2022 Remodeling Impact Report found that homeowners who install new hardwood flooring get an average return on investment (ROI) of up to 118%. On top of that, the National Wood Flooring Association has found that 99% of real estate agents believe homes with quality hardwood floors are easier to sell, and 90% believe they sell for a higher price. All of this means that hardwood floors can essentially pay for themselves in resale value.

The timeless appeal of hardwood flooring

Hardwood floors have

been around for a long time, and for good reason. They can create the perfect complement to a wide range of home design styles, offering natural tone, beauty and sophistication that’s hard to duplicate with any other material.

On top of that, hardwood floors are known for their timeless quality - hardwood has been a trusted flooring material for hundreds of years, and it’s near-assured that they will stay in style for generations to come.

Another advantage of hardwood flooring is that you can choose from a wide variety of styles and species of wood to achieve different looks, and you can consider either solid or engineered hardwood for even more options depending on the needs of your home.

Here are just a couple of examples of selections available to today’s homeowners.

Classic, enduring style

Hickory is the hardest of all North American woods, making it perfect for those who want beauty and long-lasting quality, especially for high-traffic areas. The five-inch-wide planks in LL Flooring’s natural hickory solid hardwood flooring are factory finished with premium aluminum oxide for a fortified finish, offering excellent resistance to stains, scuffs and scratches.

This natural option in

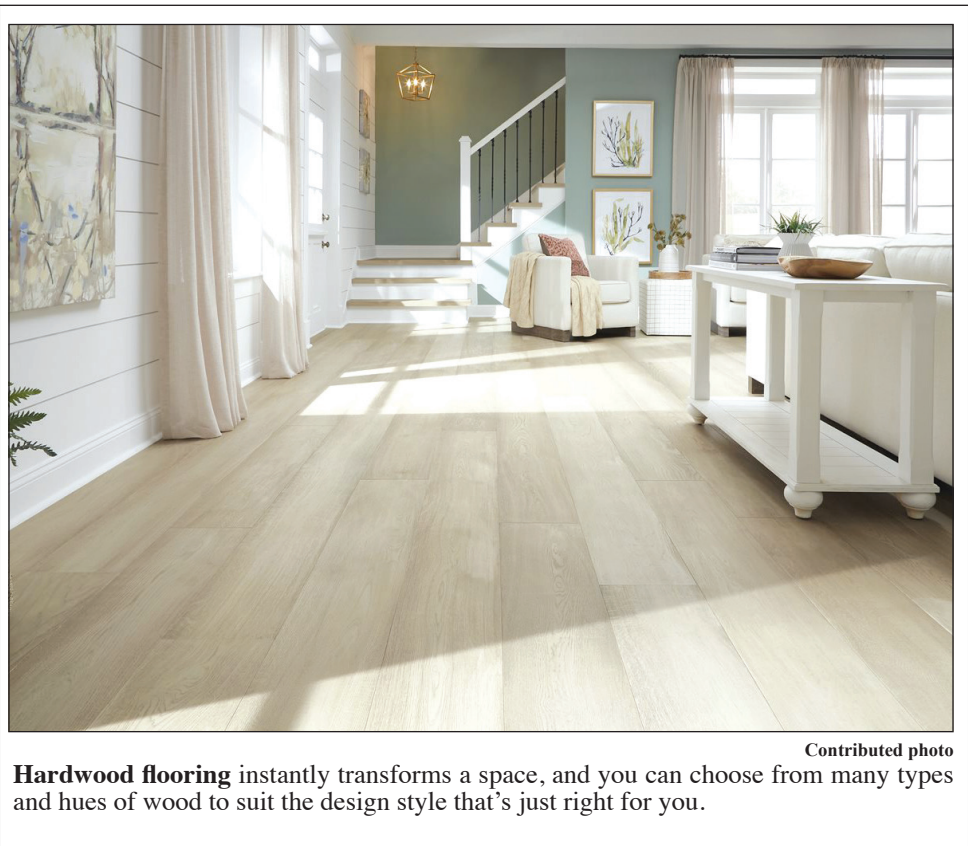
hickory flooring stands out for its high-contrast color variations and unique grain patterns, with colors running from light tans to deep browns and reddish tones laced throughout. Hickory floors are equally attractive in a more classic or traditional style home, for a sophisticated and modern city loft or a rustic country cabin.

Modern engineered elegance

Oak engineered hardwood flooring gives you the option for on-trend, wider planks (8.5 inches wide). The buttery cream coloring of this classic white oak flooring gives these blonde planks an inviting lightness and beauty that complements a variety of preferred styles, ranging from modern farmhouse, minimalist and Scandinavian to biophilic, eclectic and bohemian designs.

Engineered hardwood is an enhanced wood product that offers improved performance, and lighter tones can help to reflect the light in any room of your home for a more open, bright and airy ambience.

Whichever hardwood flooring option you choose, you can relax and enjoy its beauty now and for years to come - or prepare your home to sell - knowing that you’ve made a sound investment in the future of your home.



Contributed photo
Hardwood flooring instantly transforms a space, and you can choose from many types and hues of wood to suit the design style that’s just right for you.

Almost two-thirds of home fires are due to human error.

Be prepared. A working smoke alarm can double the chance of escaping from a home fire safely, but that’s just the first line of defense. It’s also important to create a home fire escape plan. Kidde’s fire safety toolkit is a great resource to help families prepare for a fire emergency.

While many people assume that a fire can’t happen to them, the truth is that everyone makes mistakes. Having the right life-saving tools can help protect you and your family.

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Porch and patio pick-me-up ideas

(StatePoint) If your concrete porch and patio surfaces are plain, ugly or in disrepair, you may assume the only solution is to hire a contractor for a complete overhaul. The truth is that you can resurface these spaces with minimal DIY experience in just a few days. Here's how:

Make repairs first
As with any project, the key to success is preparation. First, pressure wash your surface, allowing it to thoroughly dry. Then use a durable repair product to fill in cracks, pits and holes. Impact-, moisture-, salt- and mold-resistant, this odorless,

hard stone compound can patch flaws or function as a smooth new base. Because it doesn't dry quickly like concrete, you can take your time and apply the product slowly. While the normal cure time is 24 hours, you'll want to increase your dry time when applying the product in

damp, cool conditions, or if applying a very thick coat.

Choose a new surface
Give your space a huge upgrade by applying a new surface with a DIY product. The real stone surfaces available, will improve the look of your porch or patio while enhancing the functionality of the space, and there are many options to choose from, depending on the amount of skill you have and the time you want to invest. There are unique formulas offering a seamless overlay that is both attractive and functional, whereas a self-priming formula means one less step, for instant color and beauty and

an attractive textured finish. Want to get creative? Consider an all-in-one kit, which includes a pre-mixed primer, base coat, accent coat, clear sealer, stone texture roller and grout line stencil tape. While this process takes a little time, it's easy to do and will allow you to design a stunning decorative stone surface that will stand up to extreme weather. Finally, a Granite Stone Coating is easily applied in a thin uniform layer using a scraper, trowel or flooring squeegee for dependable durability and a visual effect that is timeless and stunning.

Complete your project
Finalize your porch or

patio pick-me-up in one step by applying a sealer with anti-slip benefits. It is not only a high-performance clear coat that will strengthen and protect your new surface, it will help keep family members and visitors safe from falls and mishaps. In fact, its commercial-grade anti-slip ratings are up to twice the OSHA standard and its high-performance, odorless water-based technology bonds firmly to all types of flooring materials. With just a little effort and minimal expense, you can resurface your porch and patio for a total transformation of your outdoor spaces.

Projected timelines for popular renovation projects

Renovations help homeowners customize their homes to align with their needs and wants. Remodeling may be necessary to replace outdated fixtures and features, address mistakes previous homeowners may have made, or to make a home more functional.

Homeowners often find it beneficial to hire professional contractors when they have work to be done around the house to ensure the job gets done to code and to their satisfaction. Timelines for home remodeling projects vary depending on a number of variables, including the size of a crew as well as the scope of the project.

Once a project commences, the timeline can feel endless. The following are estimates of timelines for top remodeling projects to give homeowners an idea of how long their renovation projects may last, courtesy of Renofi, a company that provides a lending platform leveraged by credit unions nationwide to offer loans to consumers.

- Kitchen: There are a lot of moving parts to a kitchen renovation, involving the services of electricians, plumbers, structural experts and even interior design professionals. Not to mention the needs of craftspeople who can make custom cabinetry and countertops. Kitchen remodels can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks.

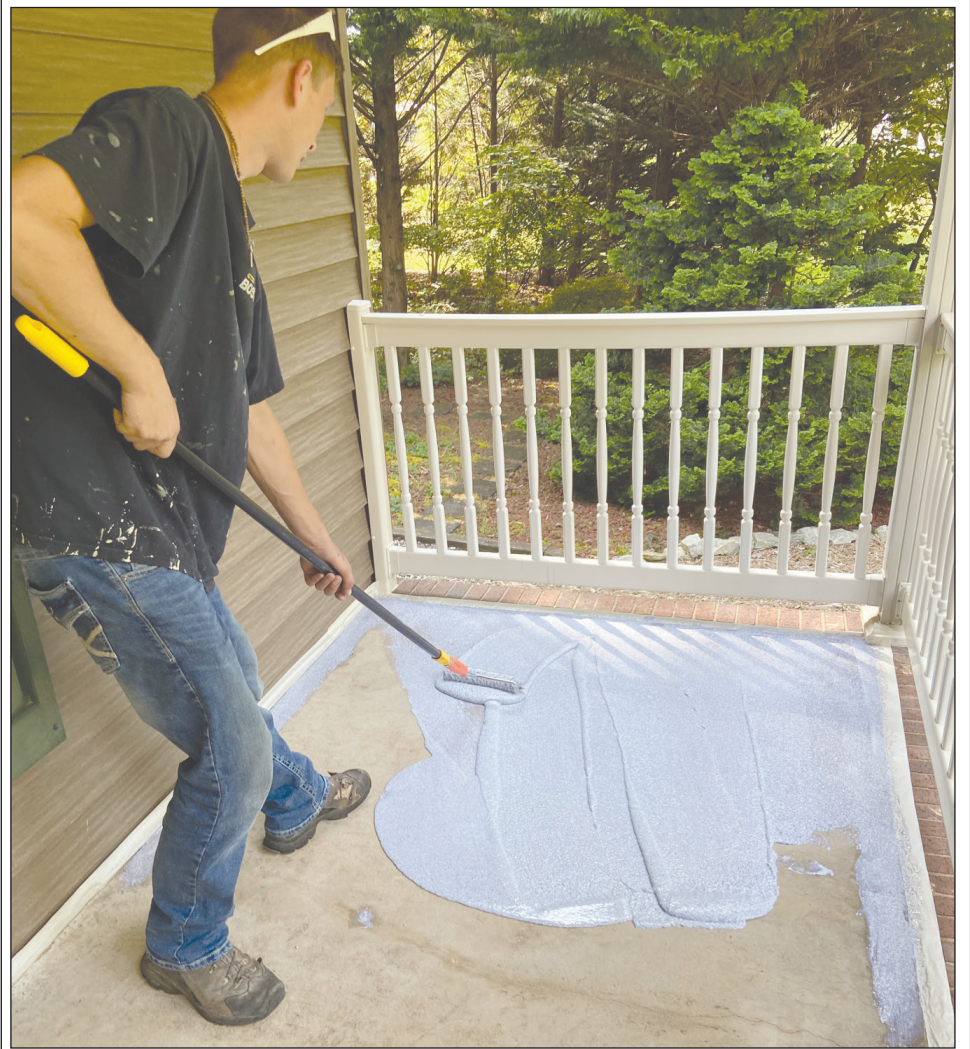
- Bathroom: The process of a bathroom

renovation typically involves demolishing the old bathroom, removing old fixtures and starting from the ground up. As with a kitchen remodel, bathroom jobs require the services of different professionals. That is why homeowners can expect three to 10 weeks for a bathroom, depending on the scope of the project.

- Finishing a basement: Finishing a basement can add valuable living space to a home. Establishing a home theater space or man cave may require installing framing, insulation, utilities, drywall, flooring and any additional needs if the finished basement will have a bathroom or necessitate additional plumbing. A finished basement project can last one to two months. But the good news is that typically the rest of the house is livable while the work is being done, so residents will not be disrupted.

- Whole home remodel: Hogan Design & Construction says that a whole house remodeling project can take anywhere from 16 weeks to 24 weeks. More involved projects can take longer.

Remodeling a home often involves a considerable investment of time and money. Knowing how long a homeowner will be inconvenienced by the work can help the household plan accordingly.



Contributed photo
There are a number of ways homeowners can resurface their porches and patios with minimal DIY experience and in just a few days. There a number of products that will give your space a huge up-grade just by applying a new surface with a DIY product.

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Seven Fall Tips for Readyng Your Outdoor Power Equipment for Winter

Prep equipment for season changes, save time and future headaches

After your lawn gets its last cut before winter, it will be time to put away spring and summer outdoor power equipment, like lawn mowers, leaf blowers and trimmers. It's also important to ready snow throwers, generators and other small engine equipment for winter use. How and when you prepare your equipment for seasonal changes can save you time and money later, says the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI). "Readyng your equipment for winter needs is important as the weather changes," says Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI. "It's also important to put your fall equipment away correctly. What you do now when you put away your equipment, sets you up for an easier start in the spring."

Here are seven tips from OPEI to ensure snow throwers will be ready when the flakes fly and chainsaws, generators and other equipment are ready for winter storms. Also, your lawn mower and other spring equipment will be available and ready for use when warmer temperatures return.

#1 - Review owner's manuals. Re-familiarize yourself with how to handle equipment safely. Lost manuals can be found online. Save a copy on your computer if possible, so it can be consulted when needed. Be familiar with your equipment, and all its features, including how to turn it off quickly and safely.

#2 - Service all equipment. Before storing spring and summer equipment, clean and service it or take it to a small engine repair shop. Change engine oil and safely dispose of the old oil. Service the air filter, and do other

maintenance as directed by the owner's manual. Check winter equipment and see if any maintenance and repairs are required.

#3 - Handle fuel properly. Unused fuel left in gas tanks over the winter can go stale and even damage equipment. Before storing equipment, add fuel stabilizer to the gas tank; then run the equipment to distribute it. Turn the engine off, allow the machine to cool, then restart and run until the gas tank is empty. For winter equipment, buy the recommended type of fuel no more than 30 days before use. Use fuel with no more than 10% ethanol in outdoor power equipment. Use a fuel stabilizer if recommended by the manufacturer. Get more information on safe fueling for outdoor power equipment at LookBeforeYouPump.com.

#4 - Charge batteries. Remove and fully charge batteries before storing. Don't store batteries on metal shelves or allow them to touch metal objects. Store them on a plastic or wood shelf in a climate-controlled structure.

#5 - Shelter equipment from winter weather. Store spring and summer equipment in a clean and dry place, such as a garage, barn or shed. Winter equipment should be kept away from the elements, but be easily available for use.

#6 - Prepare, prepare, prepare. Make space in the garage or basement before the weather changes so there is room to store larger yard items. Remove sticks, debris, dog and kid's toys and other items from your yard that can damage or destroy equipment. Clear the paths used regularly, especially during

the winter when snow can "hide" things.

#7 - Have the right weather appropriate extension cord

for your generator. Keep heavy duty outdoor-rated extension cords on hand. Ensure the cord is the right

length to operate the generator a safe distance from the building. Never operate a generator indoors, in a garage,

breezeway or under an open window or near any air intake for a building.

Four things to know about kitchen renovations

Kitchens are often described as the most popular room in a home, and that's not mere conjecture. A 2022 survey from House Digest asked participants to identify the room they consider most important in their homes, and roughly 41 percent chose the kitchen.

Residents tend to congregate in kitchens in the morning and then again in the evening when meals are prepared and, in homes without formal dining rooms, eaten. With so many people interested in kitchen renovations, the following are four things homeowners should know about these popular improvement projects.

Expect to spend some money. Most home improvement projects require a significant financial investment, but kitchen renovations are among the more expensive undertakings. The overall cost of a project will depend on a host of variables unique to each home, including homeowners' preferences, but HomeAdvisor estimated the average kitchen remodel in 2023 cost between \$14,611 and \$41,432. Homeowners considering an upscale kitchen remodel may receive six figure estimates for such projects.

Expect a good return on investment. If sticker shock settles in when receiving an initial kitchen remodel estimate, perhaps it can help homeowners to know that such a project may provide a strong return on investment

(ROI). According to Remodeling magazine's "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," a minor kitchen remodel provides a 96 percent ROI. A major kitchen remodel mid-range (49 percent) and a major kitchen remodel upscale (38 percent) did not provide as notable a ROI.

Expect the project to take some time. Kitchens are large rooms with a lot of components, so renovating these spaces can take some time. Estimates vary depending on the size of the room, the scale of the remodel and the materials chosen, but Angi reports a kitchen remodel for

most homes takes six weeks to four months. That's a sizable window, and it reflects the likelihood that unforeseen issues like supply chain interruptions or the discovery of mold will arise at some point during the renovation. Though it's impossible to determine precisely how long a project will take before it begins, homeowners renovating their kitchens may want to plan for the project to take two months if not longer.

Expect to use your kitchen during the renovation. If the timeline of a renovation is scary, homeowners should know they will likely be able

to use their kitchen even after the project begins. Though the room might not remain a popular gathering space once the work starts, Angi notes kitchens are typically out of commission for around six weeks during a renovation. That still requires some pre-planning in relation to meals, but it also suggests homeowners won't be without a kitchen for months on end.

Kitchen renovations are popular projects. Homeowners who know what to expect before such projects commence can make it through a renovation more smoothly.



Contributed photo

Homeowners can expect a return on their investment in a kitchen remodel. There are things to keep in mind when contemplating a kitchen upgrade. Kitchens are large rooms with a lot of components, so renovating these spaces can take some time. Estimates vary, depending on the size of the room, the scale of the remodel and the materials chosen, but a kitchen remodel for most homes takes six weeks to four months.

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Senior-friendly and simple interior renovations

Home is where the heart is. That sentiment may be especially true for seniors who have spent decades living in their homes. A lot of hard work goes into home ownership, and seniors who have lived in the same space for a while undoubtedly have countless memories within the walls of their homes. A lifetime of experiences



Contributed photo
Grab bars in bathrooms can make homes safer for seniors with limited mobility.

in a home can make it hard to leave, but many seniors experience diminished mobility as they age. Mobility issues can make it hard for seniors to traverse their homes, but aging homeowners can make various renovations to make a home more accessible.

Revamp entryways and staircases. A 2020 study of 1,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that 28 percent of individuals age 65 and older who don't exercise regularly struggle with activities like walking up stairs. The study, commissioned by Total Fitness, also found that 14 percent of men and women over 65 who regularly engage in moderate exercise still find it challenging to climb up and down a flight of stairs. Seniors facing similar challenges can install a ramp at their home's entryway so they can comfortably go in and out. Inside, a chair lift can ensure seniors are not struggling to move from one floor to another.

Raise the outlets through-out the home. They're easily overlooked, but outlets, particularly those outside the kitchen, tend to be close to the floor. AARP notes that's no accident, as outlets are generally placed at a height equal to the length of a hammer to save time with measuring when buildings are being constructed. Outlets close to the floor can be difficult for seniors with mobility issues to reach. Relocating the outlets a little higher off the floor is not an expensive renovation, but it can make a home more accessible for seniors who have difficulty bending down or getting down on one knee.

Install door knob extensions. Verywell Health notes that nearly half of all people age 65 and older have arthritis or another rheumatic condition. Arthritis can make it difficult for seniors to grip and turn door knobs. Door knob extensions can make it easier for seniors with arthritis to open the doors in their homes. Such extensions are roughly five-inch levers that can be installed over an existing door knob, making it easier to grab and pull down. Extensions save seniors the hassle of turning the knob, which some may find painful and almost impossible.

Renovate the bathroom. Bathroom renovation projects can be costly, but seniors with mobility issues should know that bathrooms can pose a particularly dangerous threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that roughly three million older adults are treated for fall injuries in emergency departments each year. A 2019 analysis published in The Journals of Gerontology noted that 22 percent of in-home falls resulted in a change in the person's walking ability. Replacing a step-over shower with a zero-step alternative can make it easier for seniors with mobility issues to get in and out of the shower, thus reducing their risk for falls. Grab bars along shower walls and a chair inside the shower can make it easier to bathe and towel off safely.

Seniors with mobility issues can make their homes more accommodating through an assortment of simple, yet effective renovations.

Leaving town? Here's how to prep your home

(StatePoint) If you're planning to travel, you're in good company. Eighty-two percent of adults in the United States – that's more than 212 million people – are planning on doing the same, according to The Vacationer's travel and trends survey. As you pack your bags, it's also important to prepare your home for your absence. While catching some summer sun, you can help protect your home and possessions using these tools and strategies:

1. **Leverage technology:** The latest technology can streamline your home security and keep you informed of what's going on at home. Philips Hue, known for its premium smart lighting, has recently integrated smart home security into its suite of

smart home technology with the introduction of Philips Hue Secure. The brand's all-new Secure cameras keep watch on your home at all times. Featuring a crisp and clear 1080p HD livestream, night vision, and a speaker for two-way talk and sound alarms, these cameras are your eyes and ears when you're not there. Plus, the system's sensors send you an alert and trigger lights as soon as someone opens a window, door, cabinet or safe. With alerts sent straight to your phone, and the ability to manage your system easily from your mobile device using the app, including triggering light or sound alarms, you'll have smart home security in the palm of your hand.

2. **Manage lighting:**

Speaking of smart home lighting, this technology can help give the impression that your home is occupied, helping deter would-be intruders from even stepping onto your property. Use a smart home lighting system to strategically manage settings from your device while you're away.

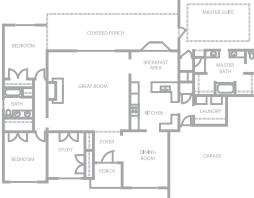
3. **Hold your mail:** Depending on the length of your trip, it may be a good idea to contact the U.S. Postal Service and request that they hold your mail while you're gone. Likewise, if you subscribe to any newspapers, the last thing you'll want is a growing stack of dailies on your front driveway or lawn advertising your absence. Contact publications and ask them to hold delivery until you return.
4. **Enlist a neighbor:** Pair tech surveillance with a good old-fashioned neighborhood watch. Ask a trusted friend or neighbor to keep an eye on things and to be in touch if they notice any suspicious activity.
5. **Tidy up:** While not related to home security, a few additional measures can help ensure your comfort when your vacation ends. Be sure to take out the trash and recycling as close to your departure as you can in order to avoid unpleasant odors in the summer heat. Tidy up. Sweep, do the dishes and wipe down surfaces so you can return to clean spaces. And as you approach your house upon your return, use your HVAC app to restore temperatures to their standard settings.



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Suspend any deliveries expected while traveling or planning to be away from home for an extended amount of time.



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How to prepare for power outages and stay safe this winter: Life-saving tips from CPSC

(BPT) - When a severe weather event like a winter storm hits your town, a portable generator can power your necessary appliances, electronic devices and medical equipment. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is encouraging consumers who use portable generators to learn how to operate them safely to prevent carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

CO is known as the invisible killer because it's colorless and odorless. Often, people don't realize they have CO poisoning until it's too late. According to a recent report from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, non-fire carbon monoxide deaths associated with the

use of consumer products, an estimated 250 consumer product-related non-fire CO deaths occurred in the U.S. in 2019. Most of these deaths occurred in colder months, with more than half occurring November through February.

Since 2009, portable generators have been associated with 40% of all non-fire CO deaths related to consumer products under CPSC's jurisdiction.

This winter, CPSC has six life-saving tips to protect your family from CO poisoning.

Never operate a portable generator indoors

Never operate a portable generator inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace, shed or other enclosed spaces. Opening doors or windows

won't provide enough ventilation to prevent the buildup of lethal CO levels.

Don't operate a portable generator close to your home

Ensure that portable generators are operated at least 20 feet from your house. Don't operate a generator on a porch or in a carport. It may be convenient, but it's too close to home and puts your family at risk of CO poisoning. Direct the generator's exhaust away from your home and other buildings where someone can enter. Close windows and seal off vent openings that are near the generator or in the path of

its exhaust.

Don't skip maintenance

Regularly check and maintain your portable generator to ensure it will work properly when needed. Read and follow all labels, instructions and warnings on the generator and in the owner's manual.

Purchase a portable generator with safety features

When searching for a portable generator, look for models with a CO shut-off. This safety feature automatically shuts off the generator when high levels of CO are present around the generator.

Models that are certified to the latest PGMA G300-2018 and UL 2201 safety standards are estimated by CPSC to reduce deaths from CO poisoning by 87% and 100%, respectively.

Install CO alarms

A CO alarm is the last line of defense and can save lives. Install battery-operated CO alarms or CO alarms with battery backup on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas. Interconnected CO alarms are best because when one sounds, they all sound. Test CO alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed. Never ignore an alarm when it sounds. Get outside im-

mediately, then call 911.

Keep outside vents clear

Clear snow away from the outside vents for fuel-burning appliances, such as furnaces, so that dangerous carbon monoxide does not build up inside the house.

Keep your family safe this winter by using these six tips. To learn more about the dangers of CO and how to protect yourself during a power outage, visit CPSC.gov/Safety-Education.

SOURCE: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

Three tips for first-time home buyers

Real estate has garnered considerable attention since 2020, and for good reason. Though speculators and real estate professionals may point to a number of variables that have affected the market for homes in recent years, the pandemic certainly was among those factors. Real estate prices and mortgage interest rates increased significantly during the pandemic and have remained well above pre-pandemic levels ever since.

The spike in home prices and interest rates has had a significant impact on young home buyers, some of whom feel as though their dream of home ownership may never be realized. And data from

the National Association of Realtors (NAR) indicates the median age of home buyers is now significantly higher than it was two decades ago. In 2023, the median age of buyers was 49, which marked an increase of 10 years compared to the average buyer age 20 years ago.

First-time home buyers may face a more challenging real estate market than they would have encountered just a half-decade ago. The following three tips can help such buyers successfully navigate the market as they look to purchase their first home.

1. Expect to move quickly. Inventory remains very low, which means buyers are in heated competition for the

few homes that are on the market. In late 2023, NAR data indicated the rate of home sales was the lowest it had been in 13 years, so buyers will likely need to move quickly and make an offer if they see a home they like, as chances are the property won't be on the market too long before it's sold. In fact, the NAR noted that homes spent an average of just 23 days on the market in October 2023.

2. Apply for mortgage preapproval. The competitive nature of the market for buyers means it's in their best interests to arrange financing prior to beginning their home search. A mortgage preapproval can be a competitive advantage, as it indicates to sellers that buyers won't be denied a mortgage or lack financing after making an offer. The financial experts at NerdWallet note that buyers will be asked to provide details about their employment, income, debt and financial accounts when applying

for mortgage preapproval. Gather this information and clear up any issues, such as credit disputes or delinquent accounts, prior to applying for preapproval.

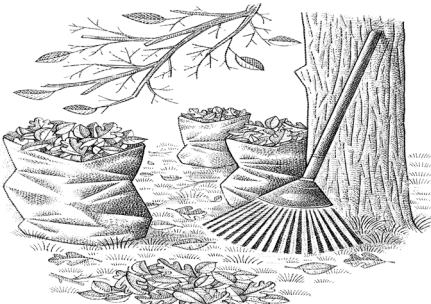
3. Set a realistic budget and expect to offer over asking price. A financial planner and/or real estate professional can help first-time buyers determine how much they should be spending on a home. In the current market, buyers should know they will likely need to pay more than asking price for a home. For example, the NAR reports that 28 percent of homes sold for above list price in October 2023. With that in mind, first-time buyers may do well to look for homes that are under budget in anticipation of offering more than list price after seeing a property.

The real estate market remains competitive for buyers. First-time buyers can utilize three strategies to increase their chances of realizing their dream of home ownership.



Contributed photo

Ensure that portable generators are operated at least 20 feet from your house. Don't operate a generator on a porch or in a carport. It may be convenient, but it's too close to home and puts your family at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Direct the generator's exhaust away from your home and other buildings where someone can enter. Close windows and seal off vent openings that are near the generator or in the path of its exhaust.



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Snow blower safety tips

When snow hits certain areas hard, cleanup will be necessary. It is essential for homeowners and business owners to get outdoors promptly to remove snow from walkways for the safety of pedestrians. Shoveling snow can be back-breaking work, particularly when the snow is very wet or compacted. That's why many people have invested (or plan to invest) in snow blowers to make faster work of snow removal. While these tools are quite effective, they require caution and proper technique to help avoid injuries. The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates there are 5,740 hospital emergency room-related injuries associated with snow blowers each year. The organization Safety Now says most injuries associated with snow blowers involve injuries to the hands or fingers, including amputation. Individuals can prevent common injuries and even death by following these snow blower safety guidelines.

- Read the owner's manual to understand all of the controls and features before use.
- Dress accordingly for the weather, including using sturdy footwear with good traction. Boot or shoe grippers can reduce the risk of slips and falls. Also, avoid loose clothing, as scarves or jackets can become tangled in moving parts of the machine.
- Start the snow blower outside and not in a garage or shed. Gas-powered devices give off carbon monoxide.
- Stay focused on the task at hand, which means using the snow blower only when sober and not under the influence of medications that can cause drowsiness.
- Working at a brisk pace can help prevent the snow blower blades from getting clogged from the snow sticking. Wet, heavy snow is more likely to clog the machine, so it may require more passes to get the job done.
- Clogs can occur and require extreme caution to

dislodge. Always turn off the snow blower and disengage the clutch, says the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. Wait for the impeller blades to stop spinning. Always use a broom handle or a stick to clear compacted snow. Never stick your hand down the chute or around the blades, even if the power switch is off.

- Keep all safety shields and mechanisms in place on the machine.
- Do not leave a snow blower unattended.
- If the snow blower is an electrical version, use an extension cord designed for outdoor use and plug it into an outlet equipped with a ground fault circuit interrupter. Keep the extension cord away from the auger.

Even though snow blowing can be less physically taxing than manually shoveling snow, it still exerts the body. Take frequent breaks to rest.



Contributed photo
While snow blowing can be less back-breaking than shoveling, there are safety guidelines recommended to prevent injuries.

Exercise caution where you toss the snow, and make sure other people, particularly children, are not in the path of snow removal.

Nine signs of pest infestation

Individuals want a home that is welcoming and comfortable. Unfortunately, many conditions that people find appealing also appeal to pests. Pests may be more problematic at certain times of year, such as when weather is extreme and pests like rodents or even raccoons seek refuge in a home. During times of year when temperatures are mild, certain insects may begin to hatch or swarm, becoming problematic around the home.

Some signs of pests taking up residence may be readily apparent, while others may be less obvious. The following are nine signs of pest infestation in or around a home.

Droppings: Small droppings may indicate that pests are nearby. Droppings will vary depending on the insect or rodent. It's good to familiarize yourself with the appearance of various droppings, from mice to termites to bed

bugs.

Footprints: Footprints are another sign of pest infestation. Footprints left in dirt around a home, or in dusty areas in the attic or basement, may show that pests are tracking in and out of the house.

Sawdust piles or trails: Sawdust could be indicative of termites or ants. Insects like carpenter bees also may burrow into areas of wood and leave sawdust behind.

Shed wings, skins and casings: Many insects molt and, during this process, will shed certain parts of their anatomy to grow larger. Roaches, bed bugs and beetles are some pests that might be scattering sheds or egg casings in a home. Termite wings are discarded once the swarms choose a new location for the colony.

Foul odors: Musty or foul smells, particularly in hidden areas, may indicate pests are nesting nearby.

Unexplained noises: Scratching or scurrying in walls or floors often indicates pests are present.

Bites: Waking up in the morning with welts or red areas on the skin might indicate the presence of bed bugs or other biting insects.

Presence of nests: Those who can see nests in corners or undisturbed areas of the home likely have pests present. Rodents often use chewed cardboard, insulation, paper and other scavenged items to create nests, according to exterminators.

Increased number of beneficial insects: An influx of spiders and other predatory insects may indicate there are plenty of food sources in the home for them to feast on.

Pests can be problematic, but homeowners who recognize signs of infestation can take prompt action.

Kitchen to curb - simple ways to refresh your home

(BPT) - But before listing your home - and well in advance of staging photos for online real estate sites - experts suggest evaluating your home's curb appeal and other cosmetic features that can help attract potential buyers. Consider this: The Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics reports that excellent curb appeal alone can raise your home's value by as much as 7% and many realtors will tell you the same.

With the right tools and a bit of creativity, even new DIYers can undertake home improvement projects designed to enhance aesthetic appeal and add value to their living spaces. One such versatile tool that can help you achieve significant upgrades without spending a fortune is the rotary tool. Capable of tackling a wide array of projects with its ability to cut, carve, engrave, polish and beyond, the rotary tool opens a world of creative possibilities for enhancing your home's aesthetics and functionality. To help homeowners unleash their DIY creativity, Dremel®, the creator of the high-speed rotary tool, shares five tips and project ideas:

Tidy up flooring. Over time, the grout in between tile can be susceptible to buildup - whether it's grime, mold or mildew - causing it to look dull or dirty. While cleaning it by hand can be a tedious, time-consuming task, enlisting the help of a solution and tool will have you knocking that item off your to-do list in no time. Start with a bathroom cleanser to clean any grout stains, followed by a rotary tool to quickly and easily remove the dirty or missing old grout. Top it off by regrouting where needed and from there, you're well on your way to impressing prospective buyers.

Refinish outdoor furni-

ture and fixtures. Can you see rust on your outdoor railings, lawn furniture, mailbox, doorknobs, hinges or other metal outdoor features? Are they discolored, weathered or worn? Grind away rust in small, detailed sections, then sand or buff the surface before painting.

Stand out from the others. A home with custom shelves can be an effective, easy way to add appeal and differentiate your house from the ones around you. Express your creativity while incorporating sleek added storage with a shelf, effectively concealing clutter and optimizing space. Simply grab your favorite rotary tool and get started. From cutting wood to routing, the various rotary attachments on the market make this tool the right one for the job.

Customize the look of your home. In preparation for selling your new home, cordless rotary tool can help elevate your space and infuse some personality. This lightweight tool is a go-to, whether it's engraving your home address into your wooden mailbox or adding the address number to the perimeter of your home.

Leave them floored. Flooring can be a challenge to maintain, especially if you have little ones or pets running around. Looking to paint or refurbish? Make sure you start with an even base. With a sanding accessory on your rotary tool, you can easily smooth dents and gouges or sand splinters in wood flooring to create a prepared foundation to work off of before painting or sealing and save yourself time and money by avoiding replacing the floors completely.

Increasing your home's curb and cosmetic appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money or require a pro's help.

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Optimize a small kitchen with these tips

(StatePoint) Whether you live in tight quarters or like many Americans, have a smaller, secondary kitchen in your home, there are strategies for making the most of compact cooking areas, none of which involve compromising style or functionality.

Use smart storage
Sneak in extra storage in unexpected places without contributing to kitchen clutter. Install pull-out cabinets. Use an over-the-sink dish drying rack. Mount a magnetic knife sheaf to your backsplash. Use a rolling storage cart that can be moved out of the way when not needed, being sure to opt for one with a wooden top to boost your

counter real estate. All these solutions will help free up more of your workspace, ensuring you have plenty of room to chop, mix and stir.

Go multifunctional
Top-notch appliances don't need to be huge to provide professional-style performance. It's all about finding models that offer multifunctionality.

Get creative
It's a good idea to get a bit creative about where appliances will actually fit in your compact kitchen.

Build upward
Don't forget to think about your kitchen from a vertical perspective, too. This can help you maximize every

square inch of the room. Add hooks to the upper areas of your walls, or even hang items from the ceiling. Put seasonal tools and ingredients up on the highest shelves and rotate them as needed. A small, foldable stepstool takes up almost no storage space but can help you reach those seldom-used items when it's time.

A cozy kitchen is no cause for distress. Whether it's throwing an elaborate dinner party or cooking for a busy family, you can get a lot done in your smaller kitchen with wise appliance choices and creative storage solutions.



You can get a lot done in your smaller kitchen with wise appliance choices and creative storage solutions.

Transform countertop surfaces in just a weekend

(StatePoint) Did you know that you don't have to spend tons of time or money on home interior updates? In fact, you don't even have to engage a contractor to elevate your spaces in a big way.

Here are three stunning methods for completely transforming stained, burned or otherwise drab countertop surfaces in your kitchen, bath or other areas of your home. The beauty is that each project costs less than \$300, and you can complete one in a weekend, even if you don't consider yourself especially handy:

1. A marble look: Installing marble countertops can cost thousands of dollars and disrupt your life for weeks, if not months. Fortunately, there's a way to get the same beautiful, one-of-a-kind look of marble with just a few supplies. The Marble Dream Resurfacing Kit from Daich Coatings is a new stone coating system engineered to be applied in a few simple steps, with no special artistic skill required. Available in both Pristine White and Cosmos Black, every installation will look completely unique based on how you blend the product. After prepping your surface and applying the base coat, the glaze mix and the vein accent colors, you use a blow dryer to push the colors around, deciding for yourself how they get blended, and the direction and strength of the details and finish. Designed so you can work at a relaxed pace and make changes on the fly, cleanup is a snap for this project. And the water-based, odorless formula is safe too, so you won't be exposed to anything hazardous. When you're finished, not only will your countertops look revitalized, they'll offer superior heat, impact and scratch resistance for greater utility. The brand makes installation easy by providing a detailed online video tutorial. Visit youtube.com/watch?v=JJ8487WQIcg to watch and learn more.

2. Real granite finish: Real granite countertops are an elegant, natural upgrade that can take your kitchen or bath



You don't have to spend tons of time or money on home interior up-dates. In fact, you don't even have to engage a contractor to elevate your spaces in a big way. There are completely ways to transform those stained, burned or otherwise drab countertop surfaces in your kitchen, bath or other areas of your home.

to a whole new level. But what if you didn't have to commit to the complicated construction, scary price tag or long wait time of a full stone slab to get the authentic look and performance of smooth, polished granite? The LuxROCK Solid Surface Granite Kit by Daich Coatings allows you to add a premium stone surface -- complete with the visual pop of mineral highlights and sparkling accents -- right over your existing countertop, without the mess or hassle of tearing out your current surface. Available in five beautiful colors, you can renew existing countertops made of laminate, wood, concrete, stone and more in just a weekend and have the flexibility to economically switch to a new look if you'd ever like to refresh.

3. Naturalized, speckled stone: For more of a natural

speckled stone appearance, consider the 11 colors available in the SpreadStone Countertop Finishing Kit, which allows you to tailor your texture. This two-step project takes two days to complete, with results that will last for many years. In addition to a range of interior applications, you can also use this kit on exterior surfaces, including bar tops, barbecue areas, tables and more. Like the other kits, there is no need to remove sinks, plumbing fixtures or your current countertop to make this renovation, and your finished product will be food-safe and intact with a polyurethane clear coat.

In just a weekend, you can make totally transformative DIY interior updates in a way that's cost-effective and simple.

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FAQ about garage remodels

Homeowners tend to want to maximize all of the space they have in their homes. For some this may involve turning a garage from a utilitarian space into one that serves multiple purposes.

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage re-

models can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office. Prior to beginning a garage remodel, homeowners may have some common questions about the process.

How much does the renovation cost?

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel,

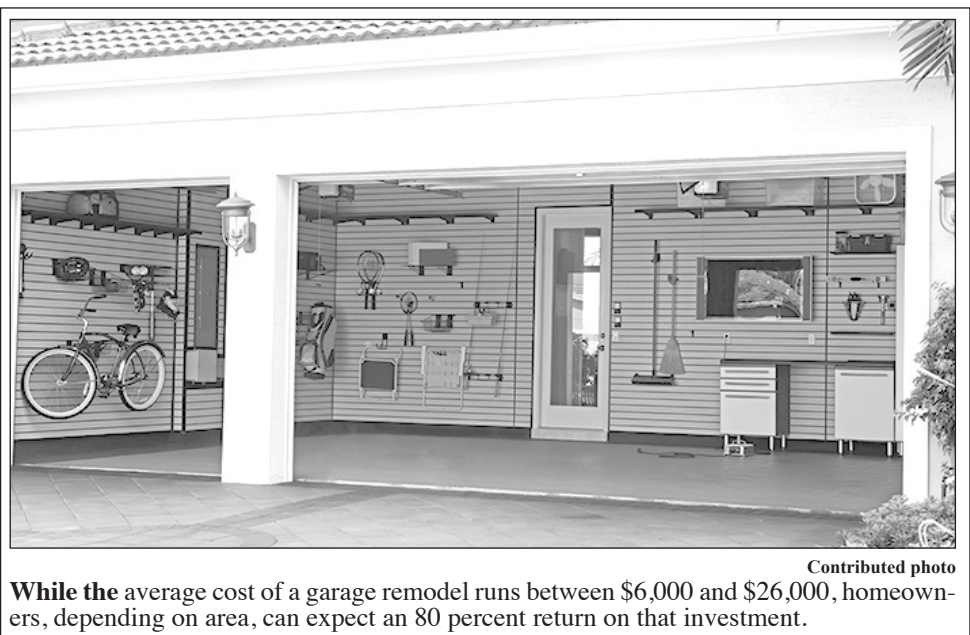
but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

Will I recoup the investment?

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average garage conversion provides an 80 percent return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

How can I upgrade the flooring?

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors. Although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.



Contributed photo

While the average cost of a garage remodel runs between \$6,000 and \$26,000, homeowners, depending on area, can expect an 80 percent return on that investment.

Water leaks can cost you thousands; here's what to know

(StatePoint) A leaky faucet, pipe or toilet is more than just a nuisance, it can lead to unhealthy mold growth and cause costly damage to your home. Such issues are more common than you may think. In fact, two out of five homeowners have experienced water damage.

Fortunately, it's easier than ever to detect a leak. Beyond the typical warning signs, such as higher than usual water bills and unexplained damp spots on walls and ceilings, new products can help you detect and ad-

dress water leaks right away.

A Flo Smart Water Monitor and Shutoff for example, is a game-changing smart water device that offers 24/7 leak detection. If the system detects a leak, your smart water valve will automatically turn off your water to prevent flooding.

Water damage can have potentially devastating impacts. By being vigilant and relying on innovative solutions, you can protect your home, your health and your wallet.

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Health problems linked to mold exposure

Mold is a natural part of the environment and can be found growing just about anywhere that moisture and oxygen are present, advises the Environmental Protection Agency. Mold is a fungus that can be helpful because it breaks down dead organic matter. But mold growth indoors can prove problematic, not only to personal living spaces but to one's health.

When mold grows outdoors in the fresh air, exposure to it can be minimal. However, mold growing indoors can cause concentrated conditions that adversely affect indoor air quality and overall health. The Rhode Island Department of Health says exposure to a large number of mold spores may cause symptoms associated with allergies, such as runny

nose, watery eyes, headache, fatigue, and sneezing, among others. Exposure to certain molds, such as Stachybotrys and Aspergillus, can cause more serious illness because of the mycotoxins these molds produce. Aspergillosis is a fungal lung infection with emerging antimicrobial resistance, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization, the National Academy of Medicine and the National Toxicology Program report that occupants of damp, moldy buildings have an increased risk of respiratory problems. Repeated exposure to mold can lead to asthma, which is a chronic airway disease characterized by inflammation, states the National Institutes of Health.

Individuals can experience shortness of breath and airway obstruction from the overproduction of mucus.

Additional conditions also can be attributed to mold. For example, valley fever is linked to the fungus Coccidioides, which lives in soil in some areas of the southwestern United States. Mucormycosis is a severe but rare fungal infection caused by a group of molds known as mucormycetes, says the CDC. It affects the sinuses or the lungs of people with weakened immune systems.

Though some people who come in contact with mold will not develop any adverse symptoms, it is still best to address indoor mold problems promptly. These steps can help.

- Use dehumidifiers in

- damp areas, such as basements.
- Ventilate bathrooms, kitchens and laundry areas.
- Fix any leaks in pipes, walls or windows promptly.
- Use mold-resistant paint.
- Make sure that clothes dryers and exhaust fans vent to the outdoors rather than an attic or another room.
- Remove mold with mold-killing products. The CDC says mold can be cleaned from hard surfaces with soap and water or a bleach solution of no more than one cup of household bleach to one gallon of water.

Mold is everywhere in the environment, but prevention of indoor mold growth can help people avoid respiratory issues and other health problems.

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Want savings on energy-efficient home upgrades?

A new tool can help you save big

(BPT) - As a homeowner, you may have heard about incentives to tackle climate change that are available as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a large piece of legislation that was passed last year. Many of its opportunities focus directly on your personal slice of the American dream - your home. The EPA's ENERGY STAR program just launched a new tool that can help you find all of the savings available to you.

The idea behind these incentives is to lower this country's carbon emissions by helping homeowners make essential, energy saving upgrades to their homes, particularly for the biggest energy users, like your heating and cooling system and water heater. Many households struggle to afford these ener-

gy-efficient home upgrades, so the IRA allocated funding for this effort, a portion of which goes toward rebates and tax credits for homeowners. For many middle- and lower-income families, this means the chance to save big on essential upgrades for your home.

To help homeowners take advantage of these opportunities, ENERGY STAR is rolling out a new home improvement savings web tool that addresses the largest barriers Americans face when it comes to making these upgrades - cost and navigating the complexity of these projects. This handy online tool is a one-stop shop that allows you to pop in your ZIP code and find information on incentives that are available to you. Right now, it features generous tax credits and util-

ity rebates that can help you substantially lower costs on qualifying products. Later, it will include information on state energy efficiency rebates for low-income communities as these state programs begin to come online - starting in 2024.

What projects qualify? These incentives cover projects that tackle your home's biggest energy users, such as your heating and cooling system, water heater, insulation and more. These areas of your home are not only the biggest energy users, they're essential systems that are also expensive to upgrade. Almost half of your energy bill goes toward heating and cooling your home - which, for the average American household, is almost \$900 a year. Similarly, your water heater is the second biggest energy

user in your home. Finding ways to make these systems more efficient, particularly by upgrading to heat pump technology, can help you live comfortably while also drastically reducing your energy bills.

Why the focus on heat pump technology? Heat pump technology has been around for decades, but there have been some exciting technology improvements, particularly for HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) and water heating products, that provide unmatched energy savings.

* Heat pump HVAC is essentially an air conditioner and a heater all in one. Yes, despite their name, heat pumps also cool the air in your home. And new heat pumps are extremely efficient. ENERGY STAR-certified heat

pump HVAC is so efficient it can deliver up to three times more heat energy to a home than the electrical energy it consumes. This is possible because a heat pump moves heat rather than converting it from a fuel, as combustion heating systems do. In the summer, it cools your home in the same way. Replacing your older central AC with an ENERGY STAR-certified heat pump could save you nearly \$600 over the life of the product, on cooling costs alone.

* Heat pump water heaters that have been ENERGY STAR-certified use about one-quarter of the energy of a standard water heater and can save a household of four approximately \$550 per year and more than \$5,600 over its lifetime on electric bills. Similar to heat pump HVAC, it moves heat from the surrounding air rather than creating it - which heats your water for a fraction of the energy.

What savings are available? There are numerous savings opportunities that homeowners can take advantage of to make essential energy-saving upgrades more affordable - and you can learn about all that apply to you

using the home savings tool.

* Federal tax credits: Tax credits provide annual discounts of 30% of project costs, up to \$3,200, for products such as heat pump HVAC, heat pump water heaters, windows, and insulation.

* State rebates: Starting in May 2024, state rebate programs will offer incentives targeted to low- to moderate-income households. These rebates will vary by state and are rolling out throughout 2024. New York is the first state to launch with several other states following closely behind.

* Utility rebates: In addition to the Inflation Reduction Act incentives, many utilities offer rebates on ENERGY STAR-certified appliances and equipment.

ENERGY STAR is the government-backed symbol for energy efficiency, providing simple, credible and unbiased information that consumers and businesses rely on to make well-informed decisions. Since 1992, ENERGY STAR and its partners helped American families and businesses avoid more than \$500 billion in energy costs and achieve more than 4 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas reductions.

Elevate the backyard experience

Chances are no one wants to replicate the side effects of the global pandemic anytime soon. Despite all of the upheaval it brought to so many people's lives, there was at least one silver lining to the pandemic: a newfound appreciation for backyards and other outdoor living areas. Back in 2021, survey participants reported spending 14 hours outside every week, which marked a three-hour increase than before the pandemic hit.

Outdoor spaces like patios, decks, yards, and even front porches remain popular places for homeowners and their loved ones to congregate. Various studies have shown that those who spend more time outside in nature have lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Being outside is strongly associated with improved mental and physical health. Homeowners who want to maximize the potential of their outdoor spaces can look to these ideas to take backyards up a notch or two.

Establish a gathering spot

A well-designed yard has one or more dedicated gathering spots, particularly areas that enable comfort underfoot. Homeowners can give consideration to hardscape that enables individuals to

spend time outdoors without standing in soggy or buggy situations. Whether they're traditional decks, platform decks, concrete or paver patios, or areas separated from the lawn with pea gravel or another type of rock, homeowners can make the yard more useable through these spaces.

Invest in an outdoor cooking area

Grilling, smoking and even making brick oven pizzas outdoors is a major component of backyard entertaining. Outdoor kitchens

can increase the convenience of prepping, cooking and serving food outdoors. Grills and other cooking gear can be built into weather-resistant counters and cabinetry.

Install a pergola

A pergola or another structure is the perfect way to add privacy to a gathering spot and create more shade and weather protection when Mother Nature does not want to cooperate.

Think beyond the summer season

When making backyard improvements, homeowners

can incorporate ideas that make the yard more functional during different seasons. For example, a fire pit or outdoor fireplace can be a spot for making summer s'mores or sipping mulled cider in the fall. An enclosed three-season room offers the opportunity to see nature and enjoy it without bearing the full brunt of chilly temperatures.

There are many ways homeowners can enhance the functionality and appeal of their backyards.



Contributed photo
A well-designed yard has one or more dedicated gathering spots, particularly areas that enable comfort underfoot.

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Fireplace safety during the holiday season

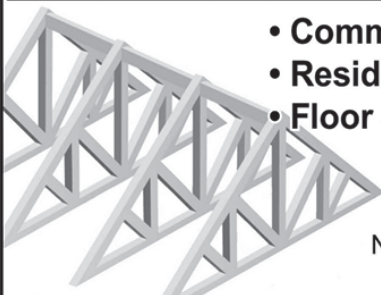
Gatherings with family and friends are an integral component of the holiday season. Certain rooms in the house are on display more than others, with kitchens, dining rooms and living areas serving as popular places to congregate. Of course, fireplaces also serve as popular gathering spots in homes that feature them.

Lighting a fire in the hearth can make any space more cozy, but doing so comes with some hazards. Consider these fireplace safety tips in advance of the holiday entertaining season.

- Have the fireplace inspected and swept professionally. Prior to lighting the first fire of the season, ensure that a professional inspects the fireplace, chimney and venting to ensure everything is in good condition. The chimney also should be swept to remove excess debris and buildup that could pose a fire hazard.
- Keep items away from the fireplace. Wrapping paper, rugs, clothing, magazines, and the like should be kept at least three feet away from the flames, suggests the American Red Cross. Also, make sure decorations are hung securely and a safe distance away from the fire.
- Check your smoke alarms. Be sure the home has working smoke alarms on every level of the house. And keep a fire extinguisher close to the fireplace.
- Never burn wrapping paper. Wrapping paper contains additives, like dyes, that make it burn extremely hot. Do not think of discarding wrapping paper by burning it in the fireplace.
- Keep the tree a safe distance away. Although it makes for the perfect Christmas photo backdrop, Christmas trees and fireplaces should not be near each other. Also, the Christmas tree is not safe to burn in the fireplace after the season, as the wood has not been properly dried or seasoned.
- Use a screen on the fireplace. Make sure the fireplace is properly covered by a screen to stop embers from escaping when the wood pops and sparks. The screen also can help keep decorations and other objects from falling into the fire.
- Keep the fireplace clean. Promptly remove any ash and debris from the fireplace after it has cooled to improve indoor air quality and provide greater control over the next fire when it is burned.

Fireplaces bring warmth and add ambiance to a home, particularly during the holidays. But safety must prevail when lighting fireplaces.

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The important role played by bees in lawns and gardens

A colorful garden in full bloom is an aesthetically appealing sight each spring and summer. The pleasant aromas emanating from such spaces only add to their appeal.

Many variables contribute to a thriving garden, and perhaps none is more important than bees. North America is home to thousands of species of bees, but many of those species are experiencing dwindling populations. According to Scott McArt, an assistant professor of pollinator health in the Department of Entomology at Cornell University, 53 bee species have experienced population declines or range contractions over the last several decades. Individuals accustomed to seeing bees as unwanted guests may wonder why that’s a problem. Though declining bee populations pose a

number of problems, perhaps none is more relatable than the link between bees and food production. A recent study published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* noted that declines in both managed and wild bee populations raise significant concerns about long-term food security. Authors of the study noted that crop production would be higher if crop flowers received more pollination. That’s a significant benefit as the global population continues to increase, but it’s also a notable benefit in the present-day from both a food security and economic perspective. In fact, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports that commercial production of more than 90 crops relies on roughly 3,600 bee species. Declining bee populations

could put that production in serious jeopardy and create a domino effect that impacts food security and individuals’ livelihoods.

But all is not lost in the fight to restore bee populations. In fact, McArt indicated in a 2019 report that bee populations are thriving in agricultural and natural areas. But bee populations also must thrive in suburban and urban areas. Planting a pollinator-friendly garden is one step McArt suggested gardening hobbyists can take to help restore bee populations. When planting to combat declining bee populations, homeowners should always look for native plants, as they are well-adapted to local climates and unlikely to upset local ecosystems. Local garden centers can be great resources for anyone looking to plant

native species. According to HGTV, the following are just a handful of the many bee-friendly garden flowers and plants homeowners can consider for their gardens:

- Bee balm
- Honeysuckle
- Sunflower
- Cosmos
- Strawberries
- Dahlia
- Butterfly bush
- Crocus
- Pot marigold
- Geraniums

Bee populations are in decline. If efforts to restore those populations are not embraced, the consequences for future generations could be dire. Homeowners can do their part by planting bee-friendly flowers and plants on their properties.

How DIY can be bad for homeowners’ bottom lines

Homeowners know it can be tempting to go the do-it-yourself (DIY) route when starting a home improvement project. Home repairs and renovations can be costly, and the notion of saving money on such projects compels many homeowners to try their hand at home improvements. However, the DIY approach can be costly as well, and if things go awry, homeowners may end up with empty pockets and unfinished projects.

Online tutorials and advertisements for home improvement retailers can make DIY seem like a snap. However, there are potential pitfalls to consider that could make the ostensibly less expensive DIY route far more detrimental to the bottom line than homeowners may recognize.

- Permits: Permits ensure work is done in accordance with local codes, which are designed to ensure the safety of residents and their neighbors. Licensed contractors know which permits are necessary for projects they’re hired to work on, and many even procure permits for their clients (homeowners are urged to read estimates and contracts to determine who will be responsible for acquiring the appropriate permits). DIYers may not

know about local permits, and therefore go ahead with projects without procuring any. That can be harmful in the short- and long-term. In the short-term, a failure to procure the appropriate permits can make a home less safe and potentially lead to costly fines and necessitate a complete do-over of the project. In the long-term, homeowners who did not secure the appropriate permits may not be given a certificate of occupancy (CO) when putting their homes on the market, which can make it very difficult to sell the home.

- Ancillary costs: The ancillary costs of DIY are not often noted in online tutorials. However, such costs can dramatically increase the amount of money DIYers shell out in order to complete projects on their own. Ancillary costs include but are not limited to the price of tools and equipment; disposal fees for materials that will need to be discarded; and the cost of permits. These costs are often included in estimates provided by contractors, but they’re easily overlooked by novice DIYers.
- Repairs: Even experienced contractors make mistakes, so DIYers, particularly novices, can anticipate making a few errors along the way. Minor mistakes



Contributed photo

While it’s tempting to tackle home improvement projects, do-it-yourselfers should know that approach can end up costing a lot more.

may not prove too costly, but more significant mishaps can quickly negate any cost savings associated with DIY renovations. The cost to fix DIY mistakes varies depending on the project, but a 2019 survey from *Porch.com* found that the average DIY mistake cost homeowners \$310 and added five and a-half hours to the overall time spent to complete a project. It’s worth noting the *Porch.com* survey was conducted prior to the

dramatic increase in material costs related to inflation in recent years. So, it’s reasonable to assume that fixing DIY mistakes in 2024 could end up costing considerably more than a few hundred dollars.

Before diving in to DIY, homeowners may want to consider the real costs associated with forgoing professional experience in the potentially misplaced hopes of saving a few dollars.



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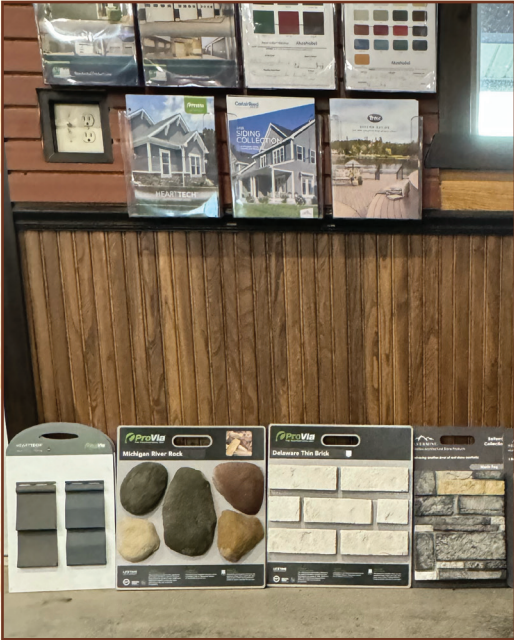
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