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Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

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Easy ways to clean up leaves

Autumn is marked by colorful foliage and plummeting temperatures. Once those leaves reach peak color, they fall from the branches and collect on lawns, necessitating cleanup projects. For homeowners with big yards, such a project can be tiring and time-consuming. However, there are ways to make leaf cleanup easier.

One of the easiest ways to clean up leaves is to reach for a lawn mower rather than a rake. The mower will cut leaves down to smaller sizes, creating an effective mulch that can add nutrients back into the lawn. Davey, a lawn and landscape solutions service, says that mowed leaves also can be collected in a mower bag and added to garden beds or compost piles.

For those who prefer manual raking, select a rake with tines that will not skewer the leaves in the process. Big rakes also can make faster work of gathering leaves into piles.

The home improvement resource The Family Handyman advocates for the use of a lawn sweeper. This is a manual device that has a rotating sweeping brush that gathers up lawn debris and leaves into an attached hopper bag. Like mowed leaves, the bag can be emptied into a compost pile or distributed where needed.

Raking leaves onto a large tarp is another option. Once it's full, the tarp can be taken to the curb where many towns will collect the leaves seasonally. Otherwise, the tarp can be used as a funnel to put leaves into a gardening bag or another appropriate receptacle.

Leaf blowers remain a fast option for cleaning up yards, but they require electricity or gas and can be noisy. Still, they are a popular choice for large landscapes or when quick work needs to be made of leaf clean-up.

Leaves will fall in autumn, but luckily homeowners have various methods at their disposal to tame the mess.



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With the pallet of fall colors leaves provide, eventually those leaves fall to the ground and the task of raking those leaves begins. One of the easiest ways to mulch leaves is with the lawn mower. Still, others will grab a rake and get out and enjoy the fall weather while raking up the leaves, which are often used for compost in gardens.

Did you know?

Gardening enthusiasts recognize fall is not a time to rest on their laurels. In fact, fall is a great season to spend time in the yard. The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst indicates fall is the ideal time to improve the soil for next season. Amending the soil in the fall allows it to react accordingly over time and reap the benefits in spring. UMass suggests getting an accurate soil test to see what is needed in the garden.

Samples should be taken from various areas. Avoid doing so when the soil is very wet. At-home kits can test for nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous and determine the soil's pH. Gardeners should till the soil and add compost or manure, which will counteract many nutritional deficiencies. Worm castings also are good to add, particularly for summer vegetable gardens. Worm castings are high in minerals and effective at holding water - so much so that they even can be used alone in place of potting soil.

Crushed egg shells, coffee grounds and banana peels also can be added in the fall, even if they are not part of a compost pile. The nutrients will break down throughout the fall and winter and be available just in time for summer plantings.

Fall yard to-dos: remove leaves

Mulching your leaves – rather than raking and bagging – is good for your lawn and the environment. As shredded leaves decompose, they feed your lawn naturally.

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Wood floor installation dos and don'ts

Jaw-dropping features can sell a home in a heartbeat. A penthouse apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows and a panoramic view of a city skyline likely won't prove a hard sell, nor will a home with an infinity pool overlooking a landscape of rolling hills. As awe-inspiring as such features can be, some more subtle components, such as authentic hardwood floors, also can do much to make a home more appealing to prospective buyers.

Hardwood flooring is a sought-after commodity. Data from the National Association of Realtors indicates that 54 percent of home buyers are willing to pay more for hardwood floors. In fact, NAR figures indicate that 28 percent of buyers between the ages of 35 and 54 consider hardwood floors "very important" when looking for a home. Homeowners who are considering selling their homes or those who simply want to upgrade their existing flooring, may want to consider installing hardwood flooring. Though it's a project best left to professionals, hardwood flooring can be installed by skilled DIYers. In such instances, homeowners may want to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

Do hire a professional if you have limited or no DIY flooring experience. Hardwood flooring installation is not generally a project for novice DIYers. Hardwood flooring projects may present some common challenges, but no two homes are the same. So, unless they have prior experience installing floors in multiple rooms or homes, homeowners may save themselves time, trouble and a significant amount of money hiring a professional to do the job.

Don't ignore the subfloor. New hardwoods won't erase the problem of subfloors in poor condition. According to the home renovation experts at BobVila.com, squeaky floors could be an indication that the subfloor has begun to warp or twist. Sinking floors are another indicator of deteriorating subfloors. Subfloors should be somewhat level before new hardwoods are installed, so DIYers should inspect and address subfloor issues before installing new flooring.

Do expose wood flooring to the elements in your home prior to installation. The home improvement resource BuildDirect recommends acclimating hardwoods to the space where they will be installed. Skipping this important step could result in gaps during the winter and cupping over the summer. To acclimate hardwoods, open the boxes and spread them out for about a week while running the air conditioner or heater at normal levels. When storing hardwoods prior to installation, avoid keeping them in potentially moist areas like a basement.

Don't skimp on tools. A DIY hardwood flooring installation might be less expensive than hiring a professional, but homeowners should resist any temptation to increase those savings further by purchasing less costly tools or fewer tools than is necessary to complete the job.

BuildDirect notes that DIYers will need at least a miter saw, table saw, cleat-nailer or stapler, finish nailer, compressor, jamb saw, chalk line, nail set and tape measurer when installing hardwood floors. Purchase all necessary tools and read product reviews to ensure each tool is up to the task.

Wood floors can be awe-inspiring. Some homeowners can install such flooring on their own, and the project can be much easier if they learn as much about installation as possible prior to beginning the project.



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Five tips to prepare for window replacement

Winter is coming, and for millions of people who reside in areas of the country that see the mercury drop considerably between December and March, that means prioritizing staying warm. Inefficient or aging housing materials may compromise your ability to do just that.

Drafts from doors, poorly protected attics and basements and aging windows may force heating systems to work extra hard to maintain interior temperatures.

Replacing old windows can make a home quieter by blocking out exterior noises. Consumer Reports also note that new windows are often easier to clean and maintain than older varieties.

Many homeowners are interested in replacing their windows, but may not know where to start. These guidelines can help the process along.

Get several estimates. Ask for recommendations from neighbors or other people in your area on which companies they used to install their replacement windows. When you interview the prospects, ask several questions about how they go about installing the windows. Questions can include:

How long will the project take?

Will I need to remain home during the process?

Do you discard of old debris?

What is the protocol for installation during inclement weather?

Research permits. Most home renovation projects need to be approved by the local municipality. Go to the permit office and find out the requirements. Some window contractors will include securing permits in the cost of the project. After the project is completed, an inspector will come by and ensure the work was done according to code.

Change up the appearance. Look at the type of hardware you have around the home and other fixtures. Choose windows that have locks or latches that can match those features for continuity of style. Think about choosing a different style or frame color of the window or a different type of window to improve efficiency and function.

Research top window manufacturers. It's tempting to purchase windows based on price alone, but replacement windows are often a decision that only has to be made once or twice for the life of the home. Invest in durable windows that will have staying power. Consumer Reports offers unbiased reviews on various window brands and can help homeowners make sound decisions.

Prepare for installation. Clear pathways, remove window treatments and disconnect window alarm systems. Plan for one to two days of installation. Keep pets and children away from work areas.

Replacement windows can be a smart investment. New windows can improve the look of a home, reduce heating costs and can keep interior spaces comfortable.

Must-have features in your bathroom remodel

Veteran homeowners recognize the value of remodeling their kitchens and bathrooms. Kitchens and baths tend to appear dated more quickly than other spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, which can always be revamped with some fresh paint and new furnishings.

The home improvement pricing resource, Home Guide, indicates an average bathroom remodel costs anywhere from $5,500 to $15,000 depending on the size and scope of the renovation. However, a bath redo can increase a home's resale value and can return as much as 68 percent of homeowners' investments.

As homeowners plan their bathroom renovations, it's a good time to consider improvements that will improve function and add design appeal for years to come.

Floating vanity: Add an airy feeling to the room by creating space between the vanity and the floor. A floating vanity can be a counter with a vessel sink or even have cabinets, as long as the vanity doesn't extend to the floor.

Freestanding traditional sink or tub: There's something elegant about a freestanding tub or pedestal sink. Such features can lend a classic vibe to a space. However, freestanding fixtures also come in modern or eclectic forms, so there are options for any design style.

Frameless showers: Switch to a walk-in shower option, which improves aesthetics and makes it easier to "age in place" in a home. Pair that frameless shower with clear glass shower doors so sightline in the space remains unencumbered.

Natural textures: Create a calm and serene sanctuary in the bathroom with light, natural hues and materials. Nature-inspired colors on tiles, walls and vanities can add to the spa vibe.

Dual sinks and vanities: With a double vanity, two people can share the space and easily use the bathroom without getting in each other's way. One vanity with two sinks works, but homeowners can create even more personal space by dividing vanities and mirrors.

Small textured tile on shower floors: Small textures are appealing and add safety. The added texture and grouting will keep feet from slipping on wet floors. Also, opt for mold-resistant grout to make cleanup even easier.

Special shower heads: Invest in shower heads that can run the gamut from creating steam showers to rainfall effects. Some showers will have multiple shower jets to offer an invigorating experience.

Improve drainage: Increase the diameter of the drain pipe in the bathroom from the standard to a two-inch drain pipe. This will reduce the risk of clogs and overflow leaks.

Install a window: Natural light and air flow can reduce the risk for mold and mildew growth, and windows add some aesthetic appeal to a space. Just be sure to choose frosted privacy glass.

Additional considerations for a bath remodel include heated floors, well-placed and attractive storage options and a toilet enclosure (water closet) for added privacy. These and other bathroom renovation ideas can add value and improve the appeal of the room.

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How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

Kitchen - Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

Formal dining room - Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

Living room - Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

Bedroom - The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

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 practical.

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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Safety upgrades for seniors' homes

Many seniors want to spend as long as possible residing in the comforts of their own homes. According to AARP's 2021 "Home and Community Preferences Survey," more than three-quarters of U.S. adults age 50 and older prefer living at home. But getting older often comes with certain deficits that may not make current living situations the safest for seniors.

Retirement Living reports that an older person is treated in an emergency room for a fall-related injury nearly once every 10 seconds. Falls cause millions of injuries and 32,000 deaths a year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Seniors may be affected by low vision, mobility limitations, cognitive decline, balance issues and loss of muscle strength. Certain adaptations may be necessary if seniors want to stay in their homes, particularly in older homes that have not recently been renovated.

Change knobs to levers

This is an easy modification. Levers are much easier for individuals with arthritis or persons who lack dexterity in their hands. Everything from doorknobs to faucet knobs can be replaced with levers.

Create zero-threshold entryways

Zero-threshold entryways, also known as flush entries, do not require crossing a lip or any raised barrier. They can appear on doorways and showers and make it easy for people who have mobility issues, as well as those using scooters, walkers and wheelchairs, to move about unencumbered.

Clear clutter/move obstructions

One inexpensive modification is to remove extraneous furniture and accessories. Such a change widens walking spaces in a room and accommodates walkers and wheelchairs. In addition, furniture can be pushed to the room's perimeter to make moving around easier. It's also important to remove area rugs, as they're often tripping hazards.

Install grab rails and supports

Minimizing falls could come down to providing support in key rooms of a home. Adding grab rails in the bathroom near the toilet and in the shower can help a person use those facilities without assistance. Install a grab rail close to seating in the kitchen to add support.

Consider smart lighting

Motion-activated or darkness-activated lighting switches and fixtures can automatically turn on lights, thereby improving visibility. Also, rocker light switches are easier to maneuver than standard toggles.

Invest in a stairlift

Single-story homes are preferable for growing older gracefully, but many seniors live in multi-story homes. A stairlift makes a multi-floor home more accessible, according to Elder, an eldercare service provider. Stairlifts make it easier to traverse staircases and reduce the risk for falls.

These suggestions are just a few of the many home modifications that can help seniors safely age in place.



Create a dream yard for your dog

According to the ASPCA, 23 million households in America welcomed a new pet into their pack during the pandemic. People have been using their backyards more in recent years for everything from working and entertaining to vacationing and working out. But for dogs, this backyard business is old hat.

"No one loves the family yard as much as the family dog," notes Kris Kiser, president of the TurfMutt Foundation, an organization that advocates for the care for and use of green spaces, as well as pet rescue. Kiser and his dog Mulligan have advice for creating a dream yard for your pets and the whole family this summer:

Plant real grass. Plastic grass is uncomfortable on paws (and bare feet), gets very hot during the summer, is difficult to clean and is worse for the environment, since it requires water for cleaning and usually can't be recycled. The bottom line is real grass is the best option for pets, people and the environment.

Select the right plants and grasses. Choose a type of turf grass that will withstand the "ruff" housing of your pet. Buffalo and Bermuda grasses can be a good choice, depending on the climate zone. For other plants and shrubs, check the ASPCA's list of toxic and non-toxic garden plants for advice before planting. You'll want soft, sturdy foliage near walkways. Save delicate, decorative flowers for elevated flowerbeds and patio pots. Pro tip: place plants close together in areas you want to designate as off-limits to your dog to create boundaries.

Consider pollinators and other wildlife. Nature starts in your backyard, which provides habitat and food for birds, butterflies, bees and more. Each of these species help pollinate food crops and flowering plants, so take them into consideration, too, when you're selecting plants for your backyard.

Plan for fun. Add a splash pool, build a sandbox for digging or even create a canine obstacle course to provide hours of fun. After a day of play, your dog will need a place to relax so think of where you can plant trees or bushes that provide shade for snoozing.

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How to prevent slips and falls in the bathroom

Bathrooms can serve as sanctuaries, providing a warm tub to soak in after a long, weary day or a private place to retire for a few minutes of peace and quiet. Bathrooms also can be dangerous places, as various groups warn that most slip and fall accidents that occur at home will happen in the bathroom.

The combination of hard surfaces and moisture from sinks and showers can create dangerous conditions. Furthermore, bathrooms tend to be small spaces, so should a fall occur, it's more likely a person will hit various surfaces on the way down.

The risk of falling in a bathroom increases with age. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, seniors over age 65 have a 25-percent chance of falling in the bathroom. Seniors generally have less flexibility and balance than younger people, meaning falls can be life-threatening. Bones easily can become fractured and internal bleeding may occur in serious cases. Bathrooms can be made more safe in a few simple ways.

Keep the bathtub clean. Soap residue or other grime can contribute to slippery conditions in the shower and tub. Cleaning these surfaces frequently can improve traction.

Declutter the space. Remove extraneous items from the bathroom that can pose as tripping hazards.

Choose the right bath mat. Bath mats can contribute to slips and falls. For those who cannot live without them, choose a mat with slip-resistant backings and add double-faced tape for added security.

Limit moisture. Use a weighted shower curtain or install shower doors to prevent water from getting on the floor. Mop up any water or additional condensation to help dry the bathroom. Install an exhaust fan to help vent moisture that can condense and accumulate on the floor and fixtures.

Improve bathroom lighting. Make sure lighting in the bathroom illuminates all areas.

Wear non-slip shoes. Wearing non-slip shoes when in the bathroom can reduce the chances of slipping on wet floors.

Install a walk-in shower or bathtub. These lipless fixtures can assist those who have difficulty entering a standard tub or shower. Grab bars also can help with maneuvering in and out of the shower area.

Use a raised toilet seat. A raised toilet, or one with a special seat that reduces the distance one has to go to reach a seated position, may help prevent falls.

Any individual with a health condition that causes vision disturbances or difficulties with balance should work with a doctor to find a resolution. These conditions may contribute to falls.



Contributed photo

While bathrooms can provide a relaxing end to the day, they can also be where slips and falls can result in injuries.There are tips on how to make bathrooms a safer place to be.

How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes - some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

Assess the merit of the project. Remodeling magazine annually publishes a "Cost vs. Value Report" that lists the average cost and return on investment (ROI) homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you're planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

Hire a contractor. Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

Refurbish existing features. Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

Choose midgrade materials. Certain materials may be all the rage, but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be $60 to $100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be $10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

Avoid peak seasons. You'll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

Do some prep work. You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

Buy a display item. Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.

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House power-washing tips for sprucing up the outside of your home

Power-washing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Power-washing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try power-washing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see power-washing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a power-washing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a power-washer hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a power-washer. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

What to do with a home office after going back to work

The number of professionals working remotely skyrocketed in 2020, when businesses were forced to close their offices in an effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As the world transitions from the pandemic phase to an endemic phase, many office workers also are transitioning back to their offices.

A recent survey from the Pew Research Center found that 59 percent of workers in the United States are now working from home all or most of the time, while 22 percent are rarely or never working from home. In 2020, 70 percent of workers were working from home all or most of the time, while 17 percent rarely or never worked from home. Those figures reflect that work life, albeit gradually, is returning to pre-pandemic norms.

As individuals find themselves going back to the office with increased frequency, they might be wondering what to do with their home offices. If space inside a home is at a premium, then repurposing a home office into a space that can be used more frequently is a great way to make better use of the existing square footage. The following are some ways homeowners can transform home offices created during the pandemic into more useful spaces.

Go back in time. Perhaps the easiest thing to do with a home office that is no longer needed is to return the room to its pre-pandemic state. Because the shift to remote work was so sudden, many homeowners were forced to turn washrooms, breakfast nooks or areas of their basements into home offices. Returning those spaces to their initial functions can make a home feel less cluttered and add more room for residents to relax and get around.

Create a new entertainment area. Many homeowners converted a spare bedroom into a home office during the pandemic. In such instances, guest beds and other furniture might have been moved into storage or even sold or discarded. Either way, that means the office was cleared of bedroom furniture. Now that the room no longer needs to be an office and now that homeowners have made due without the extra bedroom, the room can be converted into an entertainment area. Swap out the desk for a foldout couch that can still accommodate overnight guests when necessary. Then mount a flatscreen television on the wall and utilize the room as a gaming room for kids or a film room/man cave for mom or dad.

Create an in-law suite. The pandemic separated families, as people living in different households were advised to avoid gatherings to stop the spread of the virus. Individuals with aging parents may have felt particularly heartbroken by this forced separation, especially if their elderly parents were living in nursing homes that were stretched thin by staff shortages and other challenges. In the aftermath of the pandemic phase, families may want to invite aging relatives to live with them. Home offices can be repurposed into in-law suites so aging parents don't have to confront the isolation and loneliness many felt during the height of the pandemic.

As professionals return to their offices with greater frequency, they can transform their offices into spaces they're likely to use more often.



Contributed photo

Now that people aren't working remotely as often as they have in the past couple of years, they are left to decide what to do with their home office space. Many are repurposing the space into an area that will increase the square footage of the home.

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Three great reasons to consider a metal roof

(StatePoint) One of the most important considerations for any major home project is its return on investment. That's why experts point to metal as a solid choice for roofing.

"If you're looking for that elusive combination of beauty, longevity and energy efficiency, metal roofing is a smart choice," says James Alpeter, ProVia metal roofing marketing manager. "It offers superior performance and enhanced curb appeal, plus excellent resale value down the road."

As Alpeter points out, a roof plays an important role in safeguarding a home, protecting it from the elements and providing a barrier to temperature extremes. With a roof covering at least 60% of a home's exterior, consider these advantages that metal has over other roofing materials:

Longevity: Roofing takes a beating from all kinds of weather - rainstorms, high winds, hail, harsh UV rays and heavy snow. Materials like asphalt and wood shingles are susceptible to mold and deterioration, and clay or slate tiles can chip and break. Metal roofing is durable, long-lasting, and withstands extreme conditions better than other roofing options. Metal roofs typically last 40 years or more, and their warranties are stronger as well.

Curb appeal: Innovations in the metal roofing industry have resulted in beautiful panels and shingles that look identical to traditional materials, but without the associated damage concerns and maintenance issues that can quickly compromise curb appeal. For example, ProVia stamped panel metal roofing features an embossed surface that mimics the look and texture of cedar shake and quarried slate, and the horizontal panels resemble shingles rather than the industrial-looking standing seam metal roofs. At the same time, this roofing choice features built-in fade and chalk resistance, a premium architectural coating offering dirt, mildew and stain protection, and virtually no material degradation.

Environmental stewardship: Metal roofing can offer significant energy savings when compared to asphalt shingles, helping to reduce the carbon footprint and lower utility bills. Homeowners can take environmental stewardship a step further by choosing long-lasting, recycled and recyclable products, as well as products that are American made, which require less shipping.



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Metal roofing has shown a significant return on investment for homeowners. Metal roofs also add curb appeal to a home and withstands the elements Mother Nature delivers throughout the year.

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Signs your gutters are in need of repair

Fall is a great time to tackle projects around the house. The weather each fall allows homeowners to make improvements to their homes' exteriors without worrying about extreme heat or cold, while interior projects like painting are made easier because homeowners can open the windows to allow for proper ventilation.

Fall also marks a great time to prepare for upcoming projects that can make winter work that much easier. For example, fall is a great time to take stock of your gutters so you can address any issues before leaves begin to fall or the first snowstorm touches down. Compromised gutters can contribute to water issues in basements and adversely affect a home's foundation if not addressed immediately, so it behooves homeowners to learn the signs that gutters are in need of repair or replacement.

Gutters hanging off the home: Gutters were once installed predominantly with spikes. However, many industry professionals now install gutters with hanger brackets. Why the change? Spikes loosen over time, leading to the gutters hanging off the home. That can contribute to serious issues if left untreated. Gutters hanging off the home need not necessarily be replaced, but rather secured to the home, ideally with hanger brackets instead of spikes. Brackets hook into the front of the gutter and are then screwed into the fascia of a home. A professional who specializes in gutter repair can perform this task relatively quickly, and it's an inexpensive yet highly effective solution.

Gutter separation: Gutters that are no longer fastened together can leak and contribute to issues that affect the home's foundation, siding and appearance. Clogs and the accumulation of debris can cause gutters to separate because they are not designed to hold too much weight. Replacement of separated gutters may or may not be necessary depending on how big the problem is and the condition of the existing gutters. If replacement is not necessary, separated gutters may be remedied by securing the joints, another relatively simple and inexpensive fix.

Peeling exterior paint: Paint that appears to be peeling off of your home may indicate that water is seeping over the edge of the gutter closest to your home. When that happens, water is coming down the side of the house, causing the paint to peel. In such instances, replacing the gutters is often necessary.

Basement flooding: Not all signs of deteriorating gutters are outside a home. Many a homeowner has been flummoxed by flooding in their basements, and such flooding can be caused by aging, ineffective gutters. That's because deteriorating gutters sometimes allow water to leak near the foundation of a home, contributing to basement flooding.

Fall is an ideal time to inspect gutters and have any issues fixed before leaves begin to fall or harsh winter weather arrives.



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Guide to outdoor lighting

Lighting is an essential component of interior and exterior home design. Not only does lighting add style and make spaces more appealing, when done correctly, it also makes a home safer and more functional.

Homeowners who plan to utilize outdoor spaces like backyards, front porches and walkways to the fullest should think carefully about lighting. These guidelines can assist with selecting outdoor lighting fixtures.



Contributed photo

Lighting can be an essential element when designing outdoor living spaces.

Security lighting

Flood lights and security lights are a good investment for those who want to beef up visibility and security around the home. These lights are high-intensity and designed to illuminate large areas. The brightness and reach can serve as a preventive measure to keep animals and even criminals away. Motion-sensor lights will immediately engage if something crosses the path of the sensor. Some lights will remain on from dusk until dawn. Lowes Home Improvement suggests using the correct wattage on outdoor security lights so they flood an area thoroughly without affecting neighboring properties.

Wall, post and ceiling lights

Outdoor lighting fixtures beyond security options come in a variety of styles, according to Lamps USA. Wall lights are mounted to the outdoor wall of the home. These typically flank doorways or the garage. Post lights are often installed on the posts of decks and porches, or are free-standing on properties, providing visibility but also style. Ceiling-mounted lights may be above doorways or installed in any structure that has an overhead area. Warm-colored temperature bulbs in these fixtures can create an inviting atmosphere that is not too bright and jarring, especially when multiple lighting fixtures are working together. When selecting lighting for wall-mounted fixtures, experts suggest sizing up if you are not sure of the size to pick, as lights will look much smaller in scale from a distance.

Accent and landscape lighting

A bevy of accent lighting choices are available. Accent lighting is designed to enhance the mood and appearance of certain elements of a landscape. Accent lighting is not intended to add bright light. For example, upward-directed lights can be cast on trees or shrubs to accentuate their shapes. Accent lighting also may call out a structure, such as a garden or a fountain. While accent lighting may be hard-wired, homeowners who want the luxury of changing lighting can opt for solar fixtures, which are more mobile but not as bright.

Additional pointers

When shopping for bulbs, consider the number of lumens. A standard 100-watt bulb produces around 1,600 lumens. Security lights should range from 700 to 1,300 lumens for optimal brightness. Other lights needn't be so bright.

Furthermore, ensure that any fixtures that are being used are safety-rated for outdoors. Wet-rated fixtures are designed to withstand direct exposure to outdoor elements, advises the design experts at Schoolhouse, a lighting and lifestyle goods company. Damp-rated fixtures are built for outdoor locations protected from harsh weather. Look for the product details or work with an electrician to choose the right lighting choices.

Lighting can transform outdoors spaces for the better.

Tips for protecting landscapes from wildlife and more over the winter

Landscapes are vulnerable to the elements during the cold weather months. Everything from de-icing products to hungry animals to the weight of snow can affect trees, shrubs and other plants.

Just because certain greenery will go dormant during the winter doesn't mean landscape maintenance ends when the mercury dips. Homeowners can take certain actions to winterproof their properties and safeguard landscapes so they recover more readily when spring arrives.

Use a safer melting product

Investigate options in snowmelt products, as traditional rock salt can injure buds and branches and kill lawns. In addition, avoid piling salted snow in one area of the landscape, as it will concentrate the salt in that spot. Spread out snow piles to help minimize the damage to delicate plants.

Secure saplings and juvenile plants

Harsh winds and battering snow can damage young plants. Use stakes and lattices to secure them so they'll be better able to withstand the weather, suggests Total Landscape Management, a commercial and residential landscaping company.

Promptly remove snow from branches to help trees and shrubs; otherwise, the weight of ice and snow can break off branches and cause irreparable damage.

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Things to consider before warming up next to your first fire this winter

A warm fire can make even the coldest winter day more enjoyable. Fireplaces may not get much use in spring or summer, but come late fall and throughout the winter, the fireplace can be a great place for families to gather.

Before fireplace season hits full swing, homeowners might want to brush up on a few fireplace facts so they can safely enjoy nights spent sitting by the crackling flames.

The Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) advises homeowners with fireplaces to hire a CSIA-certified chimney sweep to clean their fireplaces. After a lengthy period of non-use, various issues could be affecting the chimney, many of which might not be noticeable to an untrained eye. Professional, certified chimney sweeps have extensive knowledge of fireplaces, making them valuable resources who can let homeowners know if any safety issues developed since fireplaces were last used. The National Protection Agency recommends that chimneys be swept at least once per year.

A full inspection of the chimney might be in order as well. Chimney service technicians will conduct thorough examinations of readily accessible portions of the chimney exterior and interior and accessible portions of the appliance and the chimney connection. The CSIA recommends homeowners who plan to use their chimneys as they have in the past request a Level 1 inspection, which will examine the soundness of the chimney structure and flue as well as the basic appliance installation and connections. Technicians also will verify if the chimney is free of obstruction and combustible deposits.

Homeowners also should inspect their chimney dampers before lighting their first fires of the season. Dampers should open and close smoothly. If not, a service technician can help fix or replace the damper.

Firewood is another thing homeowners must consider before lighting their first fires of the season. The CSIA says that well-seasoned firewood works best, noting that wood that is not well-seasoned will produce more smoke than heat. In addition, the home improvement resource, This Old House, recommends using dense wood that's been split and stored in a high and dry place for at least six months. Oak is an example of dense wood that, when stored properly, can make for an enjoyable fireplace experience. Avoid softwoods like pine. Pine can produce a lot of creosote, which is a byproduct of wood combustion. Creosote is highly flammable, and as it builds up in a chimney, the risk for a chimney fire increases.

Choosing the right wood, making sure it's well-seasoned and having a chimney professionally cleaned can reduce the risk of a creosote-related chimney fire. A Level 1 inspection should determine if there are potentially dangerous levels of creosote deposits in the chimney.

Before nestling up to a fireplace this winter, homeowners should consider a host of factors and safety measures to ensure their fireplaces are safe and ready for the season ahead.



Contributed photo

Curling up next to a warm fire is a favorite place to be in the cold winter months. It's important to make sure home fireplaces have been inspected by an expert and the firewood they select to burn are important to buiding a safe fire in your home's fireplace.



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What expecting parents can do to make their homes safer

New parents face a host of new and unique challenges when they bring their babies home for the first time. Lack of sleep and dirty diapers are two well-known challenges parents must confront when caring for newborns. While those hurdles must be cleared after babies are born, other potential issues can be dealt with while parents are awaiting the arrival of their children.

Prior to getting pregnant, parents expecting for the first time may not have given much thought to how safe their home is for children. But with a baby on the way, safety must be the utmost priority at home. Home injuries pose a bigger threat than expecting parents may realize, as Stanford Children's Health reports that roughly 2,000 children ages 14 and under die each year as a result of injuries sustained at home. Thankfully, many home injuries can be prevented. Expecting parents can get a head-start on being moms and dads by taking various steps to make their homes safer before their babies are born.

Conceal cables and cords. Cables and cords pique kids' curiosity. Pulling on cables and cords can put young children in the path of falling objects or increase their risk for injuries involving electrical wires and outlets. Cable and cord concealers are inexpensive and easily installed. Often used to cover cords hanging down from mounted televisions, concealers also can be used to hide cords coming from computers, lamps and other items that can pose a threat to young children.

Avoid hand-me-down kids' furniture. When furnishing a children's nursery, it's best for parents to avoid hand-me-down furniture. The older a piece of furniture is, the less likely it is that the item will meet current safety guidelines. Some parents may be tempted to let their children sleep in the same crib they slept in as kids decades ago, but it's safer to eschew nostalgia in favor of products that meet the latest safety standards.

Get rid of potential choking hazards. The National Safety Council and the National Center for Injury Prevention indicate that airway obstruction injuries are the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths among infants less than 12 months old. Prior to bringing their babies home, expecting parents can remove all small trinkets and other items that curious children may want to put in their mouths. When buying toys for kids, read the packaging to make sure each item is safe for babies and avoid buying or accepting any gifts with small pieces.

Store all medicines on high shelves behind cabinet doors. Vitamins and medicines should be stored on high shelves behind cabinet doors. If kids can see them, they'll likely try to grab them. In fact, the NSC reports that children ages 19 and under account for roughly 8,000 fall-related emergency room visits every day. Hiding medicines on high shelves behind closed cabinet doors reduces the risk that kids will be poisoned and suffer a fall-related injury. Expecting parents will soon have a lot on their plate. Taking steps to safeguard a home before their babies are born can make the transition to parenthood that much easier.

Fall yard to-dos: aerate the family lawn

Aerating prevents soil from becoming compacted and covered with thatch – a thick layer of roots, stems and debris, that blocks water, oxygen and nutrients from reaching the soil.



How to prevent crabgrass

Few things can give a home exterior that sought-after wow factor as well as a nicely maintained lawn. A lush green landscape is a great way to show pride in home ownership and improve curb appeal.

As many homeowners know, lawns are under constant attack. The elements are rarely easy on lawns, and watchful eyes must always be kept open for other problems that can plague a lawn, including crabgrass.

Crabgrass can be a formidable adversary in the summer months. According to the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, crabgrass begins as seeds. These seeds germinate in spring or early summer. While crabgrass dies after the first hard frost in fall, crabgrass seeds remain dormant in winter, and the seeds then grow again in the following spring when ground temperature warms up. Without action to prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating, homeowners will likely end up with patches of crabgrass throughout their lawns every summer.

The healthier a lawn is, the harder it is for unwanted grasses like crabgrass to thrive. The following are a handful of strategies that can promote a healthy lawn and make it more difficult for unsightly crabgrass to establish itself in the months ahead.

Keep grass at a consistent length, and don't cut too low. Maintaining a consistent length of grass by mowing at regular intervals can make it hard for crabgrass to thrive. Crabgrass requires ample sunlight to germinate, so grass that is not cut too short may keep crabgrass from growing in. Of course, grass should not be allowed to grow knee-length, either. By raising blades to the mowing height appropriate for their type of grass, and mowing at regular intervals so the grass remains at that height through the summer, homeowners can promote healthy lawns and make it harder for crabgrass to germinate.

Never cut too much of the blade off of the grass. When mowing, don't cut too much of the blade off the grass with each cut, even if the grass seems especially long. As noted, cutting too low allows sunlight to reach crabgrass seeds. But cutting too much off the blade, even if the grass is still high after a mow, can injure the grass. Injured grass can make lawns more vulnerable to weeds and crabgrass.

Apply a pre-emergence herbicide. Pre-emergence herbicides kill germinating grass seedlings before they emerge from the soil. Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding when and how much herbicide to apply. If crabgrass has already started to grow, it's likely too late to apply a pre-emergence herbicide.

Crabgrass is an unwelcome invader in many lawns. Spring can be a great time to prevent this unwanted guest from returning this summer.

Fall is the time to prepare your home and lawn for winter's wrath.



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How to approach a basement remodel

A fully finished and functional basement is a dream for many homeowners. Such a space, when completed, can serve as an entertainment space, a man cave, an artist's studio, or any number of additional functions.

Despite their usefulness, finished basements are something of a rarity. In an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Construction, the National Association of Home Builders® found that only around 24 percent of single-family homes built in 2018 have basements. Homeowners who do not currently have a finished basement but are considering such a project can approach the remodel with a few key factors in mind. Careful consideration of these factors can ensure the project is budget-friendly and worthy of homeowners' investments.

Investment value: Conventional wisdom among home renovation and real estate experts suggests a basement remodel is best if done to satisfy current inhabitants and not necessarily to appeal to prospective buyers once the home is put up for sale. Remodeling magazine reports that a midrange basement remodel costing around $70,000 will provide a return of around $49,000 (or 70 percent) at resale. Though that's not a poor return on investment (ROI), homeowners who are remodeling a basement solely for the potential ROI at resale can find other projects that provide a greater return.

Foundation: The foundation of the home must garner ample consideration before beginning a basement remodel. Certain foundation issues, such as soft concrete, cracked or curved outside walls and cracks in the flooring, are indicative of significant issues with the foundation. These issues can be costly to address, and they must be remedied before the basement remodel can begin.

Existing space: Some homeowners may have bought their homes with partially finished basements or even finished areas that they simply want to remodel. In such instances, a pre-remodel inspection from a licensed home inspector can save homeowners lots of money and heartache over the long haul. Partially finished or even aging finished basements might not have been renovated in adherence to codes, which could lead to costly violations down the road. An inspection in advance of a remodel can give homeowners an idea of what they will need to do to bring the basement up to code. Local officials also can provide a list of necessary permits and a detailed description of requirements to ensure the remodeled basement adheres to code.

Soil: Soil surrounding the home should be tested prior to beginning the project. Radon is an odorless gas found in soil that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes can increase individuals' risk for lung cancer. Radon can seep into basements and increase that risk even further if it is present at elevated levels in the soil surrounding a home. Radon tests are simple and inexpensive, and no basement remodel project should begin without first conducting such a test.

Finished basements are valuable spaces. Homeowners who want to finish or remodel their basements should consider a host of factors before beginning the renovation.



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Not only does a finished basement provide extra living space, it also adds value to a home.

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Low-maintenance lawn alternatives

A traditional lawn may not be right for every property nor desired by every homeowner. There is no denying that lawns take time and effort to establish and daily or weekly maintenance to thrive. Homeowners who find that a traditional lawn is not practical can explore some low-maintenance alternatives.

Wildflower meadow

Homeowners with wide swaths of property may discover meadows are cost- and time-efficient. Stores sell special wildflower meadow mixes of seeds, or homeowners can use wildflower plug plants throughout areas where grasses are left to grow longer. This natural area can be a home to wildlife and an idyllic backdrop to a home. Most meadows only require a spring or summer and autumn cut to thrive and look good.

Ornamental grasses

Partition areas of the property for ornamental grasses to grow. The gardening resource Elemental Green says ornamental grasses tend to be drought-resistant and low-maintenance. They won't need much fertilizer and are often resistant to pests as well. Ornamental grasses grow in tufts or sprays and will not require mowing. However, they are not ideal for areas that get foot traffic.

Moss

Moss can thrive in shady areas and ones where the soil tends to stay a bit damp. Moss is velvety soft and green, so it can mimic the look of a traditional lawn but won't require mowing and other upkeep. Because it spreads quickly, moss can take over quite rapidly. You will need to protect areas where you do not want moss by creating barriers to stop spread.

Gravel

Stone and gravel areas can reduce maintenance in the landscape and require very little upkeep. When gravel is installed correctly, weeds may not grow readily. Gravel installation may include laying heavy-duty, semi-permeable landscape fabric, which is available at home improvement centers. Gravel is cheaper than pavers and can be just as beautiful.

Artificial turf

If the desired look is a lawn without all the upkeep, there are various artificial grass options on the market. Homeowners who opt for artificial turf can save money and space devoted to lawn mowers and other lawn tools.

Grass may be ideal for some, but there are alternatives for people who have troublesome landscapes or desire a low-maintenance product for their homes.

Sod vs. seed: which is your best option

A pristine lawn can be the finishing touch to a landscape and add significant value to a home. According to a joint study by the University of Alabama and the University of Texas at Arlington, homes with high curb appeal sell for an average of seven percent more than similar houses without inviting exteriors.

When it comes to establishing a lawn, homeowners have two key options: starting from seed or installing sod. Each comes with its share of advantages and disadvantages. Which option makes the most sense for a given lawn will boil down to various factors, including homeowners' budgets.

Seed

Seed is the first thing homeowners may think of when planning a lawn. Seed is an inexpensive, easily installed option. Plus, garden centers sell a variety of seeds specific to particular regions and climates. The home improvement resource Fixr says seed will cost an average of 24 cents per square foot installed compared to $1.29 for sod. That affordability compels many homeowners to turn to seed. However, seed can take up to two years to produce a lush lawn and it requires high maintenance in the initial months to establish the grass. Seed also requires greater soil preparation, including tilling to loosen soil and keeping the lawn well-watered until the grass is hardy. Weeds also may mix in with seed more readily, meaning weed prevention becomes an additional task.

Sod

One of the advantages to sod is that it can produce an instant lawn. When time is of the essence, sod will produce a complete lawn nearly as soon as the sod is laid. Sod can be used to mitigate soil erosion, as it works faster than seed, which needs to establish a root system to keep soil in check. Also, sod does not require as much soil preparation as seed.

The potential disadvantages to sod are its cost and the time it takes to install it, particularly on a large property. In addition, sod will require careful maintenance for at least the first two weeks until the sod takes stronger roots. It can be an expensive mistake if sod doesn't thrive and new pieces need to be installed. The Family Handyman says sod tends to be sun-loving and may not work in shadier areas of a property.

Sod and seed are the two main options for lush lawns. Each has its perks, and homeowners can speak with a local lawn specialist to determine which option is best for their lawn.

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Fall yard to-dos: water wisely

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Budget-friendly dining room renovation ideas

If the kitchen is the heart of the home, then the dining room may be akin to one of its arteries. The mood created in the kitchen spreads to the dining space where family and friends gather to eat and enjoy one another's company.

Dining rooms can get lost in the home renovation shuffle, as many homeowners tend to focus on renovating kitchens and bathrooms instead. Homeowners do not have to invest a lot of money in renovations to give their dining spaces awe-inspiring makeovers. Here's how to do so on a budget.

Lighten and brighten. Dining rooms were once very formal spaces. Dark woods, large pieces of furniture, over-the-top chandeliers, and other details could be found in many homes. But now that houses are being built with open floor plans, dining rooms can blend with other spaces, which have moved to lighter colored walls, flooring and furniture. A fresh coat of vibrant paint can work wonders and it doesn't cost much. If you can't remove a floor, cover it with a brightly colored area rug.

Switch things up with slipcovers. Slipcovers can be changed each season to dramatically alter the look of a dining room for little investment. Slip covers also protect chairs and can be easily laundered after spills.

Add floating shelving. Floating shelves provide much-needed storage or display space without the need to invest in another piece of furniture. Depending on the shelving, they can work in modern design schemes or even farmhouse dining spaces.

Clear out the clutter. It might be time to say "so long" to that large curio cabinet and the knickknacks within it. Curio and china cabinets used to be de rigueur, but plenty of people now prefer more open and airy dining rooms. For those who want to keep the cabinet, try decluttering inside to only include the very best display pieces and see if the cabinet can be refinished with paint or a lightly colored stain.

Improve lighting. Make the chandelier the statement piece of the space. Go for a bold color or an innovative design. Then add accessories throughout the space that coordinate with the chandelier.

Add bench seating. Those who need additional seating may not have to get entirely new furniture. Swap out some chairs for benches, which can fit a couple more guests than chairs.

Create depth with color. HGTV says that using various shades of the same color in a space can add depth. Coordinate drapes, walls, seat fabrics and accessories for a cohesive design.

Renovating a dining room doesn't require a large investment of time and money. A few simple steps can give dining spaces a whole new feel without busting homeowners' budgets.

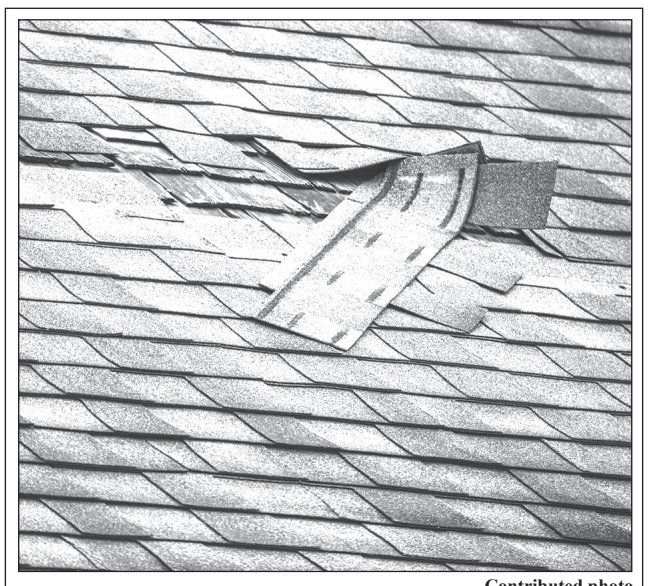
What causes curled shingles?

No homeowner wants to look at the exterior of his or her home and see roof damage. Such damage may lead homeowners to think they need a new roof, a potentially costly expense that can quickly throw household budgets into a state of disarray.

According to the HomeAdvisor, the average homeowner spends a little more than $7,600 installing a new roof. Various factors, including the size of a home and the type of roof homeowners prefer, will affect the cost of a roof replacement. In addition, homeowners who see roof damage can rest assured that not all roof problems will necessarily require a replacement roof to be installed.

Curled shingles are a problem many homeowners have encountered. This particular problem is not always indicative that a roof is on its way out. In fact, the home improvement resource, This Old House, notes as asphalt shingles age, their corners often begin to curl downward or upward. Homeowners who notice this early enough can glue down the curled section of each shingle that's beginning to curl.

Some shingles may be curling because they're defective. Fortified Roofing, a New Jersey-based roofing company that specializes in the repairing and replacing of various roofing configurations, advises homeowners to contact a local roofing professional to diagnose the cause of the curling. Doing so quickly can prevent curled shingles from contributing to more widespread damage.



Contributed photo

Not all roof problems mean a home needs a new roof, but curled shingles require homeowners' attention.

Moisture and poor ventilation may be contributing to curled shingles as well. Homeowners with attics in their home may see curled shingles on their roofs because moisture is building up in their poorly ventilated attics. In addition to causing damage such as curled shingles, a poorly ventilated attic allows moisture to build up, potentially contributing to mold growth. Mold presents a host of additional problems, including some that can adversely affect the health of a home's inhabitants.

Improper roof installation also may be the culprit behind curled shingles. When a roof is not installed correctly, shingles may not be aligned or nailed down in the right way. This might be what's causing shingles to curl on recently installed roofs.

Curled shingles are unsightly and can pose a significant threat to a home if not addressed promptly. Homeowners can protect themselves and their roofs by working with skilled roofing professionals, who can diagnose issues like curled shingles and offer the right solutions.

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Types of home insulation and where to install them

When thinking about renovating their homes, homeowners may imagine changing wall colors, expanding room sizes or upgrading appliances and fixtures. However, unless people take inventory of the less glamourous components of the home, such as structure, plumbing, heating and cooling, and insulation, other improvements may be for naught.

A home insulation project certainly doesn't offer the wow factor of a kitchen remodel, but insulation serves a vital function in the house that helps keep people comfortable and reduces energy consumption. Insulation is typically placed in areas where air escapes, such as between the stud cavities inside the walls and in the attic, and serves to slow and reduce heat transfer.

The U.S. Department of Energy says between 50 and 70 percent of the energy used in homes is for heating and cooling. By improving home insulation, homeowners can make their homes more comfortable, consistent and efficient. In fact, the ENERGY STAR program overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says homeowners stand to save an average of 15 percent on heating and cooling costs by adding proper insulation. To do so, homeowners can take a crash course in home insulation and find the products that fit their needs.

Blanket batts and rolls

Blanket batts and rolls typically are constructed with fiberglass, so proper safety gear, such as a mask and gloves, is needed when handling them. Installing this type of insulation is relatively easy since the materials are designed to fit the standard width between studs, rafters and floor joists.

Loose fill

Loose fill is usually made of fiberglass or cellulose (recycled paper fiber). It is blown or sprayed into place with pneumatic equipment, according to The Home Depot. Loose fill can be ideal for hard-to-reach areas in attics or inside wall cavities. It's good for adding insulation to irregularly shaped areas. Since it requires special equipment, this is a job best left to professionals.

Sprayed foam

Sprayed foam is just as the name implies, a foam made from polyurethane, polyisocyanurate, cementitious, or other materials that are applied by a spray container. DIYers who need only small applications can use canned products. Large quantities are pressure-sprayed by professionals.

Foam board/rigid foam panels

Ideal for unfinished walls, such as basement or foundation walls, floors and ceilings, these are boards of polyurethane or polystyrene. Foam boards tend to reduce energy consumption more effectively than other types of insulation.

Homeowners considering upgrading their insulation or amending existing insulation should do their homework on the type of insulation that will be most effective for their homes.

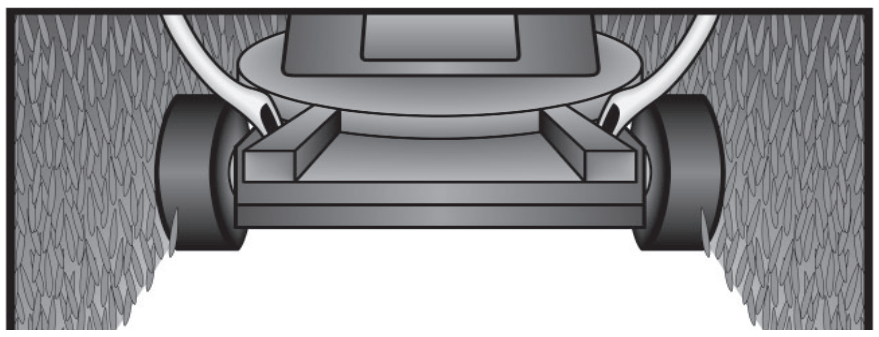


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While a home's insulation doesn't necessarily provide that wow factor, a properly insulated home is essential for a home to be comfortable and to reduce energy consumption.

Fall yard to-dos: mow at the right height

Keep cutting your grass until the first hard frost. Find the just-right length for your species, typically between two to three inches, to keep your grass healthy when it turns cold.



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Seven uses for fallen leaves

By the time autumn hits full swing, many trees will have shed their leaves for the season, and the last vestiges of red, yellow and orange magic will have faded to brown. Raking, blowing and collecting leaves becomes the primary chores of lawn and yard maintenance, and presents most homeowners with large piles of gathered leaves to tend to.

It is impossible to count just how many leaves fall to the ground each year or just how many pounds of leaves get collected curbside, but the numbers are substantial. Cleaning up leaves is considerable work, but not all of those leaves need to be carted away. In fact, there are several different uses of leaves that can be beneficial.

Spread leaves as a protective mulch to cover tender perennials or root crops/bulbs in the ground. The leaves will form a natural insulating cover that keeps the soil and the plants within a bit warmer over winter.

Create a pile of leaves that will break down and form a crumbly, compost-like material called leaf mold. Even though leaf mold may sound like a blight, it's actually a good amendment to garden soil, improving its structure and ability to hold water. Leaf mold also attracts beneficial organisms that are vital in healthy soil.

Brown leaves can be added to green materials in compost piles to improve the health of the compost being formed. According to the healthy living resource Care2, the ideal ratio is 75 percent brown to 25 percent green materials in compost. Turn compost piles regularly to aerate them.

Store dried, mulched leaves in a dry spot so they can be used in the spring as a weed barrier for spring plantings. They will keep weeds at bay and help retain soil moisture to ensure small sprouts have the resources to grow.

Use shredded leaves as a lawn supplement. Pass a lawn mower over leaves left on the lawn to break them down into pieces too small to rake. This will help keep the lawn healthy throughout the winter without blocking out needed sunlight.

Bag dried leaves and pack them tightly together in cold areas of the home, such as basements or garages. They can act as added insulation. Bags of leaves also can be placed around planting containers to protect them from frost.

Gather a few of the best-looking leaves and preserve them. Use an iron on a low setting and press leaves between two pieces of waxed paper until the waxed paper seals together. Or use clear contact paper to achieve the same effect.

Fallen leaves can be used in many different ways throughout the year.

Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter's arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well. Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening. But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.



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As the harsh winters months approach, home owners should take steps to protect their decks from the elements associated with cold winter months that can cause a deck to deteriorate.

Inspect the deck for problems. Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer. Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed before winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.

Clear the deck of potted plants. Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.

Store unnecessary furniture. Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a garage or shed for the winter. HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

Remove snow, but do so carefully. Prolonged contact with snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant. HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring.

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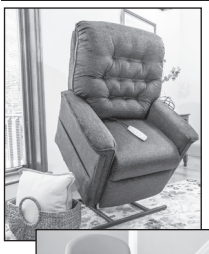
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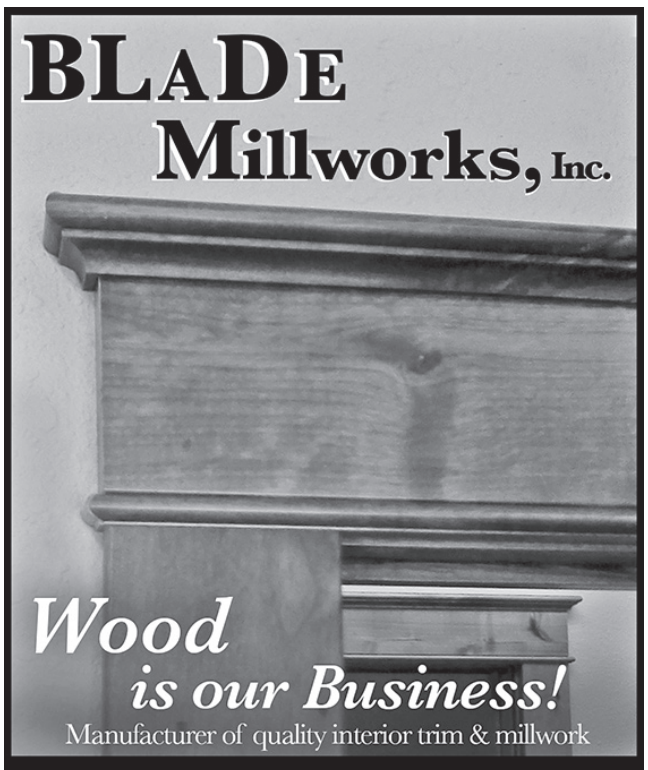
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A beginner's guide to fall planting and maintenance

Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to gardens.

The tree and bare root retailer Bower & Branch advises that soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head-start on next year's bounty.

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

Think about fall annuals and bulb planting. Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer flowers fade. Also, it's a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.

Sow salad seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radishes and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.

Take inventory of the sun. Positioning a garden carefully means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.

Fill in landscaping gaps. Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So, take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.

Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource, Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.

Continue to water plants. Water is essential in the fall and winter, as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.

Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.



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Mums fill in fall landscaping gaps, adding color to yards. They can also be enjoyed the following year once those potted mums are planted in the fall.



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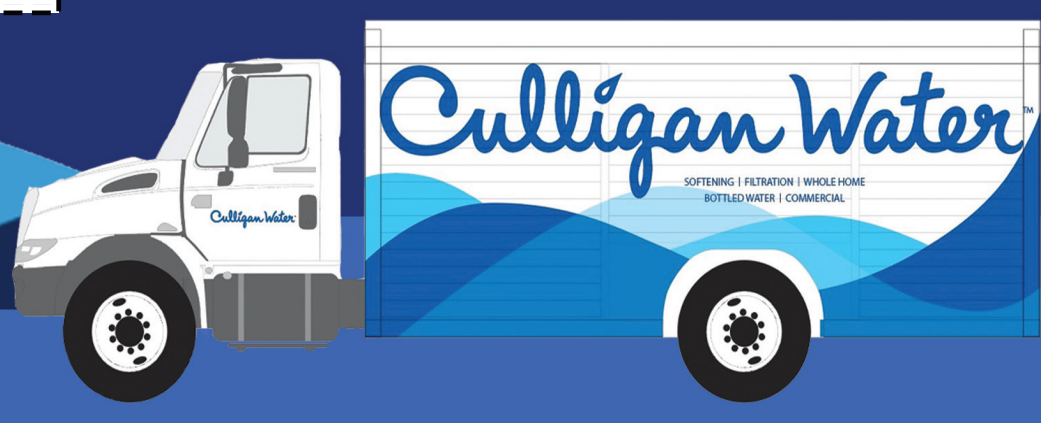
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An Auction Is a Great Way To Quickly Clean House - Garage - Sheds - Barn & More!

Call One of Our Agents Today & Discuss The Options!

SEPT 26	**K. ROGER GILBERT, BLAIR - ONLINE ONLY** Tractors, bobcat, mowers, '56 Chevy, antiques, tools
SEPT 26	**MERLIN RINDAHL ESTATE, ETTRICK - ONLINE ONLY** Tractors, machinery, antiques, primitives, '38 Chevy
SEPT 27	**62 +/- ACRES, WOODVILLE - ONLINE ONLY** In 3 parcels: Parcel 1 w/3BR, outbldgs, 4 acres
SEPT 30	**HUMMERS AUTO INVENTORY REDUCTION, ETTRICK LIVE/ONLINE** Payloader, excavator, sq. bodies, trucks
OCT 01	**ROBERT & MARY RESHEL ESTATE, PITTSVILLE** Farm machinery, l & g, tools, antiques & household
OCT 04	**FARM AUCTION, GLENWOOD CITY - ONLINE ONLY, OH 10/3** JD tractors, haying equip., farm, misc.
OCT 10	**OCTOBER CONSIGNMENT, ARCADIA** Farm & heavy equip., vehicles, lawn & garden
OCT 11	**GARY & GLORIA CROSSMAN, EAU CLAIRE** Woodworking eq., tools, guns, tractor, UTV, hh, antiques
OCT 14	**MARVIN & MARIE SCHUTTE, WITHEE - LIVE/ONLINE** Real Estate, 3+BR, 1.5+BA, 2-story
OCT 14	**MARVIN & MARIE SCHUTTE, WITHEE** Antiques, furniture, household

Dave Nehring	Josh Baecker	Jamie Back	Jacob Lallemont
715.797.0253	715.533.4114	715.797.0802	608.863.3928

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1. Visit our website at HANSENAUCTIONGROUP.COM
2. Click the auction in which you want to bid
3. Click "View Catalog and Bid"
4. Find the item you want to bid on and click "Register to Bid" (or place bid if already signed in)
5. Fill out personal info to complete registration process
6. After registering, you will be able to bid on any item on the auction. High bid on each item wins!