

2025 **Fall** **HOME** **IMPROVEMENT GUIDE**

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Why hiring a painter is the right choice

Few home improvements can change the look of a room faster and more affordably than a painting makeover. In fact, homeowners often turn to paint before they make any other renovations. Home Light, a real estate technology company, says painting a home's interior can net a return on investment as high as 107 percent.

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

Cut down on the job time - A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

Pay attention to details - Professional painters are likely to do a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.

Reduce your workload - Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings, and apply painter's tape. Homeowners who do not have much time are better off leaving trusting the

project to a professional.

Painters already have equipment - Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

Lasting results - Professional painters understand which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space. Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.

A safer experience - Painting can be a challenging job when it involves painting hard-to-reach spaces and/or climbing and balancing on tall ladders. Homeowners are not at risk of injury when hiring a professional painter. In addition, professional painters should be licensed and insured. This means if an injury or incident occurs, the homeowner will not be on the hook for the cost.

A fresh coat of paint can produce amazing results. Leaving the work to a professional can ensure a job is done correctly and beautifully and completed on time.

Home interior trends on the rise

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends,

which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

- **Rounded furnishings:** Houzz noted that gentle curves and rounded edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to

embrace popular trends.

- **Arches:** Houzz cites arches among the more popular modern trends, and the experts at Better Homes & Gardens note this unique, eye-catching style has been gaining popularity for several years. Better Homes & Gardens suggests that part of the appeal of arched doorways could be their deviation from a more traditional door shape. That uniqueness draws the attention of residents and visitors alike, and Houzz notes that arched windows, cabinets and even millwork details are part of the pivot toward arches.
- **Stove alcoves:** If it's a touch of history homeowners want, kitchen range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which undoubtedly adds to their appeal.
- **Wood for warmth:** Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.

Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.



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Wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means of providing homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.



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The basics of basement conversion projects

Space is a sought-after commodity in real estate. Buyers prioritize numerous variables when searching for a new home, and square footage is often near the top of their lists.

The real estate market has been highly competitive in recent years, and home prices have remained high as a result. That reality has prompted some current homeowners who feel they have outgrown their homes to look for ways to increase the usable space in their existing properties. Basement conversions are one way to add more space. Homeowners mulling a basement conversion project can learn the basics of the project as they try to determine if such renovations are right for them.

- Basement conversion projects can be costly. Though the final cost of a conversion project can vary widely depending on the condition and

accessibility of the existing space, estimates range from around \$45,000 to as much as \$150,000. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that the average price for excavation is \$37,000. Of course, homeowners who are simply hoping to repurpose an existing basement likely won't need to pay for excavation. Accessibility is another notable variable that can affect the final cost. If the current space is a crawl space, potentially costly structural changes may be necessary to ensure contractors and eventually residents can access the area. Basements that are already easily accessible won't require such expenditures.

- Ventilation is a must. Finished basements must be adequately ventilated so moisture can be controlled. Without sufficient ventilation, the damp conditions common in many basements

can foster the growth of mold. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America notes that inhaled mold spores can trigger allergic reactions in some people, potentially leading to runny nose, post-nasal drip, red and watery eyes and itchy eyes, nose, ears and mouth, among other symptoms. Waterproofing systems and adequate ventilation can prevent mold growth in a basement, and these should be integral components of the design.

- Permits are part of the process. Basement conversions are considered major projects, and thus typically require homeowners and contractors to secure permits before any work is done. Permits may be necessary at various stages of the project. Homeowners who ignore laws regarding permits will

have trouble selling their homes down the road, as it can be difficult if not impossible to secure a certificate of occupancy if renovations were made without securing the proper permits. In addition, securing necessary permits for each phase of the project can ensure final approval of the project. If permits are not secured along the way, local officials may insist work be redone to adhere to local laws, which can make the project even more costly.

- Basement conversions take time. The time a project takes will depend on the condition of the space at the start of the project and various details unique to each conversion. However, various contractors indicate projects take about two to three months once they begin. That timeline does not include the pre-project process of finding a contractor, soliciting design plans or preparing the rest of the home for such a significant and lengthy undertaking.

Basement conversion projects can add significant square footage to a home. Recognition of what such projects entail can help homeowners decide if this is the best way for them to increase livable space in their homes.



Contributed photo
In any basement renovation project, waterproofing systems and adequate ventilation are one important in preventing mold growth. Proper ventilation is an integral component any basement renovation.

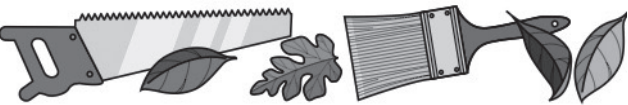
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Tips for winterizing exterior living areas

When the summer entertaining season draws to a close, homeowners need to ensure their outdoor living areas can handle weather that's right around the corner. Although outdoor furniture and other items tend to be durable, the impact snow, wind and ice can have on them may lead to damage over time. That is why many homeowners take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their belongings. Here's a look at how to prepare for the winter to come.

- **Furniture:** Cover or store furniture to protect it from the elements. Covering it with weather-proof covers can be adequate if storing items indoors is not possible.
- **Deep clean:** Items that will be covered or stored should be thoroughly cleaned prior to being removed from spaces for the season. Lingering dirt and moisture can

cause damage.

- **Insulate and drain:** Don't risk damage to pipes, which can freeze and crack in the cold. Shut off the water supply to exterior faucets and drain water lines to prevent pipes from freezing and bursting. Use foam pipe insulation to prevent freezing and cover any exposed pipes.
- **Apply mulch:** After cleaning up garden debris, think about applying mulch to garden beds and cover tender plants to protect them from the weather.
- **Check gutters:** Be sure that gutters and downspouts are clear of leaves and any additional debris. If gutters and downspouts are not cleaned, ice dams may form on the roof and cause water damage.
- **Inspect and repair:** Inspect walkways and driveways for any damage and make repairs now so water will not seep in and cause fur-

ther issues with freeze-thaw cycles. Consider applying a sealant to protect surfaces from snow and ice.

- **Pools and spas:** It's essential to follow the industry or manufacturer recommendations for closing down swimming pools and spas for the season. While covers may not be essential in all climates, covering can help prevent leaves and other debris from getting in the water. Water should be expelled from pipes and tubing to prevent freezing and bursting. If space allows, consider moving the pool pump indoors to prolong its longevity. Turn off the electricity to the outlet where the filter is plugged in. There may be additional, region-specific steps to winterize a property, but these pointers are a good starting point to protect outdoor spaces.



Contributed photo

Homeowners need to take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their outdoor furnishings, including storage of furniture to cleaning dirt linger from the summer.

Common questions and answers about carpeting

No two homeowners are the same, and that's perhaps most evident in the design decisions individuals make when decorating their homes. Flooring is among the first things a person notices when entering a home, and the array of options consumers have when choosing flooring materials underscores how unique each homeowner is.

Carpeting is a popular flooring option. Many homeowners prefer carpeting because they feel it helps to create a cozy, welcoming vibe in a home. Consumers considering carpet for their homes may have some common questions, and answers to those inquiries can help homeowners determine if carpeting is for them.

Is carpeting expensive?

Home renovations are expensive, and the cost of a project is often the first question homeowners have. The cost of carpeting varies widely and is contingent on an array of variables unique to each home and homeowner, including square footage, materials chosen by the homeowner and the cost of labor associated with installation, which can vary significantly between locations. According to the online renovation resource HomeAdvisor, the average cost to install or replace carpet is between \$782 and \$2,812. That wide range illustrates how much the cost of the project will be affected by variables unique to each project. However, even homeowners who come in around or above the high end of that estimate

may find carpet installation is among the more affordable ways to give the interior of a home an entirely new look and feel.

How different are carpeting materials?

Carpeting materials differ in their look, feel and function. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that some carpet fibers are better suited to areas in a home that attract a lot of foot traffic, while others make for better options in areas with less use, such as a bedroom or home office. For example, Angi.com notes that polyester has a luxurious, soft feel, making it a strong option for bedroom floors. Nylon carpet fiber is resistant to stains and damage and maintains its height under heavy weight, making this a good option in heavily trafficked rooms. Homeowners can discuss each carpeting material with their flooring retailer to determine which suits their budget and which is best in each room of their homes.

Is carpet padding a must?

Carpet padding is one of the costs associated with carpeting. When shopping for carpeting for the first time, homeowners may notice carpet padding costs on their estimate and wonder what it is and if it's truly necessary. Carpet padding is necessary, as Flooring101.com notes that it keeps the underside of the carpet from wearing against the subfloor while absorbing the impact of foot traffic and furniture. That absorption helps to reduce stress on the carpet and thus extend its life expectancy. Carpet padding also can have an insulating effect and help to reduce sound in a room. So, while carpet padding might be a costly expense on an itemized estimate, it's well worth the investment.

Carpeting can help make a home feel more cozy and welcoming. Homeowners can work with a local carpeting retailer to find a carpet that meets their needs and fits their budget.

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A whole home approach to energy efficiency

(BPT) - A spike in home energy bills often leads consumers to suspect a problem with their heating or cooling equipment. However, before assuming faulty equipment is the cause of high energy bills, it's a good idea to consider other potential culprits that can reduce energy efficiency and lead to costlier heating and cooling bills. Some areas within a home can allow heated or cooled air to escape before it enters the desired room. The attic is a good example of a space where undetected issues can reduce comfort, adversely affect air quality and decrease energy efficiency.

Signs of thermal problems in the attic may be visible from a home's exterior. During cooler seasons, heated air escaping from a home's attic may pass through the roof deck, melting snow or frost. If nearby homes' roofs are covered in snow or frost while your home's roof is bare, this may be a sign of attic heat loss.

Installing a sufficient amount of attic insulation

is one way to reduce energy loss. According to Energy Star, homeowners can save up to 15% on heating and cooling costs by air sealing their homes and adding insulation in attics, floors over crawl spaces and accessible basement rim joists.

Insulate to avoid the chimney effect

The proper level of insulation can help defend against the chimney effect (sometimes called stack effect). This term describes the phenomenon of less dense, warm air vertically flowing to the highest part of a structure - often the attic. Attic insulation functions as a thermal barrier that helps keep warm air inside the home from moving into the attic and escaping to the outside. Conversely, in warmer weather, attic insulation helps keep hot attic air from infiltrating the cooled interior of a home.

A proper thickness of insulation installed in the attic can also help avoid moisture buildup, which can lead to mold growth and potential structural issues. Attic insu-

lation helps maintain indoor temperatures, reduce energy loss and support occupant comfort.

Are your attic ducts in order?

Other attic components can also affect air throughout the home. When ductwork is properly sized and in good condition, airflow is balanced to support comfort and efficient air distribution. Ducts that are too small can cause airflow resistance, resulting in an uneven distribution of

air, causing the heating and cooling equipment to cycle more frequently and putting more strain on equipment. Similarly, ducts that are too large may result in lower air pressure and poor temperature control throughout the home. Even acoustics can be influenced by ductwork, as properly sized ducts may help reduce noise generated by air flowing through the ducts.

While duct size matters, so does the condition of ductwork. Holes and loose

connections in attic ductwork can allow cooled or heated air to escape before it reaches the register in the desired room. Contaminants inside the attic can enter these breaches and flow into the rest of the home. An increase in dust levels inside the home may be a sign that attic ductwork needs attention.

Inspecting the attic with a whole home approach

A home's energy efficiency relies on a system that includes the heating and

cooling equipment, ductwork and ancillary components like insulation. Ensuring that all these components are properly functioning can help contribute to occupant comfort, support indoor air quality, promote energy efficiency and contribute to the longevity of the home's comfort system. An inspection of a home's attic - including measuring insulation levels and assessing ductwork - should be included in HVAC service and maintenance checks.

Is your home wasting water? Stop your leaks before they cost you

(StatePoint) The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat—it's a stark reality. From wildfires in the west to massive storms battering the south, Americans are reminded each day of their environmental impact.

Among the most pressing concerns is water scarcity. While water covers 70% of the globe, only 0.5% of it is usable for us, according to the Bureau of Reclamation. Climate change, pollution and rapid urbanization are further reducing water access.

Water scarcity, driven by climate change, affects homeowners through rising insurance premiums, soaring utility costs, and declining property values. Meanwhile, rapid urbanization strains water infrastructure, and pollution continues to degrade water quality.

According to the 2024 Ecolab Watermark Study, 68% of Americans worry about climate change, and 70% are deeply concerned about water access. Luckily,

there are still things that can be done to mitigate these concerns.

Eco-conscious design is not just a trend, it's a crucial component of planetary health. Smart home innovations, such as water monitors and leak detectors, are helping homeowners conserve water and protect their homes.

"Smart home solutions have been around a while, but continue to improve based on growing demands," says Mason Hall, head of connected products, Moen and Fortune Brands Innovations. "Implementing smart products—specifically water-saving fixtures—is one of the simplest ways to make your home more sustainable without sacrificing your overall experience."

When it comes to water conservation, Moen's Flo Smart Water Monitor and Shutoff is leading the charge. This device continuously monitors your entire home's water usage, detecting leaks as small as one drop per minute—from a leaky toilet to a major pipe burst. Using machine learning, it identifies changes in pressure and flow, alerting homeowners before

damage escalates. In fact, 60% of users discovered a leak they weren't aware of within 30 days.

In total, the Smart Water Monitor and Shutoff has alerted users to over two million potential water leaks, according to Flow Technologies data. Plus, it helps track water usage by individual faucet, empowering waste reduction and money savings.

Rising environmental issues often lead to rising insurance costs. In disaster-prone areas, some insurance companies are reducing coverage or even withdrawing from the market due to the high costs and frequency of claims for home repairs or rebuilds.

Water damage, in particular, is a major culprit. The Insurance Information Insti-

tute (III) reports that water is claimed six times more than fire and eight times more than theft. Based on III and Census Bureau data, Moen estimates that nationally, insurers pay out over \$15 billion in water claim damages annually. To mitigate these costs, many insurance companies now offer premium discounts to homeowners who install smart products like the Flo Smart Water Monitor and Shutoff, which can reduce the likelihood of water damage claims.

Companies also have a responsibility to help drive positive change. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that one trillion gallons of water are wasted due to leaks each year. In 2020, Moen launched Mission Moen, a commitment to conserve 1 trillion gallons of water through the use of water-saving products by 2030. Since then, the company has conserved 317 billion gallons of water.

Moen's new hot water savings handheld shower by some estimates reduces shower water usage by over a third—saving up to 5,500 gallons annually. When conserve mode is activated, this feature reduces water flow to a trickle once it reaches 95 degrees F, then maintains the temperature, preventing unnecessary water waste while still providing an exceptional shower experience. The product also features Moen's Magnetix technology, with a magnetic dock made from recycled ocean plastic, further embracing sustainability.

By embracing smart technology, practicing conservation and supporting companies that make a positive impact, everyone can play a role in creating a water-abundant future.



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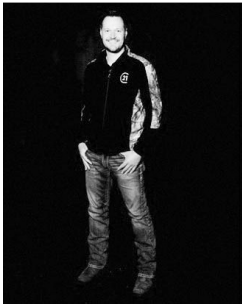
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A guide to fall lawn care for cool-season grasses

Spring is the season most often associated with lawn care, and for good reason. Grass starts growing in spring, and the season is a great time to fertilize many grasses in the hopes lawns can look their best and endure the hotter, dryer weather of summer.

Spring might mark the time when many homeowners begin tending to their lawns each year, but it's important to recognize the significance of fall lawn care as well. Grasses vary, and homeowners are urged to identify which type of grass is in their lawn so they can ensure it gets the care it needs before winter's first frost. Cool-season grasses like perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass are common in various regions, and the following strategies can help homeowners with these types of grasses tend to their lawns this fall.

- Stick to your recommended fertilization sched-

ule. Homeowners who have been fertilizing since spring are urged to continue doing so in fall at the recommended interval. It's easy to forget to fertilize in fall thanks to cooler temperatures that don't call lawn care to mind and busier schedules after school starts again and summer vacation season ends. But many fertilizer manufacturers advise users of their products to fertilize several times over the course of the year, including in fall. Stick to the intervals recommended on the packaging of the fertilizer you've been using, making sure not to forget to fertilize this fall.

- Conduct a soil test. A soil test can determine if the soil is lacking any nutritive elements it needs to come back strong in spring. Certain amendments can restore pH balance if necessary and foster stronger growth when lawns come back in spring.
- Aerate, if necessary. Soil

can become compacted over time, and that can cause a range of problems for a lawn. Compacted soil can make it harder for water to reach the roots of grass, which weakens grass and makes it more vulnerable to damage during adverse weather events like drought. Compacted soil also makes it harder for nutrients in fertilizer to get into the soil. Aerating is best left to professionals, particularly in larger lawns, as the job can foster strong root development when done properly.

- Remove thatch where it's excessive. Thin layers of thatch can benefit lawns by delivering nutrients from grass clippings and leaves to a lawn. However, when thatch is excessive, it can block air, water and even fertilizer from reaching the soil. Thatch often can be removed with a rake, but lawns with especially thick layers of thatch may need to be scarified. Homeowners can take a DIY

approach to scarifying or hire a landscaping professional to dethatch the lawn and remove the thatch from their properties.

- Continue to water the lawn. A cool-season grass will continue to require water into the fall. Though the lawn won't need to be watered as frequently in fall as in summer, various lawn care professionals note cool-season grasses still need roughly an inch of water each week in fall.
- Remove leaves as they fall. Fallen leaves can affect a lawn in much the same way as excessive amounts of thatch, blocking water and nutrients from reaching the soil. So, it's best to remove fallen leaves, especially when they begin to fall in large quantities.

Fall is an opportune time to tend to a lawn to increase the chances grass grows back strong in spring.



Contributed photo
it's important to recognize the significance of fall lawn care as well. Grasses vary, and homeowners are urged to identify which type of grass is in their lawn so they can ensure it gets the care it needs before winter's first frost.

Six features of industrial decor

Home decor is as varied as the people who decorate their homes. Some people prefer traditional styles while others gravitate toward country or coastal. Industrial decor is another unique style that can set homes apart.

The Interior Design Institute says industrial design is known for its raw beauty and functional charm. Industrial design continues to be a popular choice that evolves with each new generation. Industrial design pays homage to warehouses and city centers. For those looking to impart a new look to their homes, industrial chic may be the right fit. The following are

six notable characteristics of this unique style.

1. Neutral colors: Whites, grays, blacks and neutral tones of brown feature prominently in industrial design. However, accent colors like red, blue or green also may be used.
2. Sense of spaciousness: Industrial design harkens back to vast, open warehouses. Open floor plans are part of the design, as are tall ceilings

and large windows.

3. Exposed wood or steel beams: Showing the "bones" of the building is on brand for industrial design. Expect exposed steel or wood beams in the ceilings. Additional exposed structural elements include ducts, brick and pipes.

4. Recycled elements: Industrial decor may utilize reclaimed or recycled materials, such as salvaged wood, concrete, pieces of metal, or even stone.
5. Natural light: Industrial decor utilizes large windows to let in plenty of natural

light. This can counteract the harsher lines of the exposed materials and graphic lines of the style.

6. Edison bulbs: Edison bulbs that hang individually

or in decorative groups as a chandelier are another common element of industrial design. Metal domes or pendant lights also can be incorporated for a more covered look.

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Four signs of potential electrical hazards in a home

Homeowners know that the work of maintaining a home is never done. Cleaning is a daily task associated with homeownership, and such sessions can reveal more than dust buildup or dirty walls and surfaces.

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous situations. For example, vacuuming and dusting sessions can present a great opportunity to spot electrical hazards that might otherwise go unseen. With that in mind, homeowners can keep an eye out for these four signs of potential electrical hazards when working around the house.

Tingling when touching an electrical appliance: The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) advises homeowners to call a qualified electrician immediately if they experience a tingling feeling when touching an electrical appliance. The Electrical Safety Office notes experiencing a tingle or the feeling of being shocked is not normal. Homeowners who experience such a feeling should avoid the location and warn others in the home to do the same.

Wall outlets that look or feel unusual: Wall outlets do not garner much attention, as many are low enough to be out of sight or even behind furniture. So, a cleaning session might be the only time homeowners will notice issues

with wall outlets. The NFPA notes discolored outlets or outlets that feel warm to the touch is a sign of an electrical problem. Various issues can cause outlets to look or feel unusual. An outlet could be short-circuiting or wires

could be damaged, and each issue merits the attention of a qualified electrician.

Foul odors: An odor that calls to mind burning rubber is another indicator of an electrical problem. Various electrical experts indicate such odors

can be indicative of damaged wiring, an overloaded circuit or loose connections, each of which poses a significant safety hazard. The NFPA urges homeowners to contact a qualified electrician immediately if they sense a smell of burning rubber in their homes.

Flickering lights: Homeowners won't need to wait until cleaning sessions to notice flickering lights. Such flickering is hard to miss regardless of what residents are doing inside a home. Sometimes lights flicker because of a loose bulb, so homeowners who notice flickering should first turn off the light, let the bulb cool down if need be and then check to make sure it isn't loose. If the bulb isn't loose, then lights could be flickering

for a multitude of reasons. A loose connection can cause flickering, as can an overloaded circuit. Homeowners also may not realize that not all bulbs and dimmer switches are designed to work together. For example, modern LED light bulbs often require the installation of specific dimmer switches or the lights won't operate properly. Flickering can result if these products are not compatible. If a home is old, then flickering lights could be due to old wiring that needs to be replaced.

Daily and weekly cleaning sessions can be a good time for homeowners to perform a quick audit of electrical outlets and lights to ensure everything is safe and working properly.



Contributed photo

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous electrical issues that could be dangerous.

Did you know?

Outdoor living spaces are a good investment for homeowners seeking to enjoy their home exteriors to the fullest, and that investment continues to pay dividends when homes are put on the market. According to Remodeling magazine's Cost vs. Value report, a number of outdoor living upgrades provide a sizable return on investment (ROI) when homeowners put their properties up for sale.

According to the report, a wood deck could recoup up to 82 percent of the original cost at resale, meaning a job that comes in around the national average price of \$17,000 could net \$14,000 at resale. An outdoor kitchen could prove an even better investment in terms of ROI, as Remodeling magazine indicates such a feature nets a return between 55 percent and 200 percent at resale depending on the location of the home and the materials used for the project.





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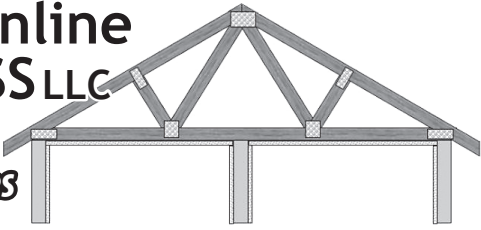
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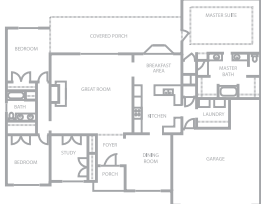
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Thinking about renovating? Check with your building department first

(StatePoint) From updating an outdated kitchen to adding a home office, home renovations can be exciting. Before you dive in, it's critical to understand the local safety requirements that impact your projects.

Kevin McOsker, the Code Council's vice president of Technical Resources, offers advice to help you renovate safely:

First, meet with your local building department. Before beginning any home improvement project, you'll want to meet with your local building department. They can walk you through the local building codes as well as the process for obtaining permits and inspections. Failing to meet the requirements outlined in the code can result

in unsafe living conditions, failed inspections or costly rework.

To contact your local building department, start with your city or county's official website and look for the building or planning department. You can also call your city hall or visit in person.

Remember, building departments want to help make your project a success. Some building departments even have approved details and drawings to assist you with simple permits, construction and inspections.

When reaching out, ask:

- Do I need a permit for this type of work?
- How much does the permit cost?
- Are there specific code requirements in my area?

- How do I schedule inspections and when should they happen?

Next, secure a permit and inspection. A building permit is an official approval that allows you to proceed with a renovation or construction project. Permits are crucial because they ensure your project is safe and in compliance with local building codes and regulations. These regulations are designed to keep you safe from hazards inside the building as well as protect you from extreme weather events.

Skipping the permit process can lead to additional fees, stop-work orders or even complications when selling your home. In some jurisdictions, it may even be a misdemeanor offense that could carry significant fines.

Once you've secured a building permit, you'll need an inspection. Building inspections are an official review of your renovation at key milestones during the construction process. They're conducted by a certified professional to confirm that the work being done complies with local building code requirements.

Common home renovation mistakes

- Skipping Permits to save time or costs: Skipping permits often leads to greater expenses later if you're fined, assessed additional fees or could even require you to redo completed construction work at your expense.
- Assuming minor changes don't require approval:

Even small updates can greatly impact safety and need permits and inspections.

- Hiring unlicensed contractors: They may not follow the code, have no license to perform the work and usually do not carry any insurance, which puts your project and your home at risk. Licensed contractors are accountable to the licensing board, just like your doctor.
- Failing to schedule necessary inspections: Without a final sign-off, your project may be considered incomplete, non-compliant or worse – create an unsafe condition.

Use building safety professionals as a resource.

By working with your local building department, you can ensure your project meets standards, avoids legal issues and creates a safe space for everyone in your home.



Remedies for creaky floors

Hardwood floors are coveted features in many homes. The National Wood Flooring Association says wood floors are the most environmentally friendly flooring options available. In the United States, the hardwood forests that provide flooring products are growing twice as fast as they are being harvested. Furthermore, wood floors can last for many generations and require fewer raw materials to produce than other flooring options. That means less waste may end up in landfills. Hardwood floors can endure for decades in a home, but over time, those same floors may need some tender loving care to keep them looking good and working as they should. Squeaky floors are a common nuisance that homeowners may experience. Squeaking is often caused by movement and friction between floorboards. Treating the problem involves identifying the underlying issue.

Loose hardware

Squeaky floors may be

due to the loosening of the hardware holding the floor in place, says The Home Depot. When nails or screws no longer are secured tightly, the boards can rub together. The noise heard is the sound produced by rubbing. Tightening or replacing the hardware can help reduce the squeaking.

Counter-snap kit method

This Old House says this kit method is a great way to fix squeaks without damaging the floor. Once the source of the squeak is located, drill a 3/32-inch pilot hole through the hardwood flooring. Then insert a screw through the kit's depth-control fixture and into the pilot hole, and drive it until it automatically snaps off below the wood surface. Follow this up by filling the hole with wood putty that matches the floor color. Once the putty is dry, lightly sand the area to blend.

Use a shim or shims

Sometimes the floor may squeak because of a gap between the joists and the subfloor. Filling the gap with

a small piece of wood called a shim can help alleviate the gap or gaps.

Drive up screws

If a squeak is just in one spot, The Home Depot says that you may be able to drive short screws from below into the subfloor.

Small gaps

For small gaps between boards, sprinkle talcum powder or powdered graphite between squeaky boards to reduce friction. Wood filler applied with a putty knife also

may work. For larger gaps, use a liquid filler designed for wood floors.

Homeowners also can visit their local home improvement center for other hardware solutions designed for underfloor repairs to remedy squeaks. Many work from underneath the floor and involve mounting plates or brackets to sure up the floor. Squeaky floors can be problematic, but noises can be banished with some repair work.

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Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals. The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.

Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nut-hatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports

prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.



Contributed photo

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.



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How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.

Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades

like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul.

Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of The Brilliant Home Buyer, characterizes kitchens and baths as "money rooms" that add the most value to a home.

Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves living there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation

with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



Contributed photo

In today's unique market, homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.



How to understand your home energy use - and cut costs

(BPT) - Heating and cooling systems account for around 55% of the average home's energy use, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). And during the warmer summer months, HVAC systems are working at their hardest to keep homes cool - which means that as temperatures rise, energy bills often do, too.

Consider the following tips to boost a home's energy performance and save on utility bills to help keep costs down and improve HVAC efficiency.

Practice routine maintenance

Clean or replace filters on air conditioners or furnaces regularly, ideally once a month or as recommended. This routine practice will ensure systems run efficiently.

It's also important to schedule seasonal inspections with a professional techni-

cian to identify and address potential issues before they become larger, more costly problems. An expert will also help evaluate the health of key components such as filters, refrigerant levels, and thermostat calibration to keep units working at peak performance.

Maintain clear airflow throughout the home

Proper insulation and air sealing techniques can achieve whole-house energy savings of 10%-20%, proving a cost-effective way to reduce energy waste.

Ensure air return points are not blocked by furniture, carpeting or drapes so that air can flow freely. Confirm that doors and windows are closed when the HVAC system is in operation, and check that loose seals or gaps around windows, doors and ducts are not causing conditioned air to escape from the home.

Additionally, during warmer months, keep window coverings closed during the day to block the sun's heat.

All these practices can prevent energy waste, lower utility costs, and improve overall performance.

Evaluate equipment options

Another option homeowners may consider is upgrading their home's HVAC equipment. According to the DOE, upgrading a home's cooling and heating system

can cut energy use by 20% or more, depending on the existing setup.

Most cooling and heating equipment today is built for energy efficiency. A trusted, local contractor can help a homeowner evaluate the best equipment options. No matter a home's heating and cooling needs, these are a few tools and solutions homeowners can explore to better understand how to make a space more energy efficient.

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Designer tips: how to choose the right sliding, folding and pocket door hardware

(BPT) - The right door hardware can improve both function and design in the home. Whether you're renovating or simply upgrading, understanding options like pocket, wall-mount, bypass, multi-pass and bi-fold doors will help you make a smart choice. Each type has unique benefits that suit different spaces, from saving floor space in compact bathrooms to dividing areas in spacious home gyms. Explore five top solutions below.

Save space with stylish pocket door hardware

Pocket doors slide into the wall to maximize floor space. Perfect for everyday use in tight areas like hallways, bathrooms and kitchens, the ADA-compliant 1500SC Pocket Door Frame Kit is a

popular choice because little force is required to slide the door. It can be used with nearly any type of door and provides soft-closing door movement that prevents slamming and enhances safety.

Wall-mount doors offer privacy without wall modifications

Wall mount sliding doors are simple and quick to install and give any room an instant facelift. The 200WM Wall Mount Sliding Door Hardware Kit supports extra-heavy doors and includes a soft-close feature, perfect in bedrooms, laundry rooms and home offices where a quietly closing door is appreciated.

Bypass sliding doors: perfect for closets

Smooth gliding and long-lasting bypass door hardware

is a closet staple. From hallway, bathroom and bedroom closets to kitchen pantries, sliding bypass doors free up floor space so you can fit more furniture in a room. Swinging doors can block walkways, whereas bypass doors keep the path free and clear.

Multi-pass doors for modern room dividers

It's easy to open up or close off larger spaces with multi-pass door hardware. Three door panels hang from a durable top track and each door slides independently from jamb to jamb. Door

panels stack together neatly to widen a doorway, giving access to two-thirds of the opening.

Bi-fold doors maximize visibility and function in tight spots

Great for closets converted into creative spaces, such as a bar nook or workshop, bi-fold door panels fold together and allow ample access to the closet contents. For best results, it is important to choose high-quality folding door hardware when upgrading a closet so your doors operate trouble-free over time.



Contributed photos

Whether it's a pocket, wall-mount, bypass, multi-pass or bi-fold doors, each style provides benefits that suit different spaces, from saving floor space in compact bathrooms to dividing areas



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Fall in love with your backyard this fall – here’s how

(StatePoint) Just because fall is here doesn’t mean your backyard fun has to end. Fall is the perfect season to breathe in crisp air, sip something warm under the stars, watch an outdoor movie, and make the most of your outdoor setup. With the right tools and a few seasonal upgrades, your backyard can stay the place

to be long after Labor Day. Here’s how.
Blow away the mess: “Leaf” it to the pros
Those golden leaves look lovely on trees, not so much on your lawn. A good leaf blower (especially a cordless or battery-powered model).
Bring the heat: stay toasty on the patio

With propane or electric patio heaters, you can keep the chill at bay and enjoy those al fresco dinners well into the season. Try the Dr. Infrared Heater Outdoor Patio Heater for electric convenience or the Hampton Bay 48,000 BTU Patio Heater for classic propane warmth.

Cover up: furniture that survives the season
Fall weather can be unpredictable, but with water-resistant covers for patio chairs, tables and lounge sets, your stylish setup won’t suffer. Brands like Vailge and Duck Covers make highly rated all-weather options in multiple sizes and styles.

Pool days aren’t over yet
If you’re one of the lucky ones with a pool, you might be able to stretch swimming season into September, especially with a pool heater. A reliable robotic skimmer like the Bubblue BuVortex V5 will spin around your pool, clearing it of fallen leaves, bugs and branches.

Backyard movie magic: outdoor projectors
Cooler nights are made for blankets, popcorn and movie marathons under the stars. Outdoor projectors turn backyards into a private cinema.
Fall clean-ups are easier with the right tools
Pressure washers, trimmers and gutter vacs are great tools to prep your home for colder months.
Don’t let mishaps and malfunctions ruin your fall fun
Outdoor gear works hard

all year—but colder weather puts added stress on everything from leaf blowers to lounge chairs. When something breaks, it can be expensive to replace. The good news? Many of these items can be protected. The surprise? Most Americans don’t know it.
An Allstate Protection Plan survey found:

- Only 9% know patio tables can be covered
 - Just 7% know about patio chairs and umbrellas
 - Only 6% realize lounge chairs qualify
- And awareness is also low for leaf blowers (34%), robotic pool cleaners (28%) and patio heaters (22%)
- Don’t wait for a breakdown. A protection plan helps

keep backyard essentials working longer and saves you from surprise repair costs. Visit www.allstateprotectionplans.com for more fall outdoor living tips.
By performing a few maintenance tasks and protecting your gear, you can stretch backyard season into sweater weather.



Contributed photo

With the right tools and a few seasonal upgrades, your backyard can stay the place to be long after Labor Day. By performing a few maintenance tasks and protecting your gear, you can stretch backyard season into sweater weather.



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Tips to renovate on a budget

Renovations around the house require an investment of time and often considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations depends on the scope of the project.

Homeowners who are conserving funds can rest assured that it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate a home on a budget.

- Create a budget and don't waver. Figure out exactly what you can afford for a renovation and then make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable

projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must adapt ideas to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise once a renovation is underway.

- Maximize an existing floor plan. This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before you invest in major renovations like an expansion. Bring in a designer with an eye for utilizing space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.
- Balance DIY with hiring contractors. You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire

well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.

- Check clearance and resale stores. Shop discount stores for building materials to save money. For example, if a builder ordered too many cabinets, they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores, which are nonprofit home improvement stores and donation centers. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings on items needed for a renovation. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also can be great places to find certain home improvement materials and furnishings.
- Take advantage of free services. Certain stores may offer things like free consultations with designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products, even if it's not

mandatory.

- Resurface instead of redo. Certain items can be made to look new with minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well. Finding ways to perform home renovations on a budget may require some creative thinking, but it's possible to get results at the right price point.



Contributed photo
It is possible to renovate both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. First tip, create a budget.



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How apartment renters can cut energy costs and save big

(StatePoint) With economic uncertainty and soaring housing prices putting homeownership out of reach for many Americans, apartment living is on the rise. But if you're a first-time renter, one often-overlooked aspect of apartment life may come as a surprise: the energy bill.

While you may expect to pay for electricity or gas usage inside your unit, you might not realize you could also be footing the bill for energy used elsewhere in the building.

"In apartment complexes, your energy costs may also include a share of the cost of heating and cooling common spaces, such as lobbies, hallways, fitness centers and recreational rooms," said Timothy J. Harper, president and CEO of Nationwide EnergyPartners, a Columbus-based company that specializes in energy management for multi-family communities. "You might not always be aware of it because it's sometimes baked into your rent or utility bill and not called out separately."

Harper advises that whether you're apartment hunting or already settled in, it's wise to ask a few key questions: Are utilities individually metered? Do you pay the energy provider directly or is it bundled into your rent? Does your building use a third-party service that also offers tools to monitor and reduce your usage?

"These details can help you understand what's driving your energy costs," Harper said. "Because after rent, utilities are typically your next biggest expense."

While as a renter you may not have the authority to install new appliances or upgrade insulation, there are several simple strategies that can make a noticeable difference in monthly bills:

Adjust the thermostat: If your unit allows it, slightly adjusting your thermostat – lower in winter, higher in summer – can significantly cut energy use. Portable

fans or space heaters can sometimes be more efficient than relying solely on central systems, as long as they're used safely.

Seal the leaks: Older units can suffer from drafty windows and doors. Removable weather stripping and draft stoppers – available at most hardware stores – can provide inexpensive insulation and reduce heating or cooling loss.

Use curtains wisely: Blackout or thermal curtains can help regulate indoor temperature. Keep them closed on hot days to block out sun and open them during winter daylight hours to naturally warm your space.

Cut "Vampire" power: Even turned-off electronics can drain power. Smart plugs allow you to cut electricity to devices like TVs, chargers and game consoles when they're not in use.

Switch to LED lighting: Energy-efficient LED bulbs use up to 80% less energy and last longer than traditional incandescent bulbs. They're an easy upgrade with long-term savings.

Adopt smart appliance habits: Run laundry machines during off-peak hours, typically late at night or early morning, if your building uses time-of-use pricing. Also, avoid overcrowding your refrigerator, which can reduce airflow and force it to use more energy.

Ask about energy audits: Some apartment communities offer energy audits that identify inefficiencies throughout the building that can be addressed to reduce waste or third-party reports that provide historical data on average energy usage and cost by unit so people shopping for, or living in, those units know what's typical.

For more energy saving tips, visit nationwideenergypartners.com.

By staying informed and adopting energy-smart habits, you can stay comfortable in your rental unit without letting energy bills spiral out of control – an important step toward financial peace of mind in an increasingly pricey rental market.

How to understand your home energy use - and cut costs

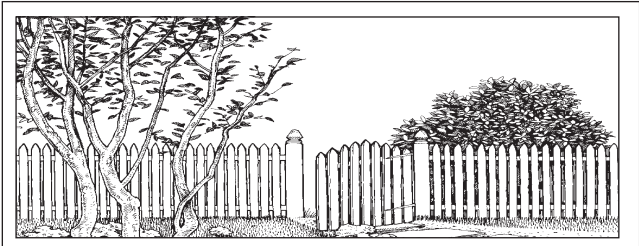
(BPT) - Heating and cooling systems account for around 55% of the average home's energy use, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). And during the warmer summer months, HVAC systems are working at their hardest to keep homes cool - which means that as temperatures rise, energy bills often do, too.

Consider the following tips to boost a home's energy performance and save on utility bills to help keep costs down and improve HVAC efficiency.

Practice routine maintenance

Clean or replace filters on air conditioners or furnaces regularly, ideally once a month or as recommended. This routine practice will ensure systems run efficiently.

It's also important to schedule seasonal inspections with a professional technician to identify and address potential issues before they become larger, more costly problems. An expert will also help evaluate the health of key components such as filters, refrigerant levels,



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Helpful tips to tackle challenging paint projects

(StatePoint) Some DIY projects are easier than others. Painting tricky areas like windows, curves, corners, murals and more might intimidate some painters, but don't let difficulty deter you from transforming your home into a space you love. DIYers of all skill levels can complete tough paint projects with a few useful tips and the right tools.

Challenge 1: Windows
When facing any difficult painting project, like windows, preparation is critical. First, clean the wood trim with warm, soapy water and a cloth or sponge. For wooden windows that will require paint application

near the glass, don't forget to wipe the windowpanes with a glass cleaner. Buildup on these surfaces can prevent painter's tape from bonding to the surface, leaving room around the edges for paint to seep through and creating unnecessary cleanup post-painting.

Once the surface is prepped, line each windowpane and the trim with painter's tape, overlapping the edges in each corner for the tightest seal.

Challenge 2: Curves and edges
A good multi-surface painter's tape can help DIYers achieve professional results for most paint projects, but

when it comes to unusual contours, it's worth investing in a conformable painter's tape, like FrogTape Advanced. Made with thin but strong washi paper backing, the green tape lies flat while conforming to curved areas, like around light fixtures, mantels, molding and fireplaces. It's also treated with exclusive PaintBlock Technology to seal tape edges for clean, sharp paint lines.

Challenge 3: Corners and trim
When painting a wall or ceiling, it's not always easy to prevent paint bleed in the corners where adjacent walls or trim meet. Properly applying painter's tape can simplify the task.

When painting the ceiling, apply tape to the wall around the perimeter of the room, keeping the tape flush with the line where the two areas meet, and overlap the tape in the corners. A similar process can be followed when painting wood trim. When the project is complete, remove the tape slowly at a 45-degree angle while the paint is still wet for best results.

Challenge 4: Murals
Recent consumer research conducted by FrogTape discovered that one of the most popular painting trends for DIYers is nature-inspired faux wallpaper. While more than half of people prefer painting a mural over applying wallpaper, 36% still say "not feeling confident in painting skills" is holding them back

from trying this project. Experienced painters may be confident enough to freehand a design, but those who are newer to the task can rely on painter's tape or stencils to bring their vision

to life. Stencils can be used as a guide to create floral or leaf patterns, or DIYers can sketch the shapes and tape them off with painter's tape to keep outlines crisply defined. Painting is one of the most

rewarding DIY projects, but don't make it harder than it has to be. These tips can help simplify your next paint project, no matter how complicated it might seem.

Projects to consider before moving into a home

The day homeowners move into a new home is a unique experience. First-time home buyers may see such a day as the culmination of years of hard work, while those who are not new to the experience may find their new home is where they'll spend the rest of their lives.

Move-in day is indeed a notable milestone, but there's much homeowners can do between closing on a home and backing the moving truck into the driveway. In fact, it may be best for homeowners to complete several home interior projects while the residence is still empty.

Painting
Painting home interiors is among the more logical projects to consider before moving into a home. Simply put, an empty home is far easier to paint than one filled with furniture and other items. Professional painters may even discount a project if they know they won't have to cover and/or move any furniture before and after applying paint. Painting before anyone has moved in also saves residents the discomfort of living in a home overcome by the lingering aroma of drying paint. Simply open the windows and let the home air out throughout each painting

session.
Flooring
Flooring projects are another undertaking to consider before moving in. Whether you're tearing up old carpet and replacing it with new carpet, refinishing wood floors or installing a wholly new floor, each task is considerably easier if there is nothing on the floor. Flooring projects are best left to the professionals, and labor costs may drop considerably if contractors don't have to pause to move furnishings or work around other items.

Deep cleaning
A professional cleaning service should be among the first calls homeowners make after closing on a new home. A deep cleaning when the home is empty and all lingering dust and debris is visible to the naked eye can ensure no spots are missed before move-in day. Request that the cleaning service clean the interior of kitchen drawers and cabinets, which have a tendency to accumulate grime over the years.

Electrical work
Modern homes are plugged in, so addressing electrical issues prior to move-in day can ensure there are no interruptions to internet connectivity when everyone

begins to settle into the home. This is also a great time to install additional electrical outlets, and homeowners are urged to take the time to draw up plans for how each room will look once all of their furniture is in the house. Doing so can identify where additional outlets should be installed. Homeowners also can visit their new home at night and turn on the lights to see if existing fixtures provide ample illumination. If not, installing new fixtures prior to moving in makes cleanup easier and ensures there are no dark nights once everyone is in the home.

Ceilings
Replacing ceilings prior to moving in is another savvy move. If the ceilings are dated or unsightly, removing, repainting or replacing them before anything is beneath them is a great way to protect valuables from damage. And contractors may not need as much time to complete such a project in empty rooms as they would in spaces where they need to negotiate their way around furniture and other valuables.

Various renovation projects can be conducted prior to moving into a new home. Such an approach can save both money and effort.



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How to keep a bathroom from making you sick

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their inhabitants. When a home is warm and welcoming, it can be the perfect place to relax and get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Though no one wants to imagine danger lurking in their homes, certain areas of a home, including the bathroom, can pose health risks if they are not properly maintained. In addition, issues that can affect residents' health may not always be so visible, which underscores how important it can be to learn about the various ways to keep a bathroom clean so it does not make anyone sick.

- Routinely inspect tiles and caulk. Mold is one of the biggest potential health risks that can develop in a bathroom. Damage to tiles and caulk can foster mold growth. When caulk cracks or separates from tile or any other surface where it's applied, moisture can get in and lead to conditions that promote the growth of

mold. The same process can unfold with cracked tiles, so it's imperative that damaged caulk is removed and areas are recaulked. Cracked or damaged tiles also should be replaced to reduce the risk of mold infestation, which can trigger allergic reactions and exacerbate issues like asthma.

- Replace a malfunctioning bathroom fan. Bathroom fans that are not working at peak capacity can lead to moisture issues and adversely affect indoor air quality. A bathroom fan that vents into the attic can lead to mold growth in that area of the home. In addition, malfunctioning bathroom fans can contribute to moisture issues that result in mold growth. Bathroom fans that direct air outside of the house as opposed to an area like an attic can lead to healthier air and help to reduce the risk of moisture problems in the bathroom.
- Clean sink fixtures. The world was reminded of the benefits of handwashing during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, when public health officials noted how easily viruses can spread after people touch door knobs, handles and other surfaces contaminated with germs. This is true of bathroom fixtures as well. Routinely clean faucets, handles on sinks and toilets, doorknobs and light switches in the bathroom to reduce the risk of contact with germs.
- Replace shower curtains regularly. The Cleveland Clinic notes that various types of bacteria and mold can form on shower curtains and liners. That can cause illness in some people, particularly if they already have compromised immune systems due to a preexisting condition or the common cold. If shower curtains and liners are showing their age, replace them immediately. Even if there are no visible signs of bacteria or mold growth on a shower curtain or liner, individuals can still replace them every six months or at least once per year.

Various health issues may be lurking in bathrooms. Taking steps to prevent such issues can help people ensure their bathrooms aren't making them sick.

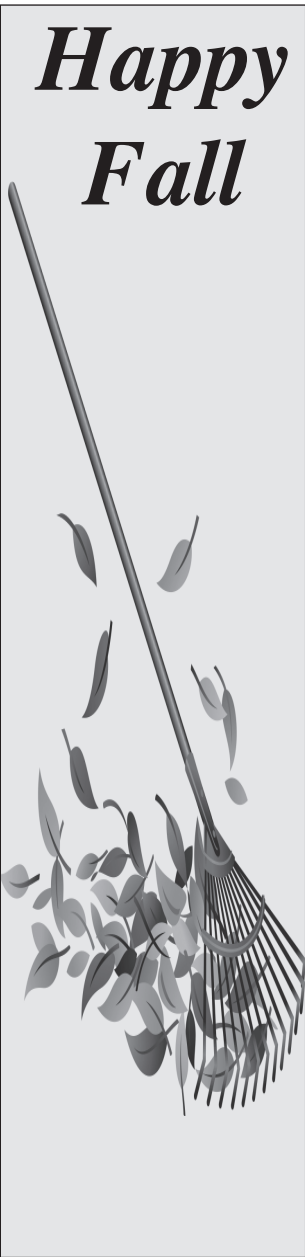
Get ready for a furnace checkup

Turning on the heat may be the furthest thing from homeowners' minds come the end of summer or early fall. After all, there are plenty more days of comfortable temperatures to expect over the weeks to come. However, failing to inspect a furnace prior to when it is needed could lay a foundation for cold evenings.

Many HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) experts recommend that homeowners get their furnaces tuned up before the first cold spell arrives. When the heat is needed for the first time, it will be guaranteed to work if it's been examined and any underlying issues have been addressed.

HVAC technicians are busy at the start of summer and winter. If a furnace is not working correctly, it could take some time before a professional can make a service call. Having the furnace and related equipment checked prior to when it's time to turn on the furnace means homeowners will not be left in the lurch or potentially spending premium prices for repairs.

It is important to get a furnace checkup for a variety of reasons. Doing so can make the HVAC system run more efficiently, which could result in savings over the winter. Regular maintenance also can help the furnace last longer, delaying the need for a costly replacement. No one wants the furnace to break down in the



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How to select the right tankless electric water heater for any home

(BPT) - Tankless electric water heaters are transforming the way households experience hot water by offering energy-efficient, space-saving solutions that deliver heated water on demand. These compact units can be up to 98% smaller than traditional storage water heaters. They may be installed in tight spaces or even mounted to a wall, freeing up valuable space while reducing energy consumption.

Selecting the right model requires preparation and research. Homeowners should consider key elements of their home's design, including the number of occupants, bathrooms and hot water appliances - paired with overall water usage - to ensure the correct tankless electric water heater is installed.

Tip 1: Estimate household hot water demand

A critical first step is properly estimating the household's hot water demand. A tankless electric water heater's flow rate, measured in gallons per minute (GPM), determines its size. Calculating how many hot water GPMs the household typically uses is essential and is done by adding up the flow rates of fixtures, such as fau-

cets and showers, that run at the same time.

After determining the GPM required to meet all the household's simultaneous needs, the homeowner can choose the right size tankless electric water heater. For example, if someone uses the shower while two faucets are running, the home will need a tankless electric water heater with at least a 5 GPM capacity.

Another important consideration is the number of bathrooms and typical usage patterns of occupants. Larger families or homes with multiple bathrooms may require a higher-capacity unit, whereas smaller households can often rely on a more compact solution. For example, the Rheem RTEX and EcoSmart models under the Rheem® family of brands cater to a wide range of needs, from point-of-use (POU) units for single fixtures, to whole-home options designed to handle multiple fixtures concurrently.

Tip 2: Factor in regional climate

Groundwater temperatures vary across the country. In northern regions of the U.S., which tend to be colder, the ground water is also colder. This means that a higher temperature rise (difference

between the ground water temperature and the desired output water temperature) is required compared to warmer southern areas.

For example, in southern areas where the groundwater temperature is 62° F, to reach a desired output water temperature of 105° F, the temperature rise would be 43° F. Whereas, in northern regions, if the groundwater temperature is 40° F to reach 105° F, the temperature rise is much higher at 65° F. The unit has to work harder to achieve this temperature.

For this reason, certain models will work well in southern climates, but a similar household in a northern region may need a larger tankless electric water heater to achieve the degree rise needed to meet household hot water requirements.

Tip 3: Account for water temperature and flow rate

Water temperature and flow rate are equally crucial when determining the appropriate tankless electric water heater size. Higher flow rates demand more powerful models to maintain consistent hot water output. Some residences may be accommodated by one whole-home unit, while others may require multiple point-of-use systems.

Tip 4: Evaluate electrical capacity

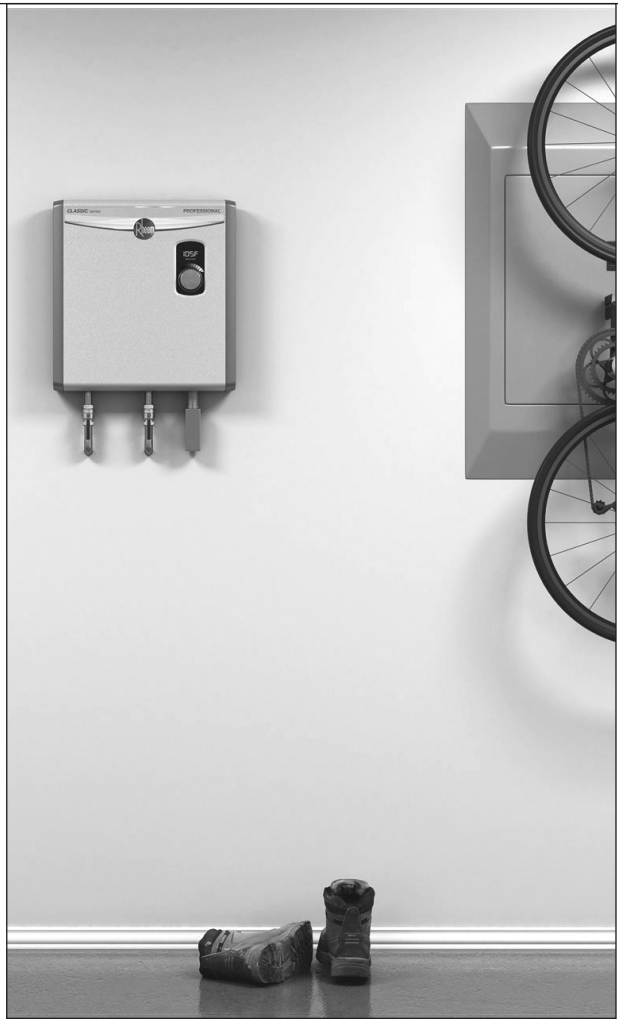
The home's electrical capacity is another essential consideration when selecting a tankless electric water heater. For most homes, the

average available amp service is either 100-, 200- or 300-amps. While a 200-amp service panel typically suffices for average households, new construction, larger homes and high-demand systems may require a higher 300-amp service panel. Additionally, older homes with lower amp service may require an electric panel upgrade to meet the needs of a tankless electric water heater.

Higher-capacity tankless electric water heaters require more power, so be sure to assess the capability of the home's electric service panel to accommodate additional circuit breakers before installation. Consult a licensed electrician or contractor to evaluate the home, circuit breaker size and wiring gauge to ensure the service panel can handle the load, prevent overloads and ensure a safe, efficient operation.

There are many benefits to tankless electric water heaters, including the ease of installation. Tankless electric models simplify installation by eliminating the need for venting, but sizing is key. If the unit is undersized, it may not fully meet demand during simultaneous water use. An oversized unit can lead to unnecessary energy consumption and higher utility costs.

Work with a professional to guarantee a safe and efficient installation for endless hot water and energy-efficient operation.



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Tankless water heaters are compact units that can be up to 98% smaller than traditional storage water heaters. They may be installed in tight spaces or even mounted to a wall, freeing up valuable space while reducing energy consumption.

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Tips to maximize closet space

Who couldn't use a little more closet space at home? As individuals accumulate more belongings, they need places to store all of these items. While modern homes may be built with extra storage in mind, older homes often place a premium on closet space. Homes built earlier than the 1980s may have small closets in bedrooms and only one or two additional closets around the home for linens and other items.

The most obvious solution to a lack of closet space is to build more closets. But too often home floor plans cannot accommodate new closets. Therefore, homeowners may have to get creative to maximize their space.

Sort and discard

Individuals can take some time to empty closets and assess what is in them. Some-

times more space can come from simply thinning out belongings that are no longer used. Take off the plastic coverings on dry cleaning and discard bulky shoe boxes.

Invest in thinner hangers

Clothes hangers come in all types, but the thinnest and most durable ones tend to be the no-slip velvet variety. Such hangers keep garments from slipping off and feature an ultra-thin design, says Real Simple magazine.

Use storage containers

Grouping items together and condensing them can free up space. Tuck belts, handbags and other items into storage bins that can be labeled and stacked. Loose items can look more cluttered and even take up more space when spread out.

Pair shelves with rods

For those with enough

space, hanging a few shelves in unused areas in the closet can provide more storage space. If there is sufficient space above the rod, install a shelf and place seldom-used items up high.

Get a closet system

A customized closet system will certainly provide the best chances to maximize closet space. These companies will measure the closet and assess the contents to draw up a design that will give homeowners what they need. Closet systems also can adjust and grow with lifestyle changes.

Choose other storage solutions

In addition to closets, people can identify other spaces to store items. This can include bins under beds, storage benches or ottomans, the back sides of doors, or in furniture with built-in drawers. Individuals also can purchase free-standing closets or armoires that can fill in when rooms do not have enough closet space or no closet at all.



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Maximizing closet space comes down to some creativity, decluttering and utilizing additional furniture to meet needs.





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Three ways to tighten up your household budget

(StatePoint) Sponsored Content. Planning your household budget is much easier when your monthly bills are as low as possible and predictable. Here are three common expenses you can rein in with a few smart strategies:

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policies through one provider, like homeowners and auto or renters and auto, can help you save. There are also steps you can take to keep your premiums in check, such as making key home improvements and avoiding filing small claims. When it comes to auto insurance, a safe driving record and modern safety features in your car can help keep rates manageable.

Internet: Fast, reliable home internet doesn't have to break your budget. Thanks

to new options from providers like T-Mobile, high-speed service can now be both affordable and consistent. T-Mobile Fiber is expanding access to gigabit-speed broadband with new plans available in select locations across the United States. Plans come with a five-year price guarantee (exclusions like taxes and fees apply), unlimited data, symmetrical upload and download speeds and no monthly equipment fees, installation charges or

annual contracts. Each plan also comes with T-Mobile Tuesdays: weekly perks that include exclusive deals on gas, dining, entertainment and more. Whether you're a remote worker, streamer or smart home enthusiast, there's a plan that fits your needs, without automatic price hikes. And now is an especially good time to make the switch, thanks to current promotions.

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