

Spring HOME

IMPROVEMENT, DESIGN & DECORATING GUIDE



~Remodeling ~Gardening
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~Plumbing ~Electrical ~Kitchen & Baths
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And much more!

*Spring 2024 Supplement to The Shopper, Black River Falls & Neillsville
Arrow Shopper, Whitehall*

Three unexpected paint projects that work in any room

(StatePoint)Are you looking to spice up your space in the new year? Get some inspiration from those who’ve already taken the plunge. The following design ideas were inspired by projects from FrogTape’s 2023 Paintover Challenge. The friendly competition required participating DIYers to complete a room makeover, including one featured paint

project, using inspiration from the brand’s Design Trends. The participants completed their transformations with a limited budget, paint and painter’s tape – and you can, too. **Paint appealing patterns** Pretty patterns, such as gingham, checkerboard and stripes, offer an element of surprise and whimsy to a room. These designs can go

on floor tiles, or anywhere in need of color, like walls and tables. Achieve a modern and clean look with neutral hues or add dimension and movement by using varying paint finishes. Whichever scheme you choose, be sure to tape off the pattern with a quality painter’s tape, like FrogTape Delicate Surface, to keep lines sharp, even on freshly painted

surfaces. **Defy tradition with bold colors** While neutral tones like gray and beige will never go out of style, mixing colors can lead to that “wow” factor. The Bohemian Bazaar design trend dares DIYers to go bold with bright hues, like bright yellow or teal. Use dramatic colors to make a statement in any space like an office, bedroom or even somewhere truly unexpected like the pantry. **Make them marvel with a mural** Whether it’s in a kid’s play area, bedroom or basement, creating a mural can add a personalized touch and make a wall pop. Don’t let the idea intimidate you. While a more seasoned DIYer may illustrate an image or even include words, murals can be as simple as stripes for beginners. No matter how basic or complex you decide to go, complete the look by carrying the color scheme or pattern throughout the area with furniture, décor and other accessories.

For more project ideas, visit <https://www.frogtape.com/>. You might be surprised how much you can enhance your space with a great idea, a little bit of paint and a high-quality painter’s tape.



Contributed photo

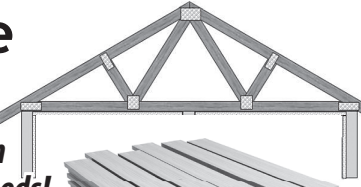
Painting unique patterns on a wall adds just a bit of whimsy to what can typically be a boring area.

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Do you need a standby generator?
Six things to know before you buy

(Brandpoint) - Every day on the news, it seems, there's a report about another extreme weather event. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2023 was a record year for extreme weather. The U.S. experienced 28 separate, billion-dollar weather disasters last year, the highest number ever. That averages out to more than one every two weeks.

Widespread power outages are one of the byproducts of these mega-storms, but it doesn't take a once-in-a-century flood to cause them. Blackouts happen regularly due to more "mundane" causes, like power grid glitches, ice storms or high winds, even lightning in a garden-variety thunderstorm taking out a power pole. And you're left in the dark. Depending on the severity of the outage, that darkness could last awhile.

When the power goes out in your home, so does the heat. And the internet. And the electricity needed to keep food at a safe temperature in the refrigerator. All of your

"smart" electronics and appliances that talk to each other (and to you) go silent.

Owning a standby generator is the best way to keep your household humming during a power outage. Because of all of the extreme weather we've been experiencing, it's moving from the nice-to-have category into a necessity. Here's what you need to know before buying one.

A standby generator is different than a portable generator. Most people are familiar with the type of bulky generators their fathers kept in the garage; noisy contraptions that needed to be hooked up to a cough to life when the power went out. You could run the refrigerator or a space heater, but not both. We've come a long way since then. A standby generator is a back-up electrical system that kicks in automatically when the power goes out. These sleek, permanently installed units are a bit like having a power plant on reserve. Some models are able to power the electricity to your entire home. The switchover from the power grid to your generator is completely automatic and usually so seamless, homeowners don't even notice a disruption.

You must own your home to install a standby generator. Standby generators are permanently installed outside of your home - just like an AC unit or solar panel system - and routed to your home's electrical and gas systems. For this reason, you must own the property your generator will power.

The type of home matters. A condo or apartment, even if you own it, isn't conducive to having a generator. If you live in a townhome complex, consult your community's by-laws before purchasing a generator. Typically, single-family and fixed mobile homes are qualified for generator installation.

Research any necessary permits before you install. Typically, your generator will be installed alongside your home's exterior in a discrete area, but it is still considered a modification to your home's appearance. This means you'll likely require approval, and perhaps permits, prior to installation if you live in a community regulated by an HOA (home owners' association) or other governing board.

Consider your home's power needs ... and your own. Do you want to power your entire home during an outage, or can you get by with only select appliances or systems running? Analyze your home's electrical load and your power priorities. This will help you determine potential generator models to choose from. Some are equipped to power your entire home, while others are better for powering the necessities.

Not all generators are created equal. You can find any number of generators on the market today with just a few mouse clicks online. But this is your family's safety and well-being in a potential disaster we're talking about. It is not the time to take chances on an untested product or company. Go with a trusted name in the industry you can count on to keep your household running. KOHLER generators have been on the market for over 100 years and each model has endured hundreds of performance tests to ensure total reliability. They're built with commercial-grade engines designed to outlast the outage. And they use state-of-the-art technology so you can monitor it on your mobile device or computer.

Contributed photo

A standby generator is a back-up electrical system that kicks in automatically when the power goes out. These sleek, permanently installed units are a bit like having a power plant on reserve. Some models are able to power the electricity to your entire home. The switchover from the power grid to your generator is completely automatic and usually so seamless, homeowners don't even notice a disruption.

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Five ways to transform your home

(BPT) - Looking ahead to a new year can inspire dreams and ideas for exciting ways to transform your home - but it can also feel daunting to take on a list of new projects. The good news is you don't need a total remodel to get the home you want, and even small changes can bring new life to your home.

Whether you're craving a complete transformation or just a few impactful changes, here are some specific approaches to enhance any room in your home:

Shed some new light

Lighting isn't just functional; it's a mood-maker, a style statement. This year, embrace the elegance of recessed lighting. These fixtures blend seamlessly into your ceiling, offering a sleek, modern look that opens up any room. Imagine soft, ambient light that enhances your living space's warmth and character.

Recessed lighting isn't just for living rooms; it can transform kitchens, bedrooms, and even bathrooms into sophisticated spaces. Plus, it's surprisingly versatile; dimmable options can switch your room from a bright, energetic workspace to a cozy, intimate nook in seconds.

Start from the bottom up

Floors are the unsung heroes of home design. They set the stage for an entire decorating scheme. So, if you really want to reset the vibe of your home, consider starting with fresh hardwood flooring. LL Flooring's Bellawood hardwood flooring

offers enduring, luxurious floors created from the finest wood species, available in a wide range of tones, textures and styles.

"Few other investments and home improvement projects can refresh and revive your home like solid hardwood floors," said Jen Meska, director of merchandising for LL Flooring. "Hardwood floors are a timeless home décor choice that bring warmth, luxury and comfort underfoot and are built to last generations, and Bellawood floors are the top of the line in both quality and style."

Learn more about flooring options to transform your home at [LLFlooring.com](#).

Create an accent wall

An accent wall is like the cherry on top of your interior design. It's a statement, a conversation starter. This year, transform a plain wall into a stunning focal point. Whether you choose a bold paint color, striking wallpaper, or even a textured material like wood or stone, an accent wall adds depth and personality to any room. It's the perfect opportunity to express your creativity and individuality. Plus, it's a relatively simple and cost-effective project that can have a dramatic impact on your space's overall look and feel.

Refresh your fixtures

Sometimes, the smallest changes make the biggest difference. Updating fixtures and hardware is a quick, easy and affordable way to give your home a modern facelift. Swap outdated cabinet knobs,

drawer pulls, light switches and faucet handles for something fresh and contemporary.

These tiny details can tie a room together, complementing your overall design theme. Whether you opt for sleek, minimalist designs or something more ornate and eye-catching, new fixtures and hardware can breathe new life into every corner of your home.

Reorganize and declutter

Embrace the new year with a clean slate by reorganizing and decluttering your home. A well-organized space not only looks better but also improves functionality and reduces stress. Start by sorting through your belong-

ings, keeping only what you love and use. Then, invest in smart storage solutions that keep your space tidy and your items easily accessible. Remember, decluttering isn't just about getting rid of things - it's about creating a more peaceful and harmonious environment where you can truly relax and enjoy your home.

Transforming your home for the new year is about making small changes that have a big impact. When creating your project wish list for the new year, keep these design tips in mind to transform your home into the sanctuary of your dreams.

How sellers can get top dollar for their homes

The process of buying and selling a home includes many movable parts. North America has experienced historic trends in the housing market in recent years. Most notably, record-high prices have dominated the real estate market over the last several years.

High prices are good news for sellers, who can probably anticipate receiving offers above listing price. Sellers who don't want to rely on the market alone to earn more for their homes can take various steps to get top dollar.

Stage your home

According to the 2023 Profile of Home Staging conducted by the National

Association of Realtors®, 81 percent of buyers' agents said staging a home made it easier for the buyer to visualize the property as a future home. Focus your attention on the living room, owner's suite and kitchen. Hiring a staging professional can be an investment that turns a sizable profit.

Know your local market

A good way to price your home and gauge if it will sell quickly is to look at the average "days on the market (DOM)" for similar homes nearby. If homes are selling faster than the average DOM, that suggests high demand, which can work in your favor.

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Market Momentum:
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The weather has everyone guessing, but one thing is certain—people are on the move! Homes continue to hit the market, and, more often than not, an Accepted Offer swiftly follows. As the seasons transition, it's not just nature that's changing; the real estate market is also experiencing a shift. This time of year presents a unique opportunity for both buyers and sellers. If you're considering a change, now is the time to seize the moment and make the most of the market's dynamic opportunities.

PREP YOUR HOME FOR THE MARKET: THE FIRST STEP TO SUCCESS

What if your home isn't quite ready to "hit the market"? The first thing you should do is declutter! For items too good to toss, consider donating or selling through our online auction platform. With the absence of snow and freezing temperatures, homeowners can now access their home exterior for that little "spruce up." While painting might not be on the agenda just yet, consider adding new shutters, a fresh front door, new flooring, interior updates, or enhancing your landscaping. Explore [HansenAuctionGroup.com](#), where our online auctions often feature doors, windows, flooring, tools, lawn care items, and more for your DIY projects.

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Garage storage solutions to help get rid of clutter

Who doesn't have a space at home that serves as a catch-all for items that seemingly have no other home? For many, this storage wasteland where items go to be forgotten tends to be the garage. Before long, clutter can overwhelm the space and create an eyesore. Garage clutter also makes the space less functional by making it harder to park a vehicle or store equipment.

Organizing a garage takes work, but the end result can improve the appearance, free up space, make work more efficient and make it easier to find and use tools more readily. Here are some ways to get started on organizing your garage.

Start with cleaning and culling. One of the first steps when organizing a garage is to thoroughly analyze what is needed and what can be removed from the garage. If items belong elsewhere, such as in a shed or the basement, move these items first. Discard damaged or broken items. Next, move on to tools or gear that hasn't been used in some time. Will you use it again? If the item has been collecting dust for years, you likely already know the answer to that question.

Pile all items in the driveway so you have a clean slate with which to start. Measure the room to figure out the dimensions so you'll know how much wall space is available for storage.

Free up floor space. The ultimate goal of a garage storage renovation is to make floor space available, according to

the maximum weight so that racks will not buckle or tip over and cause issues.

Utilize overhead space. Overhead storage can be reserved for items that aren't used frequently, such as seasonal decorations or luggage.

Out of sight. Some items should be stored out of sight and beyond the reach of children and pets. Cabinets and containers can be used

and locked to secure materials, such as fertilizers, paints, solvents and other chemicals.

Additional ideas. Magnets, pegboards, organization bins and systems and similar products can be used to corral small or errant items like hand tools, fasteners and more.

Garage organization will take some planning and time, but the end result can be well worth the effort.



Contributed photo

An organized garage provides added space and ease in which items can be stored and located when needed. Organizing a garage takes time; the hardest part is getting started.

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Improving storage in common areas

Increasing storage capabilities at home is a popular goal among many homeowners and renters. Despite how much space a person may have at home, there's often a desire to have more or maximize the areas that are there. According to the Self-Storage Almanac, there are an estimated 51,206 storage facilities operating in the United States today, and MJ Partners Self-Storage Update says 11.1 percent of households currently rent at self-storage facilities. IBISWorld indicates the Canadian self-storage industry has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent over the last five years.

People often turn to external storage facilities to house their belongings when space is at a premium at home. Others may focus their organization energy on closets,

garages and basements to free up room. But common areas around the home also can provide additional sources of storage. Common areas are locations where people come together for activities.

Living room/family room

Living rooms and family rooms are areas of the home where people spend many hours. These tend to be multifunctional spaces where people entertain, lounge and even enjoy movies or gaming. Possibilities in these living spaces that can create extra storage include furniture that serves double-duty. For example, a storage ottoman adds decorative appeal but also can be filled with board games or books. Cabinet-style TV stands may not be as streamlined as mounted versions, but they're ideal places to stash games, remote controls and other accessories.



Contributed photo

Creating additional storage within a home is one way of simplifying daily life when it comes to providing organization in a family's day-to-day life. That storage can be created in several different areas of the home.

Entryway

An entryway or mudroom can quickly succumb to clutter. When organizing such a space, think about the needs of the household. A storage bench will be a place where everyone can sit to put on shoes and then stow footwear underneath when not in use. A wall-mounted rack can hold the current season's jackets or sweaters, as well as purses or backpacks for easy access. A shelf with some hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail.

Hallway and closet
Closet organization sys-

tems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging racks. An out-of-the way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only continues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.

Tips to a tidy home when time is crunched

(BPT) - When you need your home to look its best for a big event, small gathering or just an unexpected guest, a quick clean with minimal effort can make all the difference. Here are a few proven tips and tricks to save time by cleaning smarter, not harder.

Tip 1: Use multitasking cleaners to save time. You don't need a cabinet overflowing with cleaning solutions. Choose multitasking options like Bona's all-purpose cleaners that clean a myriad of surfaces, including stainless steel, glass, ceramic, granite and stone. You can quickly tackle many tasks in your home and feel good about using a product that is 99% USDA certified bio-based content, meaning it's better for the environment.

Tip 2: Create clutter bins for quick cleans. One way to help cut clutter is by creating

a bin system to quickly tidy a space. In each room have a small basket or bin handy where you can toss in items that need to be put away in a hurry. This helps clear spaces, especially when time is running short. You can put the bin into a closet to tend to later or assign the bin to a family member to put items away while you focus on another task.

Tip 3: Focus on the floor for a tidy appearance. A quick clean of the floor makes any space look tidier in a snap, and bucket, it's a great value that is also environmentally friendly.

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Planning home improvements in 2024? Start at the top

(Brandpoint) - At first glance, the value of some home improvements can be hard to see - particularly when the improvements are in the attic. While a gleaming kitchen backsplash, an expansive patio deck or luxury spa bath are all pleasing to the eye, the value of other home improvements may best be appreciated through improved indoor comfort. Installed in the attic area, insulation and ductwork are two examples of often overlooked upgrades that can impact comfort as well as energy savings. Case in point: EPA estimates that homeowners can save up to 15% on heating and cooling costs (or an average of 11% on total energy costs) by air sealing their homes and adding insulation in attics, floors over crawl spaces, and accessible basement rim joists.

Installing adequate levels of attic insulation and repairing or replacing attic ductwork can help address the root cause of problems such as increased dust, hot/cold rooms or high energy bills. But as the attic area is infrequently accessed, how do you know if a problem exists? Let's start with in-

sulation. Simply confirming its presence in the attic is not enough. Following are some signs that your home's attic may need additional insulation:

- * Hot or cold ceilings, walls or rooms
- * Uneven temperatures in a home that cause HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) systems to run more frequently
- * High heating or cooling bills compared to similarly sized homes in the area

A sufficient amount of attic insulation, typically measured in inches, is necessary to help protect against warm air moving into colder parts of the building envelope. A qualified HVAC technician should be able to evaluate your attic and help you understand how much energy you could conserve by insulating to a specified thickness. For example, contractors designated as AirCare® Professionals are trained by Owens Corning and equipped with tools to assess insulation levels and explain how your home's attic insulation compares to recommended standards.

Leaks and poor connec-

tions in attic ductwork can also lead to problems in other parts of the home. According to ENERGY STAR about 20% of the air that moves through the duct system is lost due to leaks, holes and poorly connected ducts. ENERGY STAR also notes that tightly sealed and well-insulated ducts found in qualified homes can reduce annual utility bills by \$120 or more. 2 Following are some indicators of a problem

with a home's attic ductwork:

- * Spikes in energy bills
- * Rooms that are too hot or too cold
- * Rooms that have a musty odor
- * Heating or cooling equipment that cycles on/off more frequently as the system works harder to heat/cool spaces due to lost air
- * Increased levels of dust

An AirCare® Professional is trained to evaluate

the pressure of air running through your home's ductwork and may use special thermal technology tools that allow you to "see" where air is escaping. He or she also will evaluate the system for loose connections or areas where air may be leaking out of the system. Joints and connections will be evaluated to ensure the ductwork is properly sealed to keep conditioned air inside and

help prevent particulates in the attic from entering ducts. To find an AirCare® Professional please visit the online locator at HVAC Contractor Locator | Insulation | Owens Corning.

Ready to get a start on your 2024 home improvements? Don't lose sight of opportunities in the attic to boost comfort and energy savings.

What attracts pests to a home?

- Moisture or standing water: Additional sources of water and moisture may attract pests like gnats, mosquitoes, stink bugs, and certain spiders. Damp areas are of particular concern, especially when combined with darkness.
- Firewood: Firewood may attract a variety of pests, including termites and weevils. Firewood also may contain eggs that were laid before trees were cut down. If firewood is needed, it should be stacked far away from a home.
- Clogged gutters: Ignoring clogged gutters can lead to pest problems. Mice, squirrels, birds, ants and spiders may be attracted to damp leaves in clogged gutters.

Leaves offer shelter, nesting material and possible food sources of insect life.

- Dirty dishes and indoor trash: Leaving food-covered dishes in the sink invites pests. Leftover food attracts cockroaches, flies, ants and more. Even if time is short, it's best to wash dishes or load them into the dishwasher. Overflowing trash also draws pests into a home.
- Clutter: Clutter provides hiding places for all sorts of rodents and insects, which can hide out in cluttered areas and remain comfortable. Going room to room and clearing out extraneous items may help reduce pest populations. Focus on the garage and basement,

in particular.

Pests are attracted to certain conditions, and remedying these issues can help reduce pest infestations.



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Five inspiring trends for 2024

(BPT) - The new year brings an air of excitement and inspiration that many people channel into new projects. This year, use that energy to refresh your home! Your home should be a space that you can't wait to return to after work, school and errands.

With a few updates, you can easily transform your living room, kitchen and bathrooms, infusing these spaces with both style and function. So, get ready for a home update using these five inspiring trends.

Embracing organic and natural tones and materials
In 2024, consider integrat-

ing soothing neutrals and rich earth tones in your home for a beautiful and clean aesthetic. Also, embrace organic and natural materials. They're timeless and long-lasting, bringing airiness and texture to any room. You can achieve this by incorporating natural stone, wood and rattan materials in furniture, flooring and decor. Together, these natural elements and colors will create an inviting space that brings a touch of nature indoors.

Indulging in a spa-like bathroom
You don't have to leave your home to have a spa experience. In 2024, transform your bathroom into a serene

oasis with spa-inspired features.

For example, consider switching your current showerhead with a newer model like the Delta® ProClean™ 6-Setting Hand Shower. This powerful and practical addition to your shower features two massage spray settings so you can relax to the fullest. You can easily restart the water with the same temperature as when you left it off, providing a seamless showering experience while helping conserve water and, most importantly, your hot water supply.

Once you're done with your shower, use the ProClean™ spray setting to clean shower surfaces at least two times faster than standard sprays, powering off soap scum and shower messes. Delta® bath products make it easy to maintain a clean bathroom.

Making statements with accent walls
An accent wall can completely shift the design of a room. For example, a floral wall in the bathroom or a tropical print behind the sink can bring personality to the space. So, this year, embrace your creativity and choose a color or pattern that makes a statement.

Investing in functional spaces
Function should be at the forefront of your mind when upgrading your home. Whether you rearrange furniture to improve flow or add technology to simplify tasks, you'll enhance your daily life at home.

For example, opt for a faucet in the kitchen that has features that make cleaning up easier, like Delta®'s Touch2O® Technology. A simple touch anywhere on

the spout or handle with your wrist or forearm activates the water flow at the temperature where your faucet handle is set. The Delta® TempSense® LED light changes color to alert you to the water's temperature and eliminate any possible surprises or discomfort. Perfect for little ones who might not realize the water is too hot to touch.

In your bathroom, add a practical and visually appealing sink faucet that enhances aesthetic appeal but also improves functionality. Opt for a model like the Stryke® Single Handle Pull-Down Bathroom Faucet, which quickly cleans toothpaste, dirt and small debris from your sink with a nimble pull-down spray wand.

The Lumicoat® Finish marries function and fashion, offering several options, including Champagne Bronze, Chrome and Matte Black. Best of all, the finish resists water spots and mineral buildup. It easily wipes clean without needing cleaners or chemicals, helping to keep your bathroom spotless.

Mixing styles
Why settle for one style? Mixing styles is a popular design trend, allowing you to choose styles that resonate with your multifaceted aesthetics. Combine traditional and modern elements or vintage and contemporary pieces. Experience a journey with your home renovation, find intentional inconsistencies between rooms and spaces and add more colors, textures and finishes.

This year, resolve to update your home to suit your style and everyday needs. Let these five trends inspire you in your home renovation and decoration endeavors.



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With just a few updates, a home can be transformed in more stylish and functional spaces that better suit your style and needs.

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Steps to creating a more functional kitchen

A kitchen is often the most utilized room in a house. Meals may be prepared, cooked and often eaten in kitchens, and the room is often utilized as a homework spot or a makeshift place to pay bills and stay on top of household needs. By enhancing the organization and functionality of the kitchen, homeowners can enjoy these popular spaces even more.

Homeowners have increased their spending on home improvements in recent years. According to the Joint Center for Housing Centers for Harvard University, project spending rose to \$472 billion in 2022 from \$328 billion in 2019. It's estimated consumers will have spent \$485 billion by the end of 2023. Kitchen renovations were the most popular upgrade and accounted for the highest budgets in 2021, according to Houzz. When the time comes to renovate a kitchen, homeowners can take steps to make these spaces more organized and therefore functional. Here are eight tips to creating a more functional kitchen.

1. Increase storage, and then invest in more. Make the most of corner cabinets and other potential dead spots in a kitchen. Various products can be used to organize awkwardly angled or shaped areas. Kitchen designers also can work with you to reconfigure cabinets and kitchen layouts.
2. Organize utensils and dishes around the sink/dishwasher. Rather than traversing the kitchen to put clean dishes away, make loading and unloading the dishwasher that much easier by locating commonly used items next to and above it. Similarly, place frequently used saucepans, baking dishes and other items near the oven or food preparation area.
3. Utilize drawer and



Contributed photo

Today's home serves many functions, from meal prep to paying bills and completing homework to entertaining. There are endless design options and the kitchen is often the highest budget item when making improvements to the home.

- cabinet organizers. Make a place for everything in the kitchen. Take out all items and see what you need and use all the time. Then coordinate storage around those items so everything fits perfectly. Pull-out shelves and Lazy Susans also can facilitate access.
 4. Add shelves to cabinets. If you can afford to have a custom-built kitchen, by all means design cabinets according to preference. If you're using standard cabinets, you may have to reconfigure shelves and spacing to fit the items you have. This
 - also will help you maximize cabinet space.
 5. Organize the garbage. Have a pull-out drawer or cabinet to store trash bins. Separate compost, trash and recycling needs.
 6. Create continuity in the room. Many open concept homes will have kitchens open up to another room in the home. Mirror the design scheme from elsewhere in the house, and make sure that the flow between spaces is not obstructed.
 7. Create a beverage station. A beverage station can
 - minimize the time needed to make a cup of tea or coffee or for the kids to grab juice or chocolate milk.
 8. Have a workspace in the kitchen. Whether paying bills, making a grocery list or leaving notes for the family, a dedicated workspace can add more function to the room. Be sure there is task lighting nearby and ample overhead lighting to ensure that all kitchen needs are illuminated properly.
- A more functional kitchen can make this already popular space even more so.

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How to create an outdoor living retreat

Al fresco entertaining has taken off in recent years. It's much more common today to find homeowners who want to extend living spaces to the outdoors in meaningful ways that go beyond a few lawn chairs and a stand-alone grill. Dream backyard living rooms mirror similar spaces indoors and contain features like cozy corners, lush furniture and televisions or movie projectors. Plus, they often abut additional outdoor luxuries like fully functional kitchens. Homeowners have various options when designing outdoor living spaces. Above all else, spaces should be created with the goal of encouraging people to get together. Here are some ideas.

Poolside retreat
Homeowners with pools and other water features likely want this area to be the star of the entertaining space. Furniture will be more of the lounging variety, with comfortable chaises and spots to catch the sun. If a swim-up bar isn't possible, a rolling bar cart can be stocked with essentials for cocktails or mocktails for the kids. Furniture near the pool will be exposed to a lot of sun, so look for durable, sun-resistant fabrics.

Fireside nook
Gathering around an outdoor fireplace or fire pit is a treat when the weather cools down. Mirror the look of the same setup indoors by arranging outdoor sofas so they flank the fireplace. Add some ottomans or side tables for stowing mulled cider or



Contributed photo
The outside of a home can be transformed to expanded living spaces that provide cozy corners that provide for family and friends gathering together.

hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

Consider a custom banquette
Unused corners on a patio or rooftop retreat can utilize a custom-made banquette that provides the functionality of a sofa sectional outdoors. Have a contractor design it to the exact specifications of the area, and add a rug to ground the space.

Vary the flooring
Depending on the entertaining space, a balance of soft grass, pavers or other hardscape will be necessary. Certain areas will need to be hard enough for chairs and other furniture, particularly for those who are including an outdoor dining table in the design.

Create some privacy
Some homeowners are lucky enough to have natural barriers that offer privacy

in their entertaining spaces. When there isn't enough, tall shrubs, inexpensive bamboo fencing or trellis can provide a blind that makes an outdoor living area more cozy and private. Consider placing tall, potted plants on rolling casters to improve privacy as the need arises. Outdoor living spaces are all the rage, and they can add value and functionality to most any home.

Water wisely

If you're not getting at least an inch of water a week from Mother Nature, you'll want to keep watering through the fall. Install watering solutions, such as smart controllers on irrigation systems, to help conserve water.

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Seven things to consider when buying a backyard shed

Backyard sheds can be useful assets. Sheds can create storage space in the garage, basement or other areas of the house that have become gathering spots for gear typically used outdoors. Sheds are ideal for housing mowers, tools and even pool-care equipment. But they can be put to other uses as well, such as being key spots to engage in hobbies or even as a child's clubhouse.

Various factors should be considered before building or buying a shed. A storage shed can be a significant investment. Once placed, sheds may remain in their dedicated spots for years to come. That means careful thought should go into the planning process.

1. Check your local building codes first. Before you accumulate building materials or order a shed, be sure to know the ins and outs of shed codes. The codes may impact the shed's placement, construction, the materials used, size, and numerous other factors. It's much easier to amend plans beforehand than to face the hassle and expense after learning you did things incorrectly.

2. Choose placement wisely. Spend several days assessing the yard and thinking about the uses for the shed. If you plan to store pool floats and chemicals inside of the shed, it should be located close enough to the pool to be convenient. Look at the lay of the land. If there is a



Contributed photo

Backyard sheds can serve many purposes and because they can be a rather large investment, there are certain things to keep in mind when planning for a shed's construction and placement.

Build a potting bench



Contributed photo

Take on some home projects this spring, such as building a potting bench, making the perfect spot for planting this year's summer flowers. Build more outdoor furniture and game boards if needed to "furnish" outdoor areas. Paint exterior doors to add a touch of color. Accent door/entryway areas with benches or garden planters.

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Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- Wobbly underfoot and in hand: Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter. Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- Faded paint: Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can



Contributed photo

After winter's wrath, home decks are often in need of some extra care in preparation of the warm weather months. Homeowners should assess their decks to see what repairs are needed.

fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

- Holes in the wood: Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who notice

holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

- Rust: Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding

the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

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How to keep your lawn looking green

Homeowners’ fascination with a lush, green lawn is something that has developed over time and is still “growing” strong. According to a 2019 survey conducted on behalf of the National Association of Landscape Professionals, 81 percent of all Americans had lawns and 79 percent said a lawn is an important feature when buying or renting a property. Even though lush lawns are still coveted, due to drought, the financial climate and even invading insect populations, many people are taking inventory of their landscapes and deciding if a lawn is a priority, even going so far as to reinvent their spaces with lawn alternatives. Still, there are ways to keep properties green no matter which route is taken. Here’s a look at some environmentally friendly ways to address a

landscape. **Irrigate from below** There are many ways to water landscapes, but homeowners may want to take their cues from the commercial farming industry. Drip irrigation systems utilize a network of valves, pipes and tubing close to the roots of plants or under the soil. Such systems are more efficient than surface irrigation options, helping to save water and nutrients in the soil. **Water early** Scotts Lawn Care suggests watering a lawn in the morning before 10 a.m. when it is cooler and winds tend to be calmer. This ensures water can be absorbed into the soil and grass roots before evaporation occurs. Watering midday may cause the water droplets on the lawn blades to heat up and actually scorch the lawn.

Plant a new grass type Homeowners can experiment with eco-friendly grass seed blends that mix native grasses and may not require as much water nor ideal growing conditions. **Utilize green alternatives** Rather than focusing solely on grass, some homeowners are turning to alternatives like clover and even moss, particularly if their landscapes do not have the most pristine growing conditions. This may reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and herbicides. The result is still a green, inviting yard. **Watch the lawn height** Mowing too frequently or at too low a height may compromise the lawn’s ability to thrive. Grass cut to the proper height develops a deep root system to better locate water and nutrients in the soil. That means homeowners may not

have to water as much or as frequently. Taller lawns also shade the soil and the roots, reducing some evaporation. **Compost** Leave the clippings on the lawn to break down and further feed nutrients to the lawn, helping it look greener and thrive. Furthermore, rely on supplementation with compost to reinforce the nutrient profile in the soil. The National Resources Defense Council says composting is the natural process of recycling organic matter, such as leaves and food scraps, into a valuable fertilizer. It doesn’t take much to nurture compost in a yard. Green landscapes are possible with a few tips that help conserve water and maximize natural resources.



Contributed photo
A beautiful, well-kept lawn is important to most homeowners, but it takes time and money to maintain a lawn, and many lush lawn enthusiasts are looking at alternatives to having a landscaped yard.

The different ways to repair a driveway

Asphalt driveways do not last forever. Over time, weather and general usage can degrade the driveway surface, resulting in cracks, pitting and more. Ultraviolet rays, salt and automotive fluids also can affect the appearance and functionality of a driveway. An unsightly driveway can adversely affect curb appeal and resale potential. Homeowners have to consider various factors when it comes to repairing driveways. They may have the option of getting the driveway resurfaced, resealed or repaved,

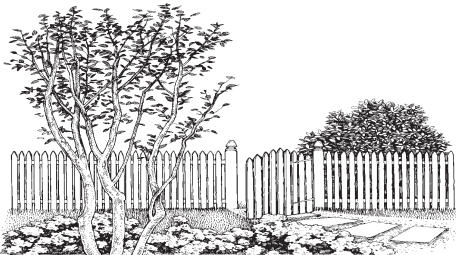
and each project is unique. **Resurfacing** According to the home improvement price comparison site Kompare It, resurfacing is simpler and faster than installing a new asphalt driveway. With resurfacing, any cracks are filled in to create an even base. Then a new layer of asphalt is applied over the existing one. That new layer can range in thickness from 1.5 to 3 inches. A heavy rolling machine will then smooth and flatten the layers together. If the driveway has minor pitting or cracking, then resurfacing can be a

cost-effective strategy, as it may be a \$3,000 to \$6,000 job as opposed to \$5,000 to \$10,000 with repaving. **Resealing** Resealing a driveway, also called sealcoating, is another repair strategy. HGTV says resealing can be a do-it-yourself project. Resealing helps the driveway last longer. The driveway needs to be clean and dry, with holes and cracks filled prior to sealcoating. Start at the far edge of the driveway and seal that area by “cutting-in” by hand for a neat edge. Afterward the rest of the driveway can be sealed

using a squeegee or broom. This project can be completed within two or three days if no precipitation is forecast. **Repaving** A project best left to professionals, repaving typically involves the removal of an existing driveway and the installation of a new one. The sub-grade layer is essential in the process for a smooth look. Contractors also will assess soil and grading when doing work. The construction blog Main Infrastructure says the new asphalt driveway can

vary in thickness between two and six inches, depending on budget and need. The contractor also can advise if full-depth asphalt application or an aggregate base is practi-

cal. Assessing the condition of driveway can give homeowners a better idea about which type of repair project best suits their property.





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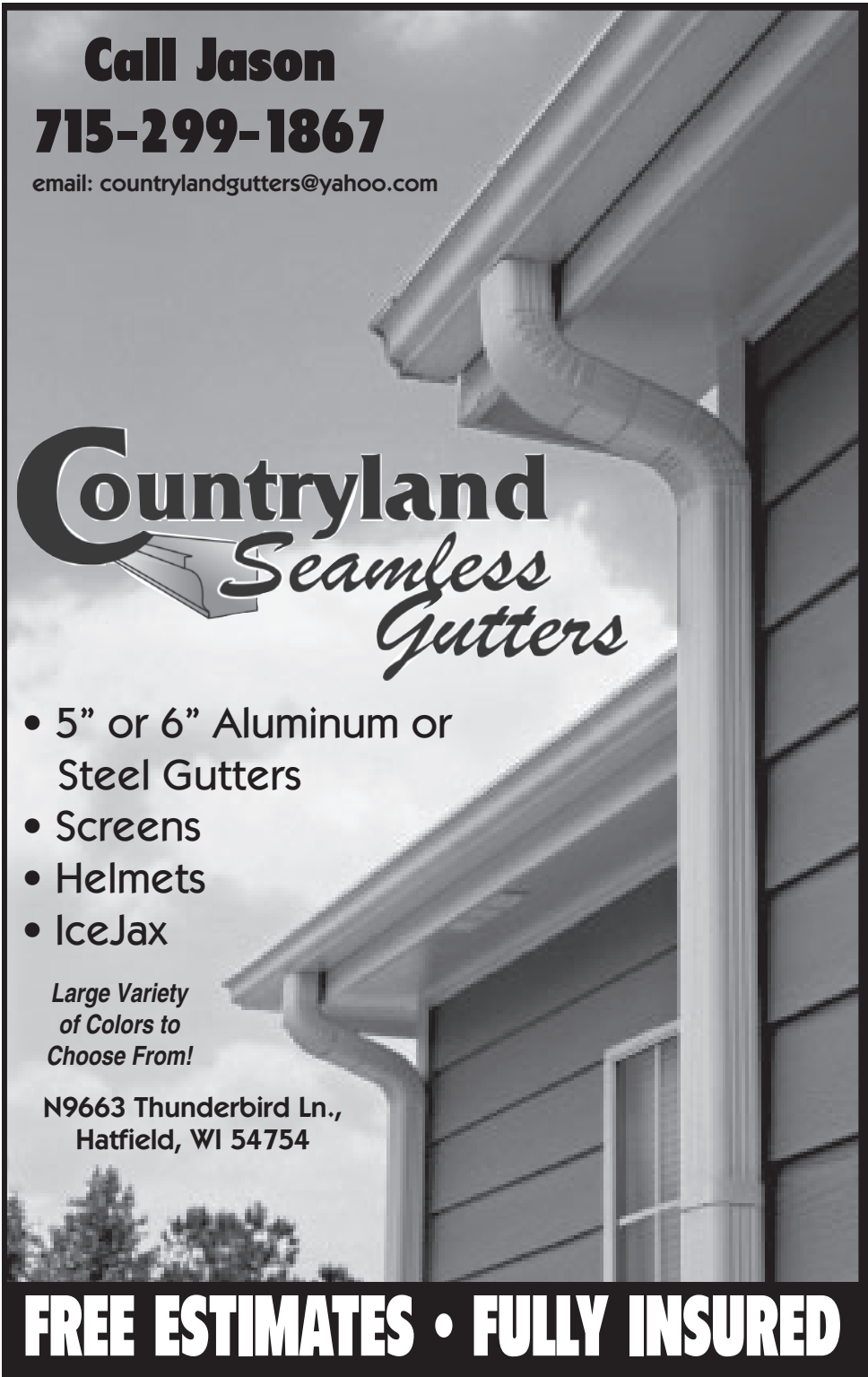


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Save money on any home’s heat and air conditioning

(BPT) - HVAC systems not only enhance home comfort but, when operating efficiently, can also contribute to cost savings. Homeowners wonder how to best utilize their HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) system to avoid costly heating bills. Similarly, these tips apply to warmer temperatures and savings on cooling bills.

Here are five strategic ways in which a home’s heating and air conditioning system can optimize the climate and serve as a savvy tool for trimming down home expenses. From smart usage practices to regular maintenance tips, these insights can help any homeowner’s HVAC system to last for years to come and provide additional comfort and savings.

Maximizing the efficiency of a home’s current system is key to ensuring it works optimally over the years while continuing to provide utility bill savings due to efficiencies.

Consider implementing the following strategies to minimize expenses with an existing HVAC system:

1. Enhance the home’s weather resistance

The operational dynam-

ics of an HVAC system are significantly influenced by how well the home functions. A well-functioning home correlates with an efficiently operating HVAC system. Weatherizing the home not only amplifies its overall effectiveness but also elevates comfort levels while reducing energy expenses.

Weatherization entails sealing all windows, doors, attics and basements to thwart heat loss. If the home has an older duct system, consider sealing it to prevent conditioned air leakage into unconditioned spaces, potentially leading to prolonged HVAC system operation. In regions with hot or warmer climates, installing blinds or solar shades can effectively mitigate the entry of the sun’s heat, minimizing the reliance on air conditioning.

2. Regulate the home’s humidity levels

Effectively managing the humidity within the home contributes to maintaining optimal comfort and reducing costs. During the winter, introducing humidity into the living space prevents dryness and also enhances comfort at lower temperatures. In the summer, maintaining lower

humidity levels promotes comfort even at higher indoor temperatures. In both scenarios, controlling home humidity lessens the operational duration of the HVAC system required to sustain a comfortable environment.

3. Get smart about the thermostat

Take charge of temperature settings to suit your preferences, whether at home or away. Utilize solutions such as Rheem®’s EcoNet® Smart Thermostat that enable seamless temperature adjustments from any location. Leveraging geofencing technology, EcoNet intelligently detects the homeowners’ presence, adjusting the heating or cooling settings to maximize energy efficiency based on whether they are home or away.

4. Implement energy-efficient practices

Incorporate energy-conscious practices as part of a daily routine to optimize the efficiency of your HVAC system and achieve substantial long-term savings on home energy bills. Begin by ensuring that doors and windows are closed when the HVAC system is in operation, preventing the unnecessary loss

of conditioned air and ensuring that the home maintains a consistent and comfortable temperature. Utilize ceiling fans strategically to enhance air circulation, promoting even distribution throughout the living space. These straightforward yet impactful habits collectively contribute

to heightened energy efficiency, translating into tangible and lasting reductions in overall energy expenses.

5. Keep current with routine maintenance inspections.

Scheduled service checks guarantee the optimal and efficient operation of any HVAC system, simultane-

ously averting potential major issues that could jeopardize both efficiency and the overall health of the system. It is advisable to conduct maintenance checks at least bi-annually, ideally before the onset of significant heating and cooling seasons during the winter and summer.

Get top dollar for your home

The process of buying and selling a home includes many movable parts. High prices are good news for sellers, who can probably anticipate receiving offers above listing price. Sellers who don’t want to rely on the market alone to earn more for their homes can take various steps to get top dollar.

Make added-value improvements

Focus renovation dollars on the types of projects that will reap the highest return on investment (ROI). Remodeling magazine annually reports the projects that offer the best ROI. In 2023, the project that reaped the highest ROI was an HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning)

conversion/electrification, which involved converting a fossil-fuel-burning furnace into an electric heat pump. The cost recouped was 103.5 percent.

Sell at the right time

Fewer people are shopping for homes in the dead of winter or during the middle of the school year, so putting your home on the market in spring typically brings out the largest number of interested parties, according to Opendoor. But this isn’t the only time-related factor to consider. To sell for the most money, you want to list your home when you have enough equity to pay off your current mortgage, the costs of selling and the costs of moving, says

Bankrate.

Give curb appeal a boost

Make sure buyers see your home in a positive light from the first moment they pull up for a walk-through showing. According to Home & Garden, improving the landscaping can result in a value increase of up to 12 percent. Additional projects can include investing in a new front door and garage doors. Be sure that hedges are trimmed, there are fresh flowers growing and walkways and the driveway are clean and tidy.

A few simple strategies can help sellers get more money for their homes.

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Saw wood to size with the Festool CARVEXPS 420 EBQ-PLUS Jigsaw that can cut up to 43/4" wood beams, as well as aluminum and steel. The Razorsaw Ryoba handsaw from Gyokucho, also a powerful cutting tool, has ripping and crosscutting teeth on opposite sides and an adjustable pivot point for angled cutting in tight spaces. Norton Hand Sanding Kits cover most sanding chores. Detail Sander fits well in hard-to-reach places. Finishing Block Sander makes general sanding quick and comfortable.

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To apply coverings by hand, consider Redtree Onyx White China Bristle Brushes (solvent-based finishes) or Redtree Matey Synthetic Bristle Brushes (water-based finishes).

For spraying, the HOMERIGHT Super Fin-

ish Max features a built-in 450-watt sprayer, eliminating the need for a hose or motor to move around. Spray milk paint, chalk-style paint, latex paint, enamels, primers, urethanes, stains and varnishes.

Spring cleaning pointers

Spring is a season of renewal. When the flowers are blooming and the trees are budding and the weather is pleasantly warm, people often feel inspired to make changes around their homes.

Tackle one big task a day
Who hasn't started one project only to be distracted into moving along to another room? Inefficiency can make you give up on spring cleaning prematurely. Agree to address one room/task a day. Keep a basket or box handy to store errant items until you move on to the next room.

Stock up on supplies
Prepare all of the cleaning supplies in advance. Put together a tool kit of sorts with the equipment you need, including mops, brooms, rags, cleansers and the like. Organization can keep you on course.



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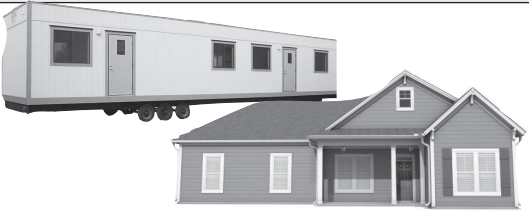
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Simple strategies to create more storage space in the kitchen

If home is where the heart is, then the kitchen is where that heart spends most of its time. Kitchens are where family and friends tend to congregate during holiday celebrations, and many a homework assignment has been completed at a kitchen island while parents prepare dinner.

The popularity of kitchens is reflected in the attention these rooms get from renovation-minded homeowners. Data from the National Association of Home Builders indicates kitchens are the most popular room to remodel. Upgrading kitchen storage is a popular renovation project, and it's also one that has practical appeal. Adding more storage in the kitchen gives the room a more organized feel, which can make preparing meals more enjoyable and create space when hosting and guests inevitably congregate around an island. With those benefits in mind, would-be organizers can consider these strategies to create more storage space in the kitchen.

- Take stock of the spice rack. Creating more storage space does not necessarily have to involve tools like screwdrivers, hammers and nails. Spice racks can easily become overcrowded as amateur cooks expand

their culinary repertoire. A crowded spice rack inevitably spills out onto the surrounding countertop. Take stock of the spice rack and discard any spices or seasonings you haven't used in a while. This can create a more organized look and free up extra counter space.

- Make a digital cookbook. If your go-to recipes are filling a binder or two, those binders are almost certainly taking up precious storage space. Scan printed recipes and convert your physical recipe collection into a digital cookbook you store on a tablet.
- Install roll-out shelving in the pantry. Roll-out shelving puts the entire pantry to use. Without such shelving, items are destined to be relegated to that nether region known as the back of the pantry. Some items never emerge from this area, as cooks forget they're there and then purchase duplicates, which inevitably contributes to storage issues. Roll-out shelving ensures all items in the pantry can be found and greatly reduces the likelihood that cooks will have lots of duplicate items taking up precious kitchen space.
- Remove single-use gadgets from the kitchen. Much like spices and seasonings vital to the preparation of spe-

cialty meals have a tendency to be used just once, kitchen gadgets that lack versatility have a way of gathering dust and taking up storage space. Whether it's a popcorn maker, a seldom-used but space-needy wok or another gadget that's used infrequently, if at all, store single-use gadgets in the garage or another area of the house where they won't get in the way or contribute to a less-than-organized look in the room.

A handful of simple strategies can help anyone create more storage space in the kitchen.

Tips to avoid the buildup of clutter

Clutter has a way of taking over a home. Clutter is not something to be taken lightly. Schedule weekly cleaning sessions. Cleaning is a chore few look forward to, and that reluctance may be a byproduct of infrequent cleanings. The less a home is cleaned, the longer cleaning sessions take when individuals get around to it. Weekly cleaning sessions can help prevent items from stockpiling and creating a cluttered look.

Discard items when they're no longer used. Holding on to items you no longer use will eventually contribute to the buildup of clutter.

Make it easy to find stored items. Even the most well-organized person can fall victim to clutter if stored items prove difficult to find. When revamping storage systems, choose clear, stackable drawers so you won't make a mess as you look for

stored items you can't find. Clear, stackable plastic bins and drawers make it easier to find what you're looking for, reducing the likelihood that items will end up on the floor or strewn about. If you don't want to replace existing storage bins, label them if they're not clear to make it easier to identify what's inside.

Donate clothing. Much like kids' toys and adults' devices should be discarded when they're no longer used, old clothes can be donated to create more storage space and prevent the buildup of clutter.

Clutter is often described as something visible to the naked eye, but clutter can also build up in dresser drawers and behind closet doors. Periodically go through closets and dressers and remove items you no longer wear, donating them if they're still in good shape and discarding them if they're not.

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How to recognize when it's time to replace your windows

Windows are a major component of a home. Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average life span of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years. Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill, and this is not a do-it-yourself project. There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines.

Difficulty opening and closing windows. A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it's probably time for something new.

There's apparent window damage. Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

Drafts in the window are common. If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

Dated windows are present in the home. Older windows may pose safety hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily. Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

Fading indoors is noted. Windows that do not feature low-emissivity (Low-E) glass coatings will not block UV rays. Those rays can cause fading to wood floors and furniture or pretty much anything the sunlight touches. Replacing existing windows with Low-E coating alternatives can safeguard belongings and improve window efficiency.

Window replacement may be necessary when existing windows are showing signs of aging or damage.



Contributed photo
The average life of windows is between 15 and 30 years. While most well-maintained products can last 20 years, it's important for homeowners to assess their windows to check for those needing replacement.



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Trends to take muted interiors from drab to dreamy

(StatePoint) While neutral tones continue to be popular this year among home DIYers, bold and colorful surroundings also are trending right now.

From adding dramatic style to the kitchen to giving an unexpected space a splash of color, these ideas—inspired by the 2024 FrogTape Design Trends, as identified by celebrity interior designer Taniya Nayak—will make areas around your home pop in 2024.

Colorful kitchens. Make the kitchen a focal point by painting the cabinets or panels on the island a vivid color. Calming blue will ensure a relaxed and laid-back feeling, while fuchsia will energize the design. Nayak recommends using FrogTape Delicate Surface Painter’s Tape to prevent paint bleed and achieve crisp paint lines. The low-adhesion tape is designed to prevent damage on surfaces like cabinets, freshly painted walls, wallpaper and more.

Dynamic décor. If painting projects aren’t in the plan for this year, revive a living room or bedroom by adding a collection of brightly colored pillows and throws, bohemian-style macramé, wall art and a rug with geometric patterns. As long as the colors are complementary to each other, the blend of styles and textures will catch the eye and make the room feel refreshed with little effort.



Contributed photo
Painting panels on a kitchen island creates a focal point, drawing the eye and energizing a design.

Nourishing green. A simple, but effective, way to boost the mood of a space is to fill it with large blooms. Place a modern plant stand in an empty corner or between rooms as a divider, and layer in green houseplants or ones with colorful leaves on the shelves. Accentuate the greenery with pops of the same color throughout the room to create a sense of cohesion.

Elevated exteriors. It’s not just the interiors of the home that should speak to personal style, the outside should, too! Give the front door a facelift by painting it a daring color. Don’t be afraid to choose one hue for the outside of the door and another for the inside. For this project, apply FrogTape Multi-Surface Painter’s Tape before painting, so that trim

around the door and doorknob is protected from paint bleed. For more fresh decor ideas and design tips, visit FrogTape.com.

Whether you choose one or all of these trends, they can be tackled by DIYers with a range of skillsets to transform dull living spaces into the home of your dreams.



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