

Spring Home

MARCH 2016

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Did you know?

The home improvement market, which includes both improvements and maintenance, has rebounded considerably from its most recent low point in 2011. The Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS) of Harvard University indicated in early 2015 that the upcoming year would surpass the \$324 billion spent on improvements during the peak of the housing boom a decade ago. Even though homebuilding and the home industry in general is still not at complete recovery, trends within the home improvement industry do suggest that homeowners have once again become comfortable investing in their homes.

How to create extra space for guests

Homeowners who enjoy entertaining frequently sometimes host overnight guests. While many hosts and hostesses have spare bedrooms for overnight or long-term guests, many others do not. But those among the latter group willing to get a little creative can find more places for overnight guests to rest their heads.

Sofa: Living room or den sofas can double as bedding for overnight guests. As a short-term solution, a night or two on the couch can be comfortable enough. Be sure to cover the sofa with freshly laundered sheets and provide those amenities one would expect in a guest space. Access to a television, a reading lamp, a fan for some white noise and a table on which to place a phone or alarm clock are helpful to have. Such items will make guests more comfortable. If your living room or family room has a door that can be closed, this will help create more privacy for guests.

Convertible bed: Marketed frequently under the brand name Murphy Bed, convertible beds can incorporate sleeping options into rooms with limited space. This furniture essentially is a bed that folds vertically or horizontally into a frame. When closed, the bed can look like a decorative storage closet or armoire. Some convertible beds come with bookcase accessories to expand storage space and also make the piece look like a more cohesive unit.

Designers also have experimented with these beds, and some transform from a desk or even from a low-lying bookshelf or bench into a bed.

Sofa bed or chair: Sofa beds and chairs have a fold-out bed nestled beneath their cushions. Depending on the size of the couch, a twin, full or queen-sized bed may be housed within. Sofa beds vary in regard to their comfort levels, so prospective hosts should investigate their options to ensure guests have the most comfortable sleeping situations possible. A bed in a couch can turn an office or living space into a guest sanctuary in a matter of minutes. In addition, some sofa beds also have extra space built within for storing blankets and pillows. Many popular furniture retailers offer couch brands that can be equipped with a bed. And if space is especially tight, consider a convertible chair that has a twin-sized bed tucked away.

Bunk beds: Bunk beds may seem like child's play, but they make great use of vertical space. Share a kid's room with your son or daughter and let the guest take your own bedroom. Otherwise, equip a home office with bunk beds and have two more sleeping spaces available.

Accommodating guests when you don't have a guest bedroom can take some creativity, but those willing to think outside the box can find options that don't compromise guests' comfort.



Invest in a sofa bed and you will always have an extra spot for overnight guests to use.

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3 ways to improve indoor air quality all year long

As winter wears on, it's not uncommon for people living in cold weather climates to experience some cabin fever. Winter weather confines many people to their homes, making many antsy to get out once the first signs of spring begin to appear.

In addition to contributing to cabin fever, winter weather can have a negative impact on indoor air quality. While air pollution is something most often associated with densely populated cities, the air inside homes is not immune to pollution, especially during long winters when windows are often closed for months at a time. Though open windows in spring and summer can vastly improve indoor air quality, there are ways to ensure that air stays fresh and healthy regardless of which season it happens to be.

1. Clean the floors.

Dirty floors are one of the chief contributors to poor indoor air quality. Dust, dirt, pollen, and pet dander can accumulate on floors, leading to poor air quality

and potentially aggravating respiratory conditions such as asthma. When vacuuming, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter, which is a uniquely designed mechanical air filter that traps harmful particles such as pollen, pet dander and dust mites. When you finish vacuuming, mop floors to gather any dust or allergens that escaped the vacuum.

2. Control indoor air moisture.

Moist air is great for dust mites and mold, both of which are very bad for humans, so do everything you can to maintain healthy levels of indoor air moisture. Dehumidifiers can reduce indoor air moisture and control allergens, but it's important to take additional steps as well. When bathing, try to keep a bathroom window open on a slight crack to prevent mold growth. When preparing meals in the kitchen, make use of your exhaust fan. In addition, don't overwater houseplants, as they can become breeding grounds for mold.

3. Resist synthetic fragrances.

A home that smells good tends to feel more pleasant, especially during winter months when windows are closed. But synthetic fragrances, such as those found in detergents and air fresheners, may be providing that welcoming scent at a heavy cost to a home's inhabitants. Such fragrances may be emitting various chemicals, including volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, into the air, affecting indoor air quality and possibly even human health. When buying laundry products, look for those that are fragrance-free, also choosing home cleaning products that do not include any artificial fragrances. Indoor air quality tends to suffer in colder months, when windows are closed and doors are open only briefly. But homeowners can take a handful of simple yet effective steps to ensure the air in their homes is healthy all year long.



Mopping after vacuuming can remove any lingering allergens and improve indoor air quality.

Find and maintain the right carpet for you



Homeowners should consider as many variables as possible, including foot traffic in a given room, before installing carpeting in their homes.

Carpet provides both practical and aesthetic appeal inside a home. In winter, carpets help keep homes warm, and the right color carpet can add to design schemes.

While rugs may have originated in the Far East, North America also has some rich carpet history. According to The Carpet and Rug Institute, the United States carpet industry began in 1791 when the first woven carpet

mill opened in Philadelphia. Others soon followed suit. Tufted carpets and machine-powered manufacturing helped churn out yards upon yards of carpeting, making it a popular, affordable and common addition to homes, especially after the post-World War II housing boom. Carpeting remains a go-to flooring material in modern homes. In fact, many homes offer a blend of both carpeting in some rooms and different flooring choices in others.

Upon choosing carpet, it is important that homeowners follow some guidelines to prolong a carpet's longevity and maintain its style. The following are some common carpeting dos and don'ts.

DO consider the room's purpose and foot traffic before shopping for carpeting. Make a list of the attributes desired (e.g., soundproofing, easy care, high pile) and present these to the salesperson so he or she can help you make the best choice.

DON'T rush into flooring choices. Unlike paint colors, flooring materials are more permanent choices that are only updated every several years or more. Weigh all of your options before diving in.

DO consider conservative colors and styles. Neutral hues and patterns will blend better with furniture options. This means you can change furniture out and still keep the existing carpeting, which complements any

new pieces. Also, if there's a chance you might sell your home in the near future, buyers tend to look for a neutral color scheme they can make their own.

DON'T skimp on padding to save a few dollars on the carpet installation. The carpeting needs a solid foundation to last and look its best. Inadequate padding can lead to extra and noticeable wear and tear. Invest in a good foundation for the carpeting, like firm, dense padding in high-traffic areas.

DO become knowledgeable about different carpet styles, such as frieze, Berber, Saxony, textured, and more. This will help ensure you make the most educated decision.

DON'T purchase at the first store you visit. Shop around to investigate different pricing and specials. Also, consider the professionalism and expertise of the staff responsible for carpet installation. High-cost carpet may not look very good if it isn't installed correctly.

DO stain-protect rugs and carpeting, which can help repel stains that would otherwise become permanent and can prolong the longevity of the flooring.

DON'T forget to vacuum carpets frequently to prevent ground-in dirt and debris.

DO pick textured carpets to conceal footprints and vacuum track marks.

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Sustainable flooring options abound

Kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects tend to make great investments, earning homeowners significant returns when they sell their homes down the road. But flooring upgrades are another home renovation project that can attract attention and help sellers when they put their homes on the market.

Home flooring options abound, and it is easy to get excited and overwhelmed about flooring renovation projects. When choosing new flooring materials, homeowners should keep in mind the latest consumer trends, as those trends might help them recoup more of their flooring investment down the road.

One popular flooring trend is the use of sustainable materials. In addition to the more widely known benefits of choosing sustainable flooring, such as protecting natural resources and reducing a home's carbon footprint, sustainable flooring can help reduce indoor air pollution. Various studies from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have shown that indoor air pollutant levels may be higher indoors than outdoors. A major contributor to indoor air pollution are the volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, being off-gassed by carpeting and other flooring in a home. Flooring manufacturers and designers are embracing the green design and remodeling movement. Today there are many beautiful and sustainable eco-flooring options. Here are some of the more popular materials.

Bamboo: Contrary to popular belief, bamboo is not a wood, but a grass. It is a fast-growing grass, and that makes it a smart choice in many design applications. Also, unlike wood, which will absorb moisture and can warp, bamboo repels water and can be used for flooring in areas where one wouldn't think to put wood, such as in bathrooms, entryways or mudrooms.

Bamboo is naturally very light in color, but can be stained in many different hues to give homeowners more options.

Green carpeting: Consumers can now find a wide range of sustainable carpets and rugs that are available at competitive prices. Wool carpets made with undyed or vegetable-dyed yarns and minimal glues are some options. Some carpets are even made from recycled content, such as rubber and plastics. Water-based, low-VOC adhesives paired with recycled cotton padding can reduce the toxicity and impact of carpeting even further.

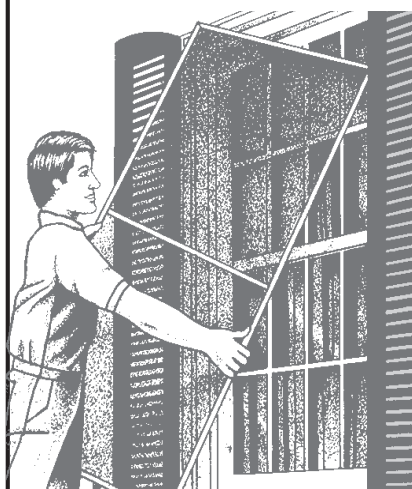
Cork: Growing in popularity, cork is a material harvested from the bark of cork trees found in the forests of the Mediterranean. The bark grows back every three years, so it is a handy renewable resource. Cork boasts fire-retardant properties and may naturally repel insects. It can usually be stained to suit various color schemes.

Rubber: Rubber flooring may call to mind fitness gyms and playground safety substrate, but it's also slowly finding its way into homes. Made from recycled tires, rubber flooring is flexible underfoot and can be long-lasting and colorful.

Reclaimed wood: Rather than purchasing brand new hardwood planks for flooring, homeowners can opt for reclaimed wood reused from other building applications. After some sanding, staining and finishing, reclaimed wood provides homeowners with the opportunity to choose traditional hardwood flooring without any concerns about deforestation.

Eco-friendly flooring materials continue to evolve and can be smart choices in today's homes.

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Reclaimed wood adds instant appeal to home projects

Repurposing salvaged wood is a popular trend in the home improvement industry. Not only can using salvaged wood give a home a one-of-a-kind look, but it's a handy way to incorporate the three Rs of green living into your lifestyle: reduce, reuse and recycle.

Reclaimed wood is often used in flooring, beams, wall treatments, and doors, but it also can be turned into furniture or home accent items. Reclaimed wood adds warmth and historical interest to a home's decor that newer materials may lack. Although finding wood that can be salvaged takes time and some legwork, such efforts can quickly pay off. Many businesses are now devoted to reclaimed timber, which can help make the process of finding and using salvaged wood even easier.

Homeowners considering reclaimed wood may be interested to learn that such wood can serve various functions aside from benefitting the planet.

Match old-growth wood. New regulations may prevent certain species of trees from being cut down. That means it can be challenging to match old wood in a home, particularly if you're looking to maintain historical value and authenticity. Relying on salvaged wood items can alleviate this concern, ensuring that you can find rare woods that are no longer available brand new.

Salvaged wood has character. It's difficult to mimic the natural age marks and character that older wood may have. Instead of being raised on farms,

wood harvested decades ago probably grew in natural environments, making the wood both durable and strong. The color and grain of salvaged wood may also be unique.

Look at objects in a new way. Doors are versatile pieces of reclaimed lumber because they're already flat and rather large. Doors can be turned into headboards, tables or benches. Staircase or porch posts can be turned into candlestick holders, and wood shutters can dress up walls and provide a place to hang artwork and other wall items.

Reclaimed wood can be found everywhere. Most people do not have to look too far to find wood they can salvage. Check salvage yards, landfills, dumpsters in front of older homes being renovated, or older, unused barns in rural settings. You also can collect driftwood or discarded shipping crates. While some reclaimed wood can be used as-is, some pieces may require millwork, including sanding, cutting, shaping, and finishing. If you do not have these skills, you probably will have to hire someone who does. The Internet is awash with ideas for putting salvaged wood to use. Get inspired and then find the pieces that will fit your project.

Add curb appeal to your property



An inviting entryway free of clutter can add substantial curb appeal to a property.

Many people are familiar with the idea that a strong first impression can go a long way. While that idea is most often referenced in regard to personal interactions, it's also applicable to real estate.

When selling a home, homeowners who emphasize curb appeal may find it far easier to sell their homes. Curb appeal refers to the impression a home's exterior makes on people seeing the home for the first time. In 2014, the online real estate database Zillow® surveyed real estate agents and found that curb appeal was one of the five most important factors when selling a home.

Projects that improve curb appeal can be vast undertakings or simpler projects, and the following are a handful of projects to improve a home's curb appeal that run the gamut from simple to complex.

Clean up the yard. Cleaning up the yard is among the simpler yet most effective projects to improve a home's curb appeal. When selling their homes, homeowners should clear the yard of any clutter, including kids' toys, grass clippings or items that might be scattered throughout

the yard. A cluttered yard suggests homeowners do not care much about their home's appearance, and that may lead buyers to think that indifference extended to maintaining the home's interior as well. Many buyers will ignore properties without any external aesthetic appeal, but cleaning up the yard does not require much effort or expense on the part of sellers.

Make the main entryway more inviting. Creating a more inviting entryway won't be as simple as cleaning up the yard, but it can help create a strong first impression without breaking the bank. To begin, remove plants and furniture from the front porch or area surrounding the doorway, as such items can create a cluttered feel. If the front door is old, replace it. Custom doors may be expensive, but they might add the wow factor buyers are looking for. If a new door is beyond your means or just unnecessary, repaint the door, ideally in a color that complements the color of your home and the surrounding landscape.

Address pavement problems. Paving problems are not necessarily an expensive fix, but the cost of repairing driveways and walkways can add up if it's been awhile since these areas were refurbished. Still,

one of the first things buyers will notice when getting out of their cars is the ground they're walking on, so patch and repair or even replace driveways and walkways that have fallen into disrepair.

Add or upgrade outdoor living spaces.

Outdoor living spaces also can set a property apart from others on the market. A recent study from the National Association of Realtors found that buyers would not hesitate to pay asking price for homes with outdoor living spaces. When adding or upgrading outdoor living spaces, try to depersonalize the spaces as much as possible, as buyers want to picture themselves, and not the sellers, enjoying these areas. Include some comfortable furniture, adequate lighting and a dining area in your outdoor living space as well. Curb appeal can add a lot to a home, while lack of such appeal can make a home difficult to sell. Homeowners who want to sell their properties for asking price or more should address curb appeal before putting their homes on the market.

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How to clean and maintain stainless steel



No matter the style of a homeowner's kitchen, be it modern, traditional or farmhouse, stainless steel appliances can add a pop of shine and a touch of class. Proponents of stainless steel appliances note their easy maintenance, stylish look and durability. Plus, the neutral tone of stainless steel helps it blend in with just about any color palette. Stainless steel is lauded for its strength and resistance to corrosion and rust. These attributes make it a popular choice in kitchens, where moisture is an issue. Although they are certainly durable choices, stainless steel appliances require maintenance to keep them looking and performing at their best. Considering that stainless steel also costs more than other finish options, taking the time to learn proper care can help protect homeowners' investments.

Avoid chlorine bleach or other products containing chloride.

Although stainless steel is highly resistant to corrosion, it is not completely impervious. Chlorine products can damage the surface of stainless steel appliances and stain them if the chlorine is left to sit.

Do not use metal scourers or coarse abrasives on the stainless

steel because such products may scratch the steel. Steel wool pads can leave behind a residue of small metal particles that may eventually rust.

Baking soda mixed with a little dish soap can be used to remove some tough dirt and stains. Rinse well and towel dry to avoid streaking.

Clean and wipe the steel in the direction of the "grain." Usually this means working from the top of the appliance and moving down toward the floor.

Consult with the owner's manual before undertaking any maintenance or cleaning. The appliance may have a special coating over the stainless steel to help protect it, and it's best to know what you're dealing with before getting your hands dirty.

If you will be trying a cleaning product or scouring method, always test it first in an inconspicuous spot to see if it is effective or harmful.

Julien, a leader in commercial kitchen equipment, recommends applying cleansers with a soft cloth or sponge. Then wipe dry with a soft, clean cloth or allow to air dry. Stainless steel remains a popular material in kitchens for sinks and appliances. With care, stainless steel can look like new for years to come.

Did you know?



In its 2015 "Cost vs. Value Report," *Remodeling* magazine found that a midrange kitchen remodeling project, which cost an average of nearly \$57,000 during the period examined, recouped roughly 68 percent of that cost at resale. That return was slightly less than that provided by midrange bathroom remodeling projects, which provided a 70 percent return at resale. More upscale remodeling projects provided even smaller returns, despite costing substantially more money. For example, the cost of major upscale kitchen remodeling projects averaged \$113,000 during the time studied for the report. But only 59 percent of that sizable investment provided was recouped at resale. Upscale bathroom remodeling projects also underperformed compared to midrange projects, recouping slightly less than 60 percent at resale. No upscale project referenced in the report provided a greater return than replacing existing siding with new fiber-cement siding, a project that recouped homeowners a greater than 84 percent return at resale. More information about the 2015 report is available at www.remodeling.hw.net.

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When cleaning their homes in the spring, homeowners should not forget to inspect their curtains, which can accumulate dust and dirt over the course of winter.

Spring cleaning projects you don't want to forget

Spring cleaning is an annual tradition in many households. After a winter spent cooped up indoors, spring cleaning can rejuvenate a household and provide a great chance to rid a home of a season's worth of clutter. Donating old clothes and cleaning out the garage are popular spring cleaning projects, but there are a host of additional tasks homeowners can tackle to freshen up their homes this spring.

Floors

Simply vacuuming or sweeping the floors might not be enough to banish some of winter's most uninvited guests. Dust has a way of settling into a home over the course of a typical winter, and it's easy for a home's inhabitants to track dirt and debris inside as well. After vacuuming or sweeping floors, go over them with a mop. Doing so can remove any lingering dust, dirt, debris, and allergens the vacuum or broom failed to pick up. Apply wood cleaner and polish to wood floors to make them look even cleaner.

Baseboards

Though baseboards might not seem all that dirty, upon closer inspection homeowners might notice substantial accumulations of dirt and dust. Such dirt and dust many not be removed so easily, so homeowners might need to use hot water and a sponge to remove any debris that is clinging.

Curtains

Curtains also may have absorbed substantial amounts of dust, dirt and debris over the winter. This might be more visible near the end of winter when more sunlight begins to shine through. Clean the curtains in adherence to the manufacturer instructions before you open windows for the season so any wind that blows in does not spread debris onto nearby furniture. Once the curtains have been washed, opening windows may help them dry more quickly.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms also tend to bear the brunt of winter weather, as mold and grime can accumulate throughout

a season in which it's too cold to open bathroom windows to let fresh air in after bathing. Inspect ceilings, tubs, shower stalls, and floors for any signs of mold growth or grime. Mold growth in a home can lead to respiratory problems and exacerbate existing conditions such as asthma, so it's best to inspect bathrooms for any signs of mold growth throughout winter. If you have let that slip, prioritize such inspections come spring cleaning time.

Furniture

It's easy to overlook furniture when tackling spring cleaning, but dust and dirt can quickly accumulate on couches and chairs over the course of winter. When possible, vacuum furniture to remove any debris that might have accumulated while windows and doors were kept shut, and shampoo any cushions or seat covers that don't pass the smell test. Spring cleaning encompasses a host of tasks, and homeowners who want a truly clean house should not overlook smaller tasks that can produce big results.



Doing away with dining rooms

Formal dining rooms are no longer as coveted as they once were. Family dinners, if they manage to be at home, are now just as likely to be served in the kitchen or in another space, such as on the patio or in the living room while watching television, as they are in formal dining rooms. Trendy homeowners have begun to ditch dining rooms in favor of using the space for other purposes. Homeowners with a passion for literature can outfit the room with floor-to-ceiling bookcases to turn one-time dining rooms into the ultimate library. Those who need a bit more family space can use a dining room as a

family room, outfitting the room with all storage nooks, a flat screen TV and a comfortable couch to make it more inviting. Because dining rooms are often located next to the kitchen, the removal of walls can make expanding the kitchen even easier. If their kitchens are cramped, homeowners can look into ways to spread out into the space allotted for the dining area. There are many ways to repurpose dining rooms so they are functional to homeowners' specific needs, especially if those needs do not include formal dining areas.

Make garage organization go smoothly

Garages tend to fall victim to disorganization during the winter, when homeowners want to hurry inside and get some respite from the cold. As a result, many homeowners resolve to clean their garages come springtime. Cleaning a disorganized garage overcome with clutter can be an all-day job, so homeowners would be wise to reserve a springtime Saturday or Sunday to get their garages back in order. Upon designating ample time to clean their garages, homeowners can then utilize a few additional tips to make the project go as smoothly as possible.

Empty the garage. The first step when organizing a garage is to empty it completely. Old machinery and rusted lawn and garden tools have a way of disappearing in garages, and those items may remain there for years if the garage is never emptied. Once you have emptied the garage, you might be surprised to learn just how much or even how little space you have to work with.

Clean the garage top to bottom. After you have emptied the garage, give it a thorough cleaning. Cleaning the garage serves multiple purposes. A clean garage is less likely to be overcome with dirt and/or critters, both of which can contribute to the deterioration of tools and machinery stored in the garage. In addition, you may be less likely to let a clean garage fall back into disorganization, saving you the trouble of reorganizing the garage next spring.

Look up. Many homeowners fail to make adequate use of the vertical space in their garages. But keeping items off the floor can make it easier to clean the garage and will provide more room for your car or other machinery you don't want to leave in the driveway or a backyard shed. Install shelves so you can more safely store automotive fluids and cleaners, and hang some hooks or hammer a few nails into the garage walls so you can hang tools like rakes and garden shears.

Group tools by season. Grouping tools by season can make for a more organized garage and one less likely to be overcome with clutter. Designate one corner of the garage for lawn and gardening tools and another for winter tools like snow shovels or snowblowers. This makes it easier to find tools when you need them. When grouping tools, you can also group items by who uses them. For example, parents can designate one area of the garage for their tools, while kids can get their own area for their toys and bicycles.

Resolve to park in the garage. One of the best ways to keep a garage organized is to park your vehicle or vehicles inside the garage each night. Parking in a garage protects your vehicle(s) from the elements, and you also won't be tempted to leave items lying around on the garage floor if you know you will eventually be pulling your vehicle in. A few simple strategies can make springtime garage organization more effective and efficient.



Did you know?

Fences can provide privacy and transform backyards into calming places to relax and unwind. But fences also may lead to disputes with neighbors if installation is not carried out with etiquette. Always place the fence within your property lines, which can be determined by examining a land survey for your home. Inform your neighbors of your intention to erect a fence, and give any concerns they might have substantial consideration. Face the more aesthetically appealing side of the fence outward to the street and to neighbors' yards. In addition, maintain the fence once it is installed so it does not become a neighborhood eyesore that irks your neighbors.

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Embrace the wonders of wireless at home

Electronic devices enable us to access information, communicate and engage in entertainment. Consumer electronics also have transformed the typical household. Data from the Consumer Electronics Association, CTIA and U.S. Census Bureau paint a picture of just how immersed in new technology society has become. Statistics indicate the typical home of 2.6 people has an average of 24 electronic gadgets in use, including one or more smartphones. These devices include eReaders, HDTVs, laptops, tablets, printers, digital cameras, DVRs, Bluetooth speakers, portable GPS devices, and more.

To meet the demands of all of these devices, some homes need an electronics overhaul, including beefing up the capabilities of Internet connections and wireless networks. Many Wi-Fi routers claim to be capable of supporting as many as 255 connected devices. While this is theoretically possible, having that many devices on a standard home wireless router can compromise how well a network works. The results may include slow Internet browsing abilities, long lag time and even connection interference or dropage. When considering renovation projects around the home, it may be worth it to pay attention to electronic devices and their connectivity.

Start with the router

The wireless router in your home is a technological workhorse. When the router goes down, your devices follow suit. Without a router you will not be able to access the digital signal from your Internet Service Provider and send it out to all of your devices.

Many older routers broadcast on a 2.4GHz signal, the same as many other radio devices. Crowding on the 2.4GHz spectrum could cause slowdown during the busiest times of the day for Internet traffic. It may be worth it to invest in a new router that can search for other channels that have less traffic and broadcast through them.

Test your speed

Relatively inexpensive software can show you your Internet speed numbers to see if your connection is meeting the speeds promised by your ISP. If your speed is slow when tested at various times in a given day, you may want to upgrade your service package to a faster service plan. If the speed is adequate, you can invest in some other options.

Get new hardware

Routers should be placed in a central location so that the signal can be accessed throughout the house. But router placement may depend on where your cable or fiber optic lines enter the home. If router signal interference seems suspect in slower connections, hardware, such as a greater-range antenna, wireless access points, and wireless repeaters can help expand your router signal throughout the house. Speak with a wireless network expert about the options that may be best for your home. Another consideration is a Wi-Fi plug that uses existing electrical circuits in a home to expand the signals offered by the router.

Expand your gadget list

Once a wireless signal is verified and confirmed as adequate, you may be interested in additional devices that can tap into the wireless network and make your home run more efficiently. Manufacturers now offer everything from wireless door locks that can be controlled with a smartphone to wireless flash memory cards that can easily transfer photos from a camera to computer to wireless lighting control throughout the entire house. With wireless speakers, you can instantly beam music to any number of units in a home or use a NAS (network attached storage) drive as a backup for photos, videos and other large files. Technology is changing the way people utilize their homes. Making sure a wireless network is up to par can make using devices easier and more efficient.



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Freshen up your home for the spring season

After a few months of chilly temperatures, come spring, many homeowners are eager to throw open their windows and doors and breathe new life into their homes. Simple changes made now — even before the weather begins to warm up — can improve interior spaces and brighten the atmosphere of a home.

Go plant shopping. Research from NASA suggests adding at least one plant in your home per 100 square feet is efficient enough to clean air. Fresh foliage also makes a home feel warm and inviting. Watering and misting plants introduces moisture into indoor air, which can make rooms overcome with dry air from heating systems feel comfortable. Just be sure to avoid overwatering plants, which can lead to mold growth.

Swap out throw pillows. Accent pillows on beds and sofas are quick and inexpensive ways to add new bursts of color to rooms. You may be able to make over a room's entire color scheme with new pillows. Invest in pillows that you can switch with each season so your decor will never look tired or dull.

Clean existing light fixtures. Another way to brighten the mood in a home is to periodically clean light fixtures to make

sure they are working effectively. Spend time dusting them and cleaning off any accumulated debris. If need be, switch out old lamp shades for newer ones that let more light shine through. If inadequate lighting is a problem no matter how many lamps you have, consult with an electrician about installing more overhead and accent lighting.

Give rugs and floors a deep cleaning. Recirculated air may be full of dust and other microscopic particles that end up blowing throughout your home. Also, it's easy to track in dirt and other materials on your shoes that become imbedded in carpeting. At least once a year, rent or enlist the services of carpet and upholstery cleaners to give floors a thorough cleaning. You may be surprised at how clean and fresh a home looks and smells once rugs and carpets are deep-cleaned. You also can make a dry carpet cleaner using baking soda, corn starch and desired fresh herbs

for fragrance. Sprinkle and then vacuum up after a few hours.

Color-coordinate bookshelves. Group all books with similarly colored covers together for an instant and eye-appealing look.

Simmer some homemade home deodorizer. In a large pot, boil water and some scented herbs, such as rosemary, citrus rinds, vanilla, or lavender. The aroma will waft through the home, creating a pleasing scent.

Invest in new window treatments. Lightweight draperies or new blinds or shades can transform the look of a room. Be sure to keep curtains and blinds open during the day to maximize the hours of sunlight. Homeowners can make some simple changes while they're stuck indoors and reap the benefits when the weather warms up again.

Fresh flowers, new throw pillows and lightweight draperies are some easy ways to transform a home in time for spring's arrival.



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This bathroom can be made safer with the addition of grab bars, a bath seat, non-slip flooring, and a transfer bench.



Modifications to make bathrooms safer

Few areas in a home can prove as perilous as bathrooms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says every year around 235,000 people over the age of 15 visit emergency rooms in the United States because of injuries suffered in bathrooms. The majority of these injuries — many of which require hospitalization — result from falls. Injuries sustained in bathrooms typically occur in and around bathtubs, usually when a person is getting in or out of the tub. Falls occur when people slip on wet surfaces or get dizzy and lose consciousness within the tight confines of the bathroom. Although bathroom injuries are mostly associated with the elderly, anyone is susceptible to such injuries. Debilitating diseases, instability from an accident or injury or even impaired vision can trigger a bathroom accident. Thankfully, some minor modifications can make bathrooms safer for everyone.

Grab bars

Unsteady individuals may rely on towel bars or shower knobs to provide some balance when maneuvering around bathrooms. But such items were not designed to support a person's weight and can be slippery, making grab bars the safer choice. Look for bars with slip-resistant surfaces instead of chrome plating. Bolted-in bars that are fixed to the studs in a wall, provide more reliable support than bars that employ suction to stay connected to the wall. Install the bars where they provide optimal leverage and stability, such as close to the shower and on each side of the toilet.

Chairs

A bath/shower chair can make bathing safer. Pharmacies and medical supply retailers carry these sturdy, plastic chairs and stools which can fit inside of a shower or tub. They enable a person to rest his or her legs and sit while bathing. When

remodeling a bathroom, have a seating area built into the design of the shower enclosure so that the addition looks seamless.

Transfer bench

Many injuries occur when people are attempting to get in and out of the tub or shower, but a transfer bench can greatly reduce the risk of such injuries. The bench is placed outside of the tub, and users just sit on the bench and then swing their legs over the ledge of the tub rather than stepping over while standing.

Walk-in showers

Some homeowners are eliminating tubs from their homes altogether. A walk-in shower provides a barrier-free entry into the shower, making it safer for those who have difficulty stepping into and out of bathtubs.

Lever-style fixtures

Knob temperature controls on faucets can be challenging to grasp for people with arthritis or poor grips. Lever-style fixtures are easier to maneuver and can help prevent scalding. These levers also are easier for children to manage. The National Kitchen and Bath Builders Association recommends installing pressure-balanced and temperature-controlled valves in the bath and shower.

Forgiving flooring

Tile may be preferred around the bathroom, but it can be cold and slippery. Investigate other water-resistant flooring materials that may be softer underfoot and offer greater traction. Rubber flooring made from recycled tires is one option that is gaining ground for its practicality and sustainability. Changes around the bathroom can alleviate many of the risks that contribute to the hundreds of thousands of injuries that occur in bathrooms every year.

5 THINGS to consider before expanding your home

Homeowners who feel their homes are a little confined may be interested in expanding their homes to make them more comfortable and serviceable. Several questions may come to mind when homeowners are considering adding on to an existing home. Expanding a home requires careful consideration. While the end results can be spectacular, expansion is typically a long and costly process that will impede on the lifestyles of a home's inhabitants during the renovation process. Expect loud noises, work crews and sawdust throughout the project. Depending on which areas are being renovated, residents may feel their lives are in upheaval until the expansion project has been completed. Familiarizing yourself with the expansion process and recognizing potential snags along the way can make planning and coping that much easier.

1. Many homeowners first consult with a contractor when mulling over expansions. However, you may want to speak with an architect first. He or she may be able to suggest renovations that fit with your neighborhood and appeal to prospective buyers when you decide to sell your home in the future.

2. Visit your building inspection or municipal office to learn the local regulations. You want to ensure that

any renovations you make are done in keeping with safety codes and laws.

3. While you're thinking of your neighbors, give them the heads up on your potential plans. This way they will not be surprised by the extra noise and activity when the renovation begins.

4. Remodeling can cost anywhere from \$200 to \$600 per square foot added. You'll need to figure out a way to pay for the renovations, and you may consider refinancing your home. Make sure it is a smart time financially to do so based on current real estate market conditions. Also know that additions will likely increase your home insurance coverage needs. Consult with the insurance company about estimated charges and any restrictions they have.

5. Consider a standalone structure when mulling over your options. Sometimes the cost of putting up a free-standing office or another structure on your property may end up being less expansive than expanding on what you already have. Think creatively and research all of your options before committing to a project.



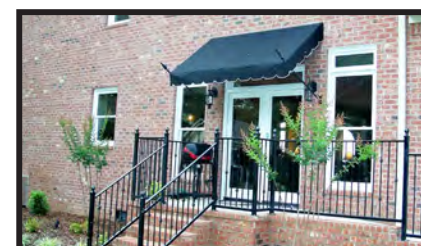
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COST-CUTTING measures for your renovation project

Home renovation projects can help homeowners transform their homes into their own personal oases. But such transformations do not typically come cheap, costing homeowners tens of thousands of dollars depending on the scope of the project. Each year, *Remodeling* magazine releases its "Cost vs. Value Report," which helps homeowners determine which projects are likely to provide the best return on investment upon selling a home and which are less likely to deliver substantial returns. For example, in 2015 homeowners who added wood decks to their homes could expect to recoup nearly 81 percent of the cost of that project at resale, while those who remodeled a home office recouped less than 50 percent of the cost of that project at resale.

The cost of home renovation projects and the potential return on investing in such projects is a big consideration for homeowners. But even those working on tight budgets can find ways to save without resorting to lower quality materials or poor workmanship.

Work with salvaged materials. The cost of materials can be considerable, but homeowners can cut those costs by choosing salvaged materials for their projects. This may only be an option for DIYers, as some contractors refuse to work with salvaged materials for fear of liability down the road if the materials do not hold up. Salvaged materials benefit the environment because they are reused rather than discarded, and homeowners can even support Habitat for Humanity by buying their salvaged materials from one of the nonprofit organization's ReStores, which sell used furniture, appliances, accessories and materials.

Do some of your own dirty work. Even if you are not a seasoned DIYer, you can save some money on labor costs by performing some of your own demolition work. Such DIY demo work is best left to exterior projects, such as breaking up an old sidewalk or discarding an old deck. When you take your DIY skills to your home's interior, you run the risk of making serious and

costly mistakes, such as damaging plumbing or demolishing a load-bearing wall.

Consider labor-friendly projects. Labor accounts for a substantial amount of renovation costs, so if your budget is especially tight consider projects that are less labor-intensive. Such projects might not be as glamorous, but they can make great investments. For example, the "2015 Cost vs. Value Report" found that replacing existing entryway doors with 20-gauge steel units cost slightly more than \$1,200 but provided a better than 100 percent return on investment. Tend to such minor projects for now while saving for larger, more expensive projects.

Comparison shop and exercise patience.

Much like you might comparison shop when purchasing a new appliance, comparison shop when looking for a contractor as well. Ask for estimates in writing from each contractor you speak with, but be careful not to choose a contractor based strictly on the estimate. You want a contractor you're comfortable with and who understands your vision, not just one who's coming in at the lowest price. In addition, contractors are typically more flexible with pricing during their offseason, which means winter in many regions.

Home renovation projects can be costly, but homeowners need not bust their budgets to get the home of their dreams.



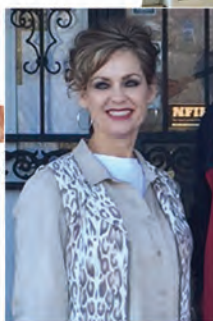
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Safeguard your home from insect infestations

The dawn of spring marks the return of many things, including long hours of sunlight and warm temperatures in which to enjoy that sunshine. But homeowners know spring also marks the return of insects, unwelcome guests that can be difficult or expensive to control once they have entered a home. As problematic as insect infestations can be, preventing such problems can be simple, especially when homeowners are proactive. The following are a handful of ways to keep insects out this spring and summer.

Consider potential food supplies and cut those supplies off. Insects often enter a home in search of food, so cutting off potential food supplies is a great way to prevent insects from coming inside. Give dining areas a thorough cleaning after meals, vacuuming or sweeping the floors beneath dining tables each night before going to bed. (Parents of young children may want to sweep floors after each meal.) In addition, clean pets' bowls each night to be sure there are no food scraps left that may entice insects, and make sure pet

food containers are tightly sealed after each serving. Sinks are another potential food source, so empty food traps after using the sink and run the garbage disposal as well to remove any food that might be lingering.


Address potential shelters. Insects also seek shelter inside homes, and there are many areas in a home that can provide adequate shelter. Cracks around windows and doors and in the foundation provide both entry points and potential shelters for insects. Seal such cracks with caulk, testing the areas by feeling for any incoming air. If you still feel air coming in, there is still some sealing to do. Cracks in cabinets or counters also may provide shelter to insects, so address these areas as well.

Reconsider exterior lighting. Exterior lighting may be inviting insects into your home. Insects tend to congregate around lights at nighttime, so avoid placing lights right outside entryways. Once doors are opened, insects can then fly right into your home. Keep exterior lights as far away from entryways as possible. If you

need lights right outside your doors, install motion-sensing lights that only turn on when you come within a few feet of the door. This reduces the volume of insects that congregate outside your entryways, and lowers the risk that insects will follow you in when you arrive home at night.

React quickly upon seeing insects. Insect infestations happen gradually, so homeowners should react quickly when seeing a single insect or a handful of insects inside their homes. The slower your response, the more likely one or two intruders is likely to turn into a large infestation. Immediately clean any areas where you see insects, and take more substantial measures if your initial efforts were not enough to prevent more insects from coming in.

The presence of insects inside a home can be a nuisance, but there are many ways to prevent such infestations and keep unwelcome guests at bay.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands washing a bunch of green asparagus in a stainless steel kitchen sink. Water is running from a modern chrome faucet. The person is wearing a bright orange long-sleeved shirt. In the background, there are other vegetables like lettuce and a purple eggplant on a wooden cutting board.

Clean kitchen sinks thoroughly after preparing foods and washing dishes to prevent insect infestations from becoming a problem.

Get set for spring termite swarms

Termite swarms are often the first visible evidence that termites are a problem in and around a home. There are several different types of subterranean termite species, and many begin to take flight when weather conditions are favorable, such as in the spring and summer.

According to the pest management company Orkin, swarming may be linked to the age and maturity of a termite colony. Swarms also may indicate the presence of other conditions, such as moisture in the air or abundant light.

Swarming termites are the winged alates that venture outside of the nest to mate and reproduce, forming newer colonies. Thousands of swarms may be in the air. The termites will squeeze through cracks and crevices in the walls and foundations of homes. They also may be seen coming out of the ground outdoors.

Orkin notes that the presence of a swarm of termites around a home suggests a strong likelihood that there is a well-established colony of termites living in or near the home. According to The Terminix International Company, over her lifetime, a termite queen can lay one million eggs, producing new swarms each year.

It is essential that homeowners recognize when termites are a problem in a home, as they can cause considerable damage. In the United States alone, subterranean, drywood and dampwood termites cause more than \$5 billion in damage annually and can cost homeowners an average of \$8,000 in treatment and damage

repairs, says Terminix. Homeowners who suspect they have a termite problem should call a professional exterminator. Flying ants can be mistaken for termites and tend to swarm as well. Termites have two pairs of wings of equal length, while ants have wings of different lengths. It may require the eyes of a trained expert to recognize these subtle differences. There are some other indications that termites may be in a home or nearby.

- Termites shed their wings as they enter a new home. If wings are found around windows, vents, doors or pipes coming into a home, it may mean termites have entered.
- Look for muddy, flattened tubes about the width of a drinking straw. Termites travel through these tubes and the tubes help protect the termites from predators and temperature extremes.
- Dark areas or bubbling in flooring can indicate termites are feeding below.
- Termites eat wood from the inside out, so any damage may not be visible. Tap suspect wood and listen for a hollow sound.
- Look for and mark any areas where termites are seen entering or exiting the house. Then direct the exterminator to these areas.

Termites can cause substantial damage to a home, but their infestations are largely treatable. When a termite swarm is spotted, call a professional immediately.



Termites feed on the inside of trees and wood boards. A termite problem may not be visible until after a termite swarm.

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