

Spring HOME & GARDEN



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Yes, you can enjoy the outdoors after an asthma diagnosis

Increased hours of sunlight and warmer temperatures typically compel people to enjoy the great outdoors. Spring, summer and fall are some of the best times to be outside enjoying fresh air and the bevy of activities available.

Healthgrades says about 25 million Americans live with asthma, which is a medical condition that causes airways to swell and tighten, making breathing difficult. Those with asthma may face a few extra challenges when enjoying the outdoors or exercising outside, but they don't have to hibernate in their homes — even if they have a severe form of the condition. Here are some pointers for enjoying the outdoors after an asthma diagnosis.

• **Know your triggers.** Asthma can be triggered by different factors. This can include smoke, air pollution, strong odors, pollen, and even dramatic shifts in weather. It's important for asthma sufferers to identify what might trigger an attack and then assess the situation to mitigate the risk.

• **Take it slow.** A sudden shift in air temperature can trigger an asthma attack. Even leaving an air conditioned home and going outside to the hot outdoors can trigger an attack. Gradually moving from different climates can help ease the lungs into the new environment. Always take it slow when planning to exercise outdoors, gradually acclimating the body.

• **Take medication as directed.** It's important for those with asthma to take controller medication as



prescribed, as that can have a huge impact on long-term asthma control, says Asthma Canada. Medication can reduce the severity of reactions to triggers. In addition, one should keep a rescue inhaler nearby at all times, especially during allergy season.

• **Check pollen counts.** Use reliable sources to check pollen levels and other allergens. Those who are triggered by these allergens might want to reconsider spending a lot of time outdoors until counts are lower. Pollen levels typically are at their highest between a.m. 5 and 10 a.m. Wearing a face covering also may help.

• **Bring a buddy along.** Having someone available to call for help should an asthma attack occur is essential. Asthma sufferers can have an asthma action plan in place and the buddy will know what to do and who to call in the event of an emergency.

Asthma affects millions of people, but it doesn't have to impede on individuals' ability to enjoy the great outdoors.

Spring planting pointers

Many people view spring as a season of rejuvenation. That renewal may be somewhat metaphorical for human beings, but it's literal for lawns and gardens that begin to grow anew as temperatures rise and hours of daylight increase in spring.

Each spring presents an opportunity for homeowners to get back outside and tend to their gardens. As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.

• **Start with the soil.** Soil can serve as the starting point each spring. Winter can take its toll on a garden and even overwhelm the area with debris over the colder months. Clear rocks and other debris from the area before loosening the soil. The Farmer's Almanac

recommends loosening soil to a depth of at least eight inches if planting a new garden. An existing garden may only need to be loosened to a depth of around six inches, after which homeowners can mix compost into the soil in early spring. Compost is organic matter that provides nutrients and helps to build strong plant roots.

• **Consider a raised garden in colder climates.** The Farmer's Almanac notes raised gardens can help homeowners in colder climates dry out and warm up wet, cold soils more quickly. Homeowners in such regions also can cover their beds with black plastic or cardboard prior to planting. Doing so can protect the beds from late-season snow and spring rains and also helps to overcome erosion.

• **Take soil temperatures.** Unpredictable weather is among the noticeable

effects of climate change in recent years. That lack of predictability can make spring planting a little more tricky than it once was.

Experts note that soil temperatures around 50 F are best for cool-season crops, while soil should be 60 F or warmer when planting warm-weather plants such as tomatoes.

• **Work with a garden center to identify what to plant.** The right plants for one region may not be ideal for another, so homeowners are urged to work with a local landscaper or garden center before planting. Such a consultation can be especially useful for homeowners planting a new garden. Landscapers and garden center professionals will know which plants work in the local climate.

• **Consider planting vegetables in the spring.** Various



garden experts note that spring is an ideal time to plant a vegetable garden. If planted at the right time, a vegetable garden can save homeowners money on their grocery bills and provide a season's worth

of fresh veggies. Lettuce and spinach are sun- and shade-friendly vegetables, which can make them good options for a spring garden. Cool-season root vegetables, which include beets, carrots and swiss chard, are some

other notable veggies that can thrive in early spring.

Spring is a season of rejuvenation for gardens. That's even more true when homeowners consider some conventional planting wisdom in early spring.

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following

steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

• **Refresh the landscape.** Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

• **Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when



A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away

from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

• **Add a water feature.** Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run

the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

• **Don't forget shade.** Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement

what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call

neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be

scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.

Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or

regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

Ground feeder

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

Sugar water feeder

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

attractive to those high-speed flyers.

Nyjer bird feeder

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

Hopper bird feeder

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

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Signs a home exterior needs updating

Renovations are a great way for homeowners to reshape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities. Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors.

Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want

their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

• **Curling shingles:** The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the affected shingles.

• **Dated entry door:** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with

front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

• **Unsightly landscaping:** It's not only the physical components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscaping. These alternatives to more needy plants can create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.



Updating a home's exterior can restore curb appeal and help homeowners feel better about their properties.

• **Cracked driveways/walkways:** If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season,

chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition, cracked walkways

indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.

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Tips to revitalize a garden this spring

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that pays a host of significant dividends. Many people love gardening because it allows them to spend time outdoors, and that simple pleasure is indeed a notable benefit of working in a garden. But the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture notes that gardening provides a host of additional benefits, including helping people get sufficient levels of exercise, reduce stress and improve mood.

With so much to gain from gardening, it's no wonder people look forward to getting their hands dirty in the garden each spring. As the weather warms up, consider these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

• **Discard the dead weight.** Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and

prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter storms also should be removed at this point if they have not previously been discarded.

• **Test the soil.** Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive in the months to come.

• **Mulch garden beds.** Mulching benefits a garden by helping soil retain moisture and preventing the growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over the course of spring and summer. That means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

• **Inspect your irrigation system.** Homeowners with in-ground irrigation systems or above-ground systems

that utilize a drip or soaker function can inspect the systems before plants begin to bloom. Damaged sprinkler heads or torn lines can deprive plants of water they will need to bloom and ultimately thrive once the weather warms up.

• **Tune up your tools.** Gardening tools have likely been sitting around gathering dust since fall. Serious gardeners know that tools can be expensive, so it pays to protect that investment by maintaining the tools. Sharpened pruners help make plants less vulnerable to infestation and infection. Well-maintained tools like shovels and hoes also make more demanding gardening jobs a little bit easier, so don't forget to tune up your tools before the weather warms up.

It's almost gardening season, which means gardeners can start on the necessary prep work to ensure their gardens grow in strong and beautiful this spring.

Humane ways to address uninvited garden guests

A beautiful garden is a wonder to behold. After a homeowner toils in the yard amending the soil and planting, it's imperative that a garden be given the best chance to thrive. However, the natural wildlife that shares the space might see that newly cultivated land as the perfect place to enjoy an easy meal or gather nesting materials.

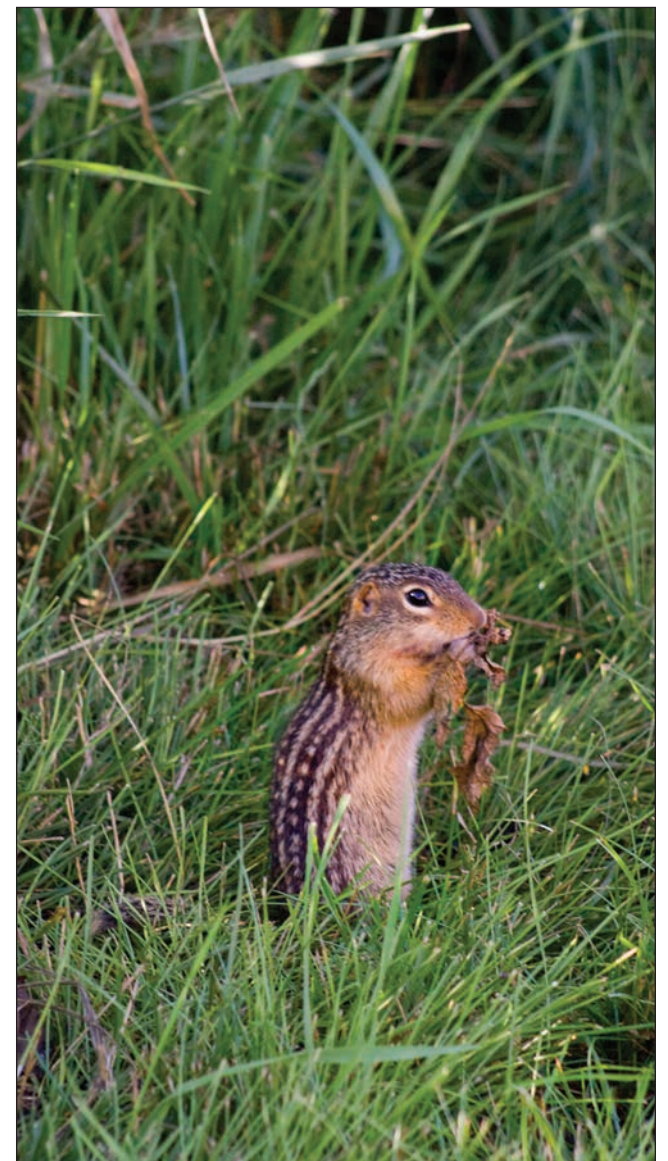
Every gardener likely has a tale about chipmunks, squirrels, woodchucks, and rabbits making nuisances of themselves in the garden. Many of these animals seem to have a taste for bulbs and other plants, which can wreak havoc on what gardeners carefully plan and plant. Finding balance so everyone can get along may require patience and some well-crafted deterrents.

• **Provide food elsewhere.**

Try luring the animals away to another area of the yard where the meal is even easier to come by. Squirrels and chipmunks love to dig and bury their caches, so a far-off corner with freshly tilled soil along with some berries, nuts and additional treats might attract them to that area instead of a newly established garden.

• **Install fencing.** While chipmunks and squirrels can scale fences easily, such acrobatics may be more challenging for lumbering groundhogs or rabbits. Make digging more difficult by laying chicken wire fencing on top of the soil and stake it down in some areas.

• **Use a scent deterrent.** Some animals are put off by the smell of other animals or aromas they find unpleasant. The capsaicin in red pepper and cayenne can be off-putting to these animals, so sprinkling it



around the garden may ward off pests but not harm the plants. Just reapply after each rain. Similarly, some people have had luck using peppermint. Plant mint around where you do not want the squirrels and chipmunks. Since mint can grow fast and become invasive, it's best to plant in containers and move accordingly.

• **Use water or movement.** Animals can be scared away if they are sprayed with water, so a well-aimed water gun can chase away the animals when a

gardener is able to stand watch. It may be easier to set up pinwheels that blow in the wind, or hang aluminum pie plates or old compact discs from strings near the garden, which may deter animals from getting too close.

• **Build a greenhouse.** When dealing with tenacious squirrels and chipmunks, the only solution may be to block off all access. Utilize an enclosed greenhouse for the garden, which will keep animals out and even extend the growing season.

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The benefits of lighting up your landscape

Homeowners know there's no shortage of ways to tweak a property. Some homeowners may lament that the work associated with home ownership is never done, but owning a house also provide endless opportunities to upgrade the spaces people call home.

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. That popularity is undoubtedly due to a number of variables, and each highlights a benefit of installing landscape lighting around a property.

- **Affordability:** Some may think of big budget projects like kitchen remodels or room additions when pondering home renovations. Such projects can have a dramatic impact on the look and feel of a home, but landscape lighting can be equally transformative at a fraction of the cost of larger undertakings. The home renovation experts at Angi.com estimate the average landscape lighting project costs around \$4,000, making affordability a notable benefit of the project.

- **Appearance:** There's no denying the aesthetic appeal of a well-lit

landscape at night. Landscape lighting can be utilized to draw attention to awe-inspiring components of a landscape, whether it's natural features like gardens and foliage or man-made components like architectural features. Improved appearance can increase curb appeal, which is often associated with how a home looks during daylight hours. But photographs of a well-lit nighttime landscape can impress buyers as well.

- **Cost savings:** Landscape lighting might help homeowners reduce the cost of their homeowners insurance. Researchers at PolicyGenius.com found that insurance companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners who install a home security system. Insurance providers may offer additional savings to homeowners who pair such systems with landscape lighting, which can be a deterrent to burglars who prefer to operate under a cloak of darkness.

- **Safety:** Insurance firms may discount premiums because of landscape lighting because they view it as a deterrent to potential



criminals. But landscape lighting also makes moving around a property at night safer for residents and guests. Lighting can be used to illuminate walkways, outdoor living rooms, patios around pools, and other areas

where residents and guests will be walking at night, which can reduce the risk of falls and injuries that may result from such spills.

- **ROI:** Savvy homeowners consider a renovation's return on investment before deciding to go forward with

a project. Studies vary, but the National Association of Realtors indicates landscape lighting can recoup as much as 70 percent of homeowners' investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing landscape

lighting is even less.

Landscape lighting adds notable aesthetic appeal to a home at a fraction of the cost of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.



Did you know?

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. Such lighting can extend living spaces, and many homeowners report that a well-lit landscape helps them feel more safe at home. Though the final cost to light up a home's exterior will depend on the size of a property, landscape lighting is among the more budget-friendly home renovations

homeowners can consider.

According to the renovation experts at Angi.com, the average cost of a landscape lighting project is \$4,000. Considering how much landscape lighting transforms the look of a property at night, that's a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks.

Solar lights are popular, but homeowners may want to consider electrical wiring

that ensures lights maintain their awe-inspiring glow throughout the night. Electrical work requires additional labor, and thus a higher price tag.

However, Angi notes that modern LED bulbs consume just 25 percent of the energy used by incandescent alternatives, which can make them a more reliable option than self-installed solar lights.

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A spring lawn revitalization strategy

New growth is a hallmark of spring, whether it plays out in the birth of birds and bunnies or with the returned buds on trees and plant stalks. While most greenery rebounds naturally, lawns may need a little extra TLC in order to return to their once lush, green glory.

Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process but can be well worth the reward when green grass adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard. Here is how to get started when the weather warms, courtesy of The Farmer's Almanac and The Home Depot.

- **Clean up debris.** Spend a few hours raking up leaves from the lawn and removing any other winter debris like twigs so that air can reach the grass below. Also remove any thatch that has developed.

- **Test the soil.** Take a sample of the soil to determine its pH level and nutrient needs. Then you can make adjustments to set a strong foundation for the lawn to grow.

- **Do some weeding.** Pull out any weeds that have poked through

early on and apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent additional weeds from taking over.

- **Start the aeration process.** A core aerator punches holes into the soil. This enables air and water to penetrate through to the roots.

- **Overseed the lawn.** Apply grass seeds over the lawn, paying special attention to any bare or thin areas so that the seed will fill in the lawn.

- **Water consistently.** It is important to water the lawn deeply and consistently, especially when the weather is dry, to help promote strong root development.

- **Time fertilizer correctly.** Apply a spring fertilizer around three weeks after the lawn starts to turn green or after the first two or three mowings. If fertilizer is applied too early it can feed weeds instead of the grass and result in fertilizer runoff.

- **Mow to an appropriate height.**

Begin to mow when the ground is dry enough and the grass is long enough to need cutting. Leave some length to the lawn; otherwise, sunlight will reach the soil and encourage weed seeds to germinate.



With a little elbow grease at the start of spring, homeowners can establish strong and healthy lawns.

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6 reasons to build a retaining wall

Homes are not always located on flat lots. In fact, landscapes can feature hills and valleys, necessitating some extra steps when installing certain features. Retaining walls are often utilized to improve the functionality and safety of a property.

Retaining walls are typically recommended to eliminate soil erosion and improve drainage, says Design One Landscape Corporation. Over time, soil erosion or drainage issues can eat into the structural integrity of a home and cause cosmetic damage and unhealthy conditions, such as mold growth. Here's a look at six instances when installing a retaining wall can be advantageous.

1. Remedy a slope in the yard:

Retaining walls help make sloped areas functional. The wall will help flatten the slope so that water and soil do not flow downward.

2. Make the yard easier to traverse:

A retaining wall can make it easier to walk around a sloped yard. Rather than contending with the hill both uphill and downhill, particularly if it's steep, the retaining wall can be installed to create flat areas that are easier to navigate.

3. Manage water runoff: Retaining walls can hold back or redirect water to help prevent flooding. A wall can be used to keep water away from the foundation, where it may enter the home.

4. Prevent soil erosion: Along with keeping water back, the retaining wall also will stop soil erosion and runoff so it doesn't cause an unsightly condition in the yard, or prove dangerous during severe weather.

5. Prevent sink holes: By helping to manage water runoff, retaining walls can reduce the risk of sinkholes. According to Slaton Bros, Inc., a retaining wall service provider, sinkholes occur when enough



water pools beneath the surface of the ground to weaken it to the point of not being capable of supporting the ground's surface weight.

6. Improve curb appeal: Retaining walls also may serve cosmetic

functions. They provide additional surfaces upon which to place container plants or additional decorations. Retaining walls also can provide backdrops to shrubs and separate grassy areas from patios

or swimming pools.

Retaining walls marry form and function. Homeowners with sloped yards or drainage issues should consider installing retaining walls to address these issues.

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Earthy colors dominate 2025

Change is in the air when a new year arrives. People often use the turn of the calendar as an opportunity to redecorate living spaces or revamp their wardrobes. As individuals narrow down their projects, they may want to incorporate a fresh and trendy palette of colors. For 2025, the options are decidedly warm, cozy and earthy.

Industry color experts routinely recommend hues that can elevate homes, offices and other spaces. The following is a selection of shades that insiders predict will color the world for the coming year.

Quietude

Sherwin-Williams has named Quietude its color of the year. This soft sage color exudes serenity and understated luxury. Grayish-green with a touch of blue, Quietude is a soothing color of tranquility. Sherwin-Williams also offers a Color Collection of

the Year that includes Convivial Yellow, Spiced Cider, and Nomadic Desert, among others.

Mocha Mousse

The title of Pantone® Color of the Year 2025 belongs to Mocha Mousse. Just as the name implies, this rich, warm brown suggests the intoxicating qualities of coffee and chocolate. It can create a feeling of comfort in any space, or even serve as the basis of a chocolate wardrobe color palette. According to Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, Mocha Mousse is “sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time an unpretentious classic.”

Purple Basil

Glidden's 2025 color of the year title belongs to Purple Basil, a dusty, neutral violet purple hue with mauve undertones. It embraces rich, warm energy, and is equally at home in a bedroom as it is in a dining room.

Cinnamon Slate

Cinnamon Slate is moody and introspective. This Benjamin Moore color blends rich plum and chocolate brown that the company calls “adaptable, yet distinct.” In fact, it is quite similar to Glidden's color of the year, but a tad more brown in nature.

Caramelized

Homeowners may want to consider Caramelized, an earthy terracotta brown that is Dunn-Edwards' 2025 Color of the Year. Caramelized is versatile and elegant, and it complements both modern and vintage interiors.

Elderton

Paula Taylor, Graham & Brown's head stylist and trend specialist, calls Elderton “a chameleon color that can be sophisticated yet cozy.” This medium brown is contemporary with a huge amount of depth. It may work in a rustic living room or a cozy library.

The new year arrives with a warm, saturated color palette that can revitalize spaces with cozy appeal.





The benefits of planting native species

Spring and summer present ideal growing conditions for many plants, making these seasons an ideal time to tend to lawns and gardens. Though it's easy to succumb to the temptation of exotic plants, avid gardeners and eco-conscious planters recognize the significance of native plants.

Novices may not realize that native plants are much better for a landscape and the local ecosystem it calls home. Recognition of the many benefits of native plants can make for healthier lawns and gardens and a healthier planet as well.

• **Native plants are built for local climates.** One of the issues gardeners who plant exotic plants run into is keeping those plants thriving when weather turns harsh. For example, exotic plants may require extra watering in areas that experience drought or even long periods without precipitation in spring and notably summer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that at least 40 states anticipate water

shortages by 2024. Planting native plants can help to combat those shortages by reducing the need to water plants if conditions become dry in late spring and summer.

• **Native plants save money.** It's also important to note that native plants save homeowners money. Because they're capable of thriving in local conditions, native plants tend to require less watering, which can help homeowners reduce their utility costs. But native plants also require less upkeep, which means homeowners can save on potentially costly, not to mention eco-unfriendly, pesticides and other amendments in order to maintain the look of exotic plants. And though it's not always the case, exotic plants tend to cost more at nurseries than natives.

• **Native plants save gardeners time.** In addition to saving money, native plants don't require as much attention. Though spring and summer is a great time to be in the yard, it's also a great time to be out

and about. Because native plants thrive in local conditions, gardeners won't need to spend much of their free time tending to them. Exotics tend to require a lot of extra attention and effort, especially when conditions become harsh. Spending more time outdoors in harsh weather does not appeal to most gardeners.

• **Native plants blend in with an existing landscape.** Native plants look natural within an existing landscape, adding some instant aesthetic appeal without breaking the bank. When planting exotics, homeowners may feel a need to redesign their entire gardens to create a certain look (think Japanese garden). That can quickly consume a budget and take up a lot of free time in both the short- and long-term.

Planting season marks a great time to revitalize a landscape. Choosing native plants when doing so pays numerous dividends for homeowners and the planet they call home.

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How to navigate a costly real estate market

Real estate has long been touted as a worthy investment. Home values historically appreciate over time, making real estate a desirable investment opportunity and one that simultaneously fulfills an investor's need for a place to live. That sounds like a win-win for those with the means of purchasing a home. But in recent years, many people have found themselves priced out of the real estate market due to a number of variables beyond their control.

It's no secret that home prices have been on the rise in recent years. According to the National Association of Realtors, the median sale price for a home in the United States reached \$419,300 in May 2024. Such high prices, coupled with decreasing yet still high interest rates, has made homeownership as expensive as ever and left many aspiring home buyers to wonder what they can do as they seek to buy a property to call their own. Though there's no foolproof way to navigate the current real estate market to a satisfying end, the following are some strategies buyers can consider as they begin searching for a home.

• **Be patient.** Patience is a virtue prospective home buyers will need to embrace. The NAR reported a 3.7-month supply of housing

inventory in May, which is low and suggestive of a seller's market. Buyers confronting a low inventory market must remain patient if they hope to find a house that checks all their boxes. Such a house may not be on the current market, and might not be for some time. But forecasters predict the interest rate reduction announced by the Federal Reserve in September will lead to a higher inventory, even if real estate sales tend to be lower in winter than spring and summer. As indicators like lower interest rates gradually point to a higher inventory, buyers may benefit by remaining patient.

• **Be ready to pounce.** Of course, a market characterized by limited inventory is typically competitive, and the real estate market in recent years has certainly played out that way. Real estate markets can vary considerably, even within the same country, but an analysis from the New Jersey Real Estate Network indicated the average time homes in the Garden State were on the market decreased from 39 days in 2023 to 35 days in 2024. Patience is important when buying a home, as buyers don't want to act too fast and then end up living in a home they don't like. But it's equally important that buyers be ready to pounce if they see a property

they like. Limited inventory means sellers are likely to receive multiple offers, and hesitancy on the part of buyers could prevent them from finding a new home.

• **Line up your finances.** Mortgage pre-approval and a solid nest egg have long been vital when buying a home, and that remains true in the current market. The competitive nature of the current market might make mortgage pre-approval more important than ever. A pre-approval indicates to sellers that a buyer has already arranged financing and been approved to purchase a home for the amount of their offer. Buyers without a pre-approval might be seen as more risky to sellers, some of whom may want to sell their homes as quickly as possible. Sellers in a competitive market may feel they need not wait around for a buyer to be approved, so it's best to line up finances before beginning a home search. Lining up finances includes building a substantial nest egg that demonstrates an ability to make a sizable down payment as part of your offer.

The real estate market has been tough on buyers in recent years. A successful navigation of the current market may require some patience, a readiness to pounce and some conventional financial wisdom.

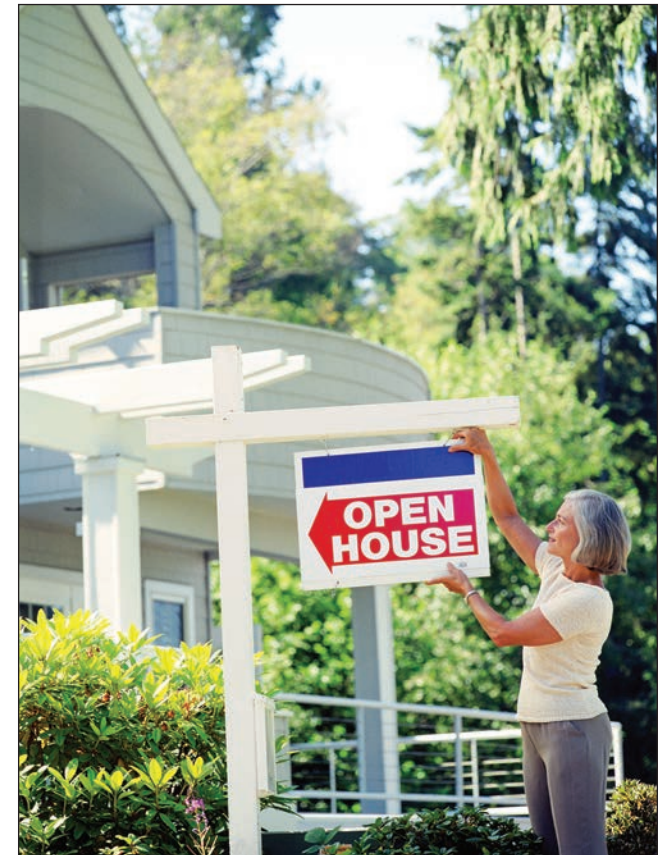
Renovations that help sell homes

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

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

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

• **Minor bathroom remodel:** Remove dated wall coverings, replace fixtures, consider re-glazing or replacing an old tub, and swap old shower doors for fast fixes in a bathroom. If there's more room in the budget, replacing a tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity, and fixtures can cost roughly \$10,500, says HGTV. You'll recoup an average of \$10,700 at resale, making a minor bathroom remodel a potentially worthy investment.



Improving a home's chances to sell quickly and at a higher price often comes down to making smart improvements that catch the eyes of buyers.

• **Redone kitchen:** The kitchen tends to be the hub of a home. This room gets the most usage and attention of any space, and it's a great place to focus your remodeling attention. The National Association of the Remodeling Industry estimates that homeowners can recover up to 52 percent of the cost of a kitchen upgrade upon selling a home. Buyers want a functional and updated kitchen. Trending features include drawer-style microwaves and dishwashers, commercial ranges, hidden outlets, and even wine refrigerators.

• **Updated heating and cooling system:** Better Homes and Gardens reports that homeowners may be able to recoup 85 percent of the cost of new HVAC systems when they

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

• **Fresh landscaping:** A home's exterior is the first thing buyers will see. If they pull up to a home with eye-catching landscaping and outdoor areas that are attractive yet functional, they're more likely to be intrigued. Often buyers will equate a home that features an impressive exterior with upkeep inside as well. The American Nursery Landscape Association says the average homeowner may spend \$3,500 for landscaping.



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Power washing a deck prior to outdoor entertaining season can make it a more welcoming space for guests.



How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

Memorial Day weekend is a popular time to entertain. For many, the weekend marks the first outdoor entertaining opportunity of the year, which is certainly something to look forward to.

As outdoor entertaining season begins, homeowners can take these steps to prepare their outdoor living spaces for the first big backyard get-together of the year.

► **Break out the power washer.** Pressure washing is an important component of spring home cleanup. The warmer temperatures of spring allow water from power washing to dry more quickly, which can decrease the chances that mold and mildew will grow on surfaces like siding. A freshly power washed home also makes for a welcoming entertaining space. A power washer also can be used on outdoor entertaining spaces to remove dirt and debris that built up over the winter. Just make sure to read manufacturer instructions

before using a power washer to clean paving stones, decks and outdoor furniture.

► **Inspect outdoor furniture.** Now is a good time to inspect outdoor furniture if the task was not performed in late fall or early winter before items were moved into the garage or placed in storage. Check to make sure furnishings are still safe to use, addressing any issues before guests come over for a Memorial Day weekend gathering. Wash cushions for outdoor furniture and replace any that might be showing their age.

► **Clean the grill.** A thorough cleaning of the grill also is in order prior to summer entertaining season. Many homeowners do little or no grilling during winter, so now is the time to give grilling surfaces and the interior of the grill a deep cleaning. Check for leaks if using a gas grill, and scrub the interior of any grease that accumulated last season. Many grilling experts

advise lighting a grill and letting it burn for roughly 20 minutes prior to putting any foods on the grates for the first time. Such a strategy allows residual fluids like soap, vinegar and de-greasing products used when cleaning the grill to burn off before food is placed on the grates.

► **Inspect the landscaping, too.** It's not just seating areas like patios and decks that need some investigation prior to outdoor entertaining season. Take a walk around the landscape and make sure there's no potentially dangerous spots where people could be injured when playing backyard games. Fill in any holes with soil and fresh grass seed, and inspect trees to see if any branches need to be pruned.

Summer entertaining season begins each Memorial Day weekend. Homeowners can take various steps to ensure their outdoor entertaining spaces are comfortable and safe.

Budget-friendly ways to freshen up your home's exterior

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.

Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

► **Power washing:** Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Hardware chains like Home Depot and Lowes typically rent power washers, but homeowners who don't want to do it themselves can hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.

► **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a



Exterior renovations need not break the bank. Various simple and inexpensive tweaks can quickly revitalize the exterior of a home.

morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

► **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. The experts

at Better Homes & Gardens urge homeowners to take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy, so look for a sturdy box as well as one that has drainage holes.

► **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs, knockers, house numbers, and even the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home appears to residents and visitors.

Tips to overcome seasonal allergies

Spring and summer are typically welcomed with open arms. Warm weather, blooming flowers and trees full of leaves are a welcome sight for many, but seasonal allergy sufferers may find the transition from winter to spring a little more challenging.

The Center for Health Statistics found that just under 26 percent of adults and roughly 19% of children have a seasonal allergy. Treatments for seasonal allergies can be effective, and many people find over-the-counter medications are enough to alleviate their symptoms. But even people who take OTC medications daily may have days when seasonal allergies cause considerable discomfort. In such situations, allergy sufferers can consider these strategies.

► **Identify your triggers.** The American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology notes that pollen is the most common outside allergy trigger. Trees and grasses typically pollinate

in spring and summer, which is why these seasons can be especially challenging for people with seasonal allergies. Dustmites and pets might trigger allergies indoors, but these can appear throughout the year. A visit to an allergist can determine what exactly triggers seasonal allergies. For example, certain types of grasses and trees might be triggers for some but not others. Identifying triggers is an effective first step because it can compel people to avoid the things that cause allergic reactions.

► **Stay indoors on dry, windy days.** The Mayo Clinic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors on dry, windy days, when pollen can be nearly impossible to avoid.

► **Take advantage of a good rain.** The Mayo Clinic advises that the best time for seasonal allergy sufferers to be outside is after a good rain. Rain helps to clear pollen from the air, so post-rain conditions can be

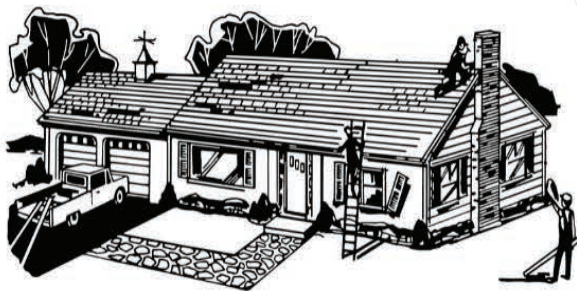
ideal for people with seasonal allergies.

► **Change your clothes and wash up upon coming inside.** The ACAAI recommends changing clothes, washing them and taking a shower upon coming inside during allergy season. Washing clothes and taking a shower reduces the likelihood that you'll spread pollen around the interior of your home, where it can attach to furniture and trigger allergic reactions.

► **Monitor the pollen count.** As noted, pollen is a seasonal allergy trigger, so allergy sufferers are urged to monitor the pollen count via a website such as Pollen.com, where visitors can type in their ZIP code and get an up-to-date allergy report. On days when the pollen count is high, stay indoors and keep windows closed so the pollen does not get inside. The Mayo Clinic notes that pollen counts tend to be highest in morning, so it's best to avoid being outside during this time of day.



Seasonal allergies can make spring and summer more challenging. A few simple strategies can help people control their seasonal allergies even on days when pollen counts are particularly high.



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How to decide between a deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. A 2022 survey of homeowners conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found that open yards are less appealing to home buyers than they once were. The survey noted that just 28% of respondents chose open yards, while 65% preferred patios and 55% chose decks. Green spaces remain popular, but the survey indicates that many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time comes to plan such areas. That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

► **Determine your budget.** Budget is a notable variable with any home renovation project, and the addition of an outdoor living space is no exception. The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project. For example, composite decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and typically a longer life span. Pavers may prove less expensive than composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio. It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an outdoor living space. In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including

supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.

► **Identify your vision for the space.** Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more quickly and even more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want. Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate between rooms inside the home. For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavilion and fireplace, while kitchen and dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio. Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor



dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space. Of course, decks can be as big as homeowners choose, which can make the spaces more multi-functional.

► **Recognize both may be in your best interest.**

Homeowners also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio. Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the area as a

multifunctional space.

Homeowners planning outdoor living space projects may find themselves choosing between a deck and pavers. Each option can work, and homeowners may even want to combine the two.

Elevate the backyard experience

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

Outdoor spaces like patios, decks, yards, and even front porches remain popular places for homeowners and their loved ones to congregate. Various studies have shown that those who spend more time outside in nature have lower levels of

stress, anxiety and depression. Being outside is strongly associated with improved mental and physical health. Homeowners who want to maximize the potential of their outdoor spaces can look to these ideas to take backyards up a notch or two.

Establish a gathering spot

A well-designed yard has one or more dedicated gathering spots, particularly areas that enable comfort underfoot. Homeowners can give consideration to hard-scape that enables individuals to spend time outdoors without standing in soggy or buggy situations. Whether they're traditional decks, platform decks, concrete or paver patios, or areas separated from the lawn with pea gravel or another type

of rock, homeowners can make the yard more useable through these spaces.

Invest in an outdoor cooking area

Grilling, smoking and even making brick oven pizzas outdoors is a major component of backyard entertaining. Outdoor kitchens can increase the convenience of prepping, cooking and serving food outdoors. Grills and other cooking gear can be built into weather-resistant counters and cabinetry.

Install a pergola

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



Think beyond the summer season

When making backyard improvements, homeowners can incorporate ideas that make the yard more functional during different

seasons. For example, a fire pit or outdoor fireplace can be a spot for making summer s'mores or sipping mulled cider in the fall. An enclosed three-season room offers the opportunity to see nature and

enjoy it without bearing the full brunt of chilly temperatures.

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

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ANDOVER

- Incorporated: 1646
- Website: andoverma.gov
- Population: 36,485 (2023 Census)
- Median household income: \$167,591 (2019-2023)
- Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$813,800 (2019-2023)
- Tax rate: \$12.49 residential; \$24.31 commercial (FY2025)
- Town Hall: 36 Bartlet St., 978-623-8200
- Police Department: 32 North Main St., 978-623-3500
- Fire Department: 32 North Main St., 978-623-3700
- Department of Public Works: 978-623-8700
- Youth Services: Cormier Youth Center, 40 Whittier Court, 978-623-8360
- Elder Services: Robb Center, 30 Whittier Court, 978-623-8320
- School Department: 978-247-7000
- Library: Memorial Hall Library, 2 North Main St., 978-623-8400

LAWRENCE

- Incorporated: 1853
- Website: cityoflawrence.com
- Population: 88,172 (2023 Census)
- Median household income: \$57,903 (2019-2023)
- Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$393,500 (2019-2023)
- Tax rate: \$8.80 residential; \$18.41 commercial (FY2025)
- City Hall: 200 Common St., 978-620-3000
- Police Department: 90 Lowell St., 978-794-5900
- Fire Department: 65 Lowell St., 978-620-3400
- Department of Public Works: 200 Common St., 978-620-3090
- Recreation: 155 Haverhill St., Second Floor, 978-620-3252
- Elder Services: Senior Center, 155 Haverhill St., 978-620-3540
- School Department: 255 Essex St., 978-975-5905
- Library: Lawrence Public Library: 51 Lawrence St., 978-620-3600

METHUEN

- Incorporated: 1725
- Website: cityofmethuen.net
- Population: 53,455 (2023 Census)
- Median household income: \$103,270 (2019-2023)
- Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$472,200 (2019-2023)
- Tax rate: \$10.58 residential; \$20.55 commercial (FY2025)
- City Hall: Searles Building, 41 Pleasant St., 978-983-8505
- Police Department: 90 Hampshire St., 978-983-8698
- Fire Department: 250 Howe St., 978-983-8940
- Department of Public Works: 10 Ditson Place, 978-983-8545
- Youth Services: Recreation Department, 41 Pleasant Street, 978-983-8589
- Elder Services: Senior Center, 77 Lowell St., 978-983-8825
- School Department: 978-722-6000
- Library: Nevins Memorial Library, 305 Broadway, 978-686-4080

TOWN HIGHLIGHTS

NORTH ANDOVER

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- ▶ Website: northandoverma.gov
- ▶ Population: 31,615 (2023 Census)
- ▶ Median household income: \$134,319 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$670,000 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Tax rate: \$11.26 residential; \$15.82 commercial (FY2024)
- ▶ Town Hall: 120 Main St., 978-688-9500
- ▶ Police Department: 1475 Osgood St., 978-683-3168
- ▶ Fire Department: 795 Chickering Road, 978-688-9590
- ▶ Department of Public Works: 978-685-0950
- ▶ Youth Services: 33 Johnson St., 978-682-9000
- ▶ Elder Services: Senior Center, 481 Sutton St., 978-688-9560
- ▶ School Department: 978-794-1503
- ▶ Library: Stevens Memorial Library, 345 Main St., 978-688-9505

HAVERHILL

- ▶ Incorporated: 1750
- ▶ Website: townofsalemnh.org
- ▶ Population: 30,089 (2020 Census)
- ▶ Median household income: \$101,339 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$438,500 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Tax rate: \$17.60 (2024)
- ▶ Town Hall: 33 Geremonty Drive, 603-890-2000
- ▶ Police Department: 9 Veterans Memorial Parkway, 603-893-1911
- ▶ Fire Department: 152 Main St., 603-890-2200
- ▶ Department of Public Works: 21 Cross St., 603-890-2150
- ▶ Youth Services: 1 Sally Sweets Way, 603-890-2190
- ▶ Elder Services: 1 Sally Sweets Way, 603-890-2190
- ▶ School Department: 603-893-7040
- ▶ Library: Kelley Library, 234 Main St., 603-898-7064

WINDHAM

- ▶ Incorporated: 1742
- ▶ Website: windhamnh.gov
- ▶ Population: 16,086 (2023)
- ▶ Median household income: \$189,450 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Median value owner-occupied home/condo: \$684,700 (2019-2023)
- ▶ Tax rate: \$22.64 (2024)
- ▶ Town Hall: 4 North Lowell Road, 603-432-7732
- ▶ Police Department: 4 Fellows Road, 603-434-5577
- ▶ Fire Department: 3 Fellows Road, 603-434-4907
- ▶ Highway Department: 603-216-5676
- ▶ Youth Services: 4 North Lowell Road, 603-965-1208
- ▶ Elder Services: Senior Center, 2 North Lowell Road, 603-434-2411
- ▶ School Department: 603-845-1550
- ▶ Library: Nesmith Library, 8 Fellows Road, 603-432-7154

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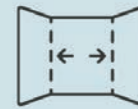
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6' x 9'	Gray Plush - Bound	\$422	\$99
8' x 11'	Nautical Pattern - Bound	\$1,203	\$389
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