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# Spring HOME & GARDEN

Thursday, April 6, 2023



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Architects, designers and design-minded builders say connection to the outdoors will be an important influence in home design.

## The role of nature in home design in the years ahead

Outdoor living spaces were prioritized during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when public gatherings were greatly limited and individuals were urged to stay home as much as possible.

Such demands have had a ripple effect on various industries, including home design.

According to a survey conducted by the New Home Trends Institute in collaboration with Pro Builder, 58% of the more than 300 residential architects, designers and design-minded builders who participated said connection to the outdoors/nature will be an important influence on their design choices in the years to come.

In addition, 45% of respondents indicated

increased attention will be afforded to outdoor entertaining spaces.

So what might the outdoor spaces of homes built in the not-so-distant future look like? Respondents to the survey anticipated a growing demand for various built-in outdoor features, including:

- Firepits or fireplaces
- Outdoor kitchens
- Gazebos or pergolas
- Pools
- Spas or hot tubs

Though trends and consumer demands are ever-shifting, architects and designers are anticipating that future homeowners will want more developed outdoor living spaces and greater access to nature, which is something current homeowners can keep in mind when renovating their properties.



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# Learn the right ways to **clean** lawn and patio furniture

Once the days begin to grow a little bit longer and the numbers on the thermometer creep a tad higher, outdoor entertaining season is right around the corner. Homeowners may be anxious to once again return to the comforts of their backyards. However, their patio furniture may not be ready for lounging just yet.

Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture made of metal, glass, wood, and plastic. Before homeowners know it, their backyards will be ready for outdoor entertaining season.

## Proper storage

Storing outdoor furniture during the colder months of the year is a great way to protect items from the elements. This may involve careful shrink-wrapping and keeping items outdoors, or by moving furniture indoors to a shed or garage. Cleaning the furniture one last time before storing it also can be handy.

## Remove stuck-on debris

Inspect furniture and be prepared to remove any stuck-on debris, such as bird droppings, sticky food residue or even cobwebs and insect nests. Be sure to use a cleaning tool that is safe for the material you are



COURTESY PHOTO

**Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture made of metal, glass, wood, and plastic.**

cleaning. Test an inconspicuous area of the furniture first to ensure your tools don't damage the furniture. For example, many scrub brushes can scratch glass

or aluminum.

## Make a thorough cleanser

Clean stains off of furniture with a versatile cleanser. A mild

cleanser can be made by mixing  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup baking soda with 1 gallon of warm water, according to the experts at Better Homes & Gardens. Regular dishwashing

detergent also can be mixed with water, as it has a mild bleaching agent. This cleanser can be used on plastic resin furniture or metal furniture, which are popular patio furniture materials.

## Patio fabrics

Check the cleaning instructions of outdoor fabrics, as there might be specific instructions on the tags. In some cases, fabric may be removed and washed in a washing machine on a gentle setting. A solution of dish soap and warm water also is a gentle way to clean outdoor fabrics. Once items are clean, HGTV advises applying a water-repellent fabric protector to minimize staining and maintenance.

## Strip or sand

Wood furniture may need specialized care. If stains cannot be removed with a mild cleanser, then hard woods like teak can be surface-sanded to restore items' original look.

Pressure washers can often do more harm than good to patio furniture, so it's best to look for an alternative way to clean them. Usually a bit of elbow grease and a cleanser is all that's needed. Give the cleaning product time to work. Wipe down and dry the furniture thoroughly to prevent the growth of mildew.

## Exterior **renovations** that can improve home value

Renovating a home to improve its value can be a smart investment. Interior improvements, such as updating kitchens and baths, offer good return on investment, but there are plenty of exterior renovations that can add value to a home and give it that coveted "wow" factor.

## Landscaping

Abundant and well-planned landscaping can instantly boost curb appeal. According to the landscaping company Lawn Starter, 71% of prospective home buyers say a home's curb appeal is an important factor in their buying decisions. As buyers use the

internet to look for their dream homes, there's no denying a beautifully landscaped, nicely photographed property can entice buyers to click and read more about a house.

## Address insects and minor repairs

Improving home value may come down to fixing areas of the home that can negatively affect its appeal to buyers. Hire an inspector to look at key components of the house and recommend what needs to be fixed. This way it is discovered before home buyers come in and do their own inspections. Termite infestations, deteriorating roofs and hidden

water leaks are some things that might need fixing.

## Improve the entryway

The front door is the focal point of a home's exterior. Invest in a new door or paint it a striking color to add appeal. Remodeling magazine's "Cost vs. Value Report 2019" indicates changing an entry door to a steel replacement can offer 74.9% ROI. Such a door provides visual appeal and added security — things buyers look for. In addition to the front door, make sure that the entryway has a level walkway, steps that are in good repair, accents that are free from rust or tarnish, and decorative plants.

## Outdoor lighting

Outdoor lighting can add to the ambiance of a property and serve as a security feature. Utilize different lights, such as a bright light by the entry, uplighting in trees and shrubs for drama, a light-lined path to the door to improve visibility, and motion-detection lights to improve the security of the property.

## Repaint (or reside) the exterior

A fresh coat of paint or new (or cleaned) siding can instantly give homes a facelift. Neutral, warm and inviting colors tend to have the widest appeal. Adding manufactured stone veneer



COURTESY PHOTO

**There are plenty of exterior renovations that can add value to a home.**

to the home can offer a 94.9% ROI, says Remodeling. And after doing the front door and siding, investing in a garage door replacement offers the highest ROI of all exterior projects listed on the "Cost vs. Value Report

2019." This improvement returns 97.5% when selling.

Knowing which improvements add value to a home can help homeowners tailor their efforts to those that are most financially beneficial.





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# Tips to pick the right **plants** for your landscape

Each year, gardening enthusiasts anxiously await the arrival of spring. Spring is a great season to plant new flowers, plants, grasses, and trees, making it a popular time of year to spend sunny days out in the yard.

Veteran gardeners may know their landscapes well and be able to pick the right plants on their own. Novices may need a little help as they look to give their landscapes a whole new look. The following are some helpful tips to help homeowners pick the right plants for their landscapes.

■ **Conduct a site evaluation.** A colorful landscape featuring an array of plants and flowers can be eye-catching and add curb appeal to a property. However, where plants will be planted is a significant variable that must be considered before homeowners choose what to plant. The Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes that site evaluation is the first step when picking plants. A number of factors must be evaluated, including light availability; water availability; exposure to the elements, including wind and extreme temperatures; and competition from existing vegetation, among other things. Document these variables prior to picking plants. For example, take note of the area you plan to plant to see if it is full sun or partial shade, and then pick plants whose growing conditions align with those you observe.

■ **Look at more than looks.** Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen for a space. If the wrong plants are chosen, they're



The maintenance required to keep a plant healthy and looking good is a key consideration when designing a landscape.

COURTESY PHOTO

unlikely to thrive or they could threaten existing vegetation, thus compromising the overall appeal of the property. Native plants can often handle local weather conditions, so prioritize natives over more exotic plants whose key attribute is aesthetic appeal. If jaw-dropping aesthetic appeal is your top priority, speak with a local landscaping professional about which natives can provide that without compromising surrounding vegetation.

■ **Consider maintenance prior to planting.** Maintenance is another variable gardeners must consider. Newly planted trees may require substantial watering until they've fully established their roots, and some homeowners may not have time for that. In addition, certain plants may require a considerable amount of pruning in order to create and maintain the look homeowners desire. Individuals must

be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain new plantings that require such diligence. If not, look for plants that don't require much maintenance while keeping in mind that even low-maintenance plants still require some effort and attention.

■ **Consider local wildlife.** If your lawn is routinely visited by local wildlife, then look for plants that won't look like a meal to these welcome, if unwanted, guests. For example, if you routinely see deer lounging around in your backyard, look for deer-resistant plants. This is a good way to protect your investment, of both time and money, and ensure minimal wildlife traffic through your newly landscaped yard.

Spring gardens are awe-inspiring, especially when homeowners embrace various strategies for successful planting.



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# 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.

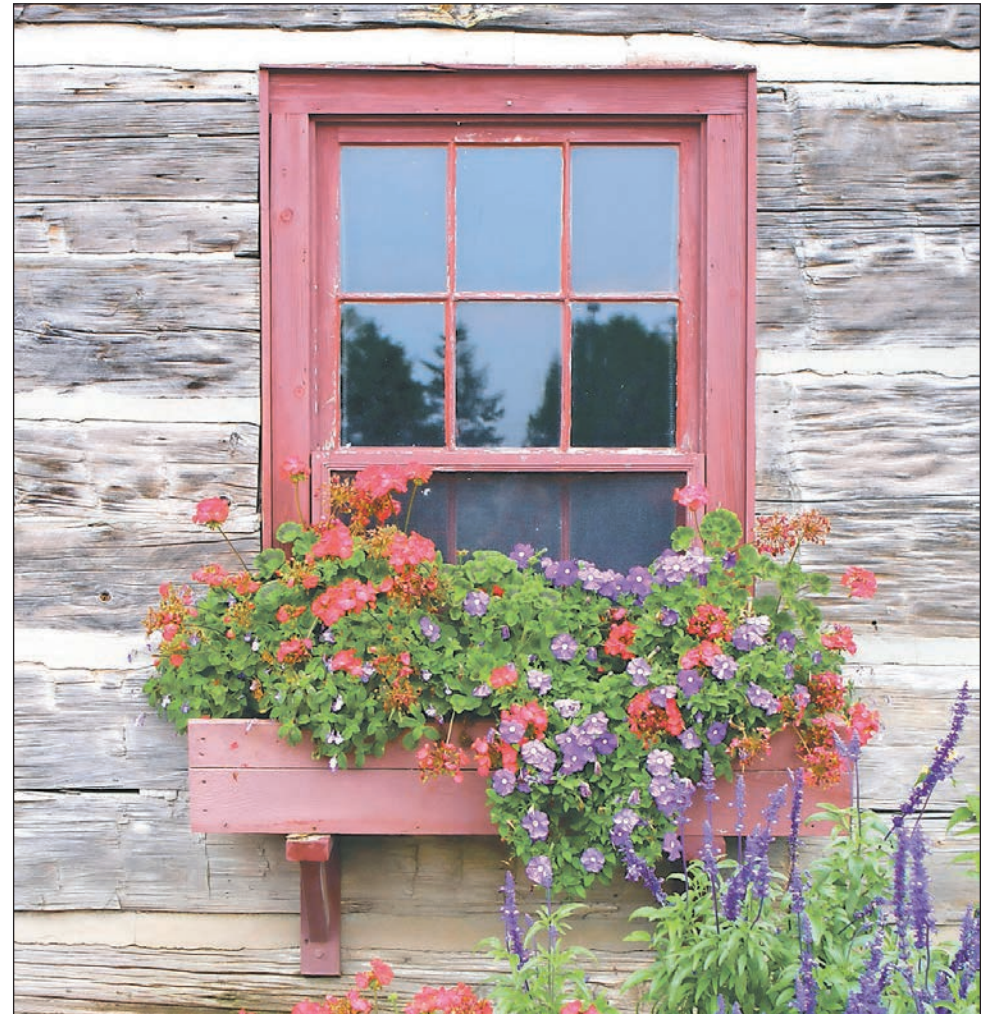
■ **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with 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.

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



COURTESY PHOTO

There are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

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# Popular trends in home exteriors

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

## Wood

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found newfound devotion among home interior decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

## Painted brick

Like natural wood, brick is



COURTESY PHOTO

Outdoor living spaces are one popular hardscaping trend that figures to remain sought-after for years to come.

a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in

recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term

commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

## Hardscaping

Hardscaping isn't a new

trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating

natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

## Outdoor lighting

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.

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# How to prepare a garden for spring planting

The final weeks of winter, and even the first few weeks of spring, are still chilly in many parts of the world. Despite those last vestiges of winter chills, late winter is a great time to begin preparing gardens for the coming planting season.

Gardens may have to withstand months of harsh weather each winter, and such conditions can take a toll. Gardeners can consider the following tips as they try

to restore their gardens and get them ready for spring planting.

■ Disinfect your tools. It's common to clean tools in late fall or whenever they're typically placed in storage for the winter. But cleaning and disinfecting are not necessarily the same thing. If tools were not disinfected at the end of the previous gardening season, disinfect them before doing any work on the garden. Doing so can

ensure any lingering bacteria or fungi on tool surfaces are killed prior to the beginning of gardening season. According to the University of Minnesota Extension, plant pathogens, including bacteria and viruses, can be transferred to and infect plants through bits of soil and plant debris left on shovels and pruner blades. Thoroughly disinfecting such tools prior to using them in the spring is a great

way to reduce the risk of disease in your garden.

■ Clear debris from garden beds. Leaves, twigs, sticks, and other debris may have gathered in the garden over the winter. Such debris can inhibit the growth of plants and vegetables, so make sure all of it is removed prior to planting. Weeds might even begin to sprout up in late winter and early spring, so remove them before they go to seed.

■ Test the soil. Testing the soil prior to planting can help gardeners determine what their gardens will need to thrive in the coming months. Garden centers and home improvement stores sell home testing kits that are effective and easy to use. Once the results are in, speak with a professional at your local garden center about the best time to amend the soil.

■ Loosen compacted soil. Soil can become compacted over winter. If compacted soil is not loosened prior to planting, plants will have a hard time getting the water and nutrients they need to thrive. Loosening the soil also provides another opportunity to inspect the



COURTESY PHOTO

Gardeners can consider the following tips as they try to restore their gardens and get them ready for spring planting.

garden for any underlying issues, such as fungi or weed growth, that you may have missed when clearing debris or testing the soil.

Late winter is a good

time to assess a garden and address any issues that developed over the winter so plants and vegetables can thrive come the spring planting season.



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# Swimming pool landscaping ideas

Backyard pools provide a way to cool off and enjoy a taste of luxury without having to travel. Backyard pools provided even more convenience and a welcome respite in 2020, as many public pools were closed in response to social distancing restrictions put in place during the pandemic.

After installing pools, many homeowners realize that touching up the landscaping around the pool can provide the finishing touch to their backyard retreats. Not all landscaping is the

same, and homeowners should choose plants that look beautiful, are tolerant to pool splash-out and won't outgrow the area. The home and garden resource The Spruce notes that a plant that is attractive at two feet tall can grow rapidly and drop leaves or other debris into the pool.

When selecting options for pool landscaping, there are some considerations to keep in mind:

- Choose plants that will provide privacy.
- Know which kind of

climate a plant needs prior to purchasing it. Tropical plants may be fitting pool-side, but will they endure when the season is over?

■ Design according to the theme of the home, as plants should complement the existing style. Modern foliage may not blend well with a home styled after a traditional English cottage.

■ Decide whether you can accept spreading or trailing plants that can cascade over retaining walls and other infrastructure.

- Look at trees that

won't drop too many leaves, flowers or fruit into the water.

■ Think about having layers of plants to soften the landscape, which can make a small pool seem bigger and more luxurious, indicates the landscaping company Earth Development, Inc.

■ Don't overlook the possibility of a lawn abutting pavers or concrete

surrounding a pool, as it can soften the edges and keep spaces open and inviting.

■ Incorporate herbs or fragrant plants, which can transform a pool day into a spa experience. Consider low-maintenance lavender as an option.

Pool landscaping must marry a variety of different features and plant requirements. As a result,

a professional consultation may be the route to take. Landscape architects will have the know-how to select plant varieties that will be tolerant, beautiful and fulfill homeowners' wishes.

Backyard pools can make a backyard retreat that much more enjoyable. Landscaping offers the softness and beauty that adds a finishing touch to poolside retreats.



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When selecting options for pool landscaping, there are some considerations to keep in mind.

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# Decor ideas to give homes a fresh look this spring

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and that spirit of renewal can take hold inside a home.

Warm weather and longer hours of daylight make spring a perfect time to imagine a home's interior design in a new light. The following are a handful of decor ideas that may inspire homeowners to give their homes an entirely new look this spring.

■ **Wallpaper:** Wallpaper fell out of favor years ago, but new styles that aren't so heavily patterned can make for wonderful additions to any room. Large-scale prints can give a room a whole new feel without giving homeowners or their guests the impression that they have stepped back in time.

A simple, mural-style floral wallpaper on the walls surrounding a table in a breakfast nook can bring nature inside.

■ **Pastel colors:** Nothing embodies the spring quite like pastel colors. If colorful, bright flowers dot the garden in the backyard, homeowners can bring those uplifting pastels inside by painting an accent wall or even adding some brightly colored accent furniture to rooms that could use a lift.

■ **Declutter:** Clutter is often conquered during spring cleaning sessions, but homeowners who want to create more free-flowing interior spaces can downsize their furniture and/or look for multipurpose features that make it hard

for clutter to take over a room. Create more open space in entertaining areas by mounting the television and getting rid of a bulky entertainment center.

Create even more space by replacing rarely used end tables with a storage ottoman where books and magazines can be stored to give a room a fresh, clean look.

■ **Accent features:** Sometimes the smallest changes to an interior space make the biggest impression. Replace dated accents like vases and table lamps with newer items that reflect the latest styles and trends. Such adjustments won't break the bank, and they can give rooms a whole new feel.



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Spring is a great time to reconsider home interiors. This spring homeowners can embrace various strategies, both big and small, to give their homes a whole new feel.

## Spring cleaning tips and tricks

Spring is a time of year when change is in the air. Trees are budding, plants are flowering, and homes laden with dark or heavy fabrics and clutter could use some lightening up.

Spring cleaning projects are popular this time of year as residents take inventory of their living spaces and aim to declutter, clean and increase efficiency. Some people find the prospect of getting organized overwhelming. Here are some tips that can help anyone master spring cleaning.

■ **Create a plan.** Make a checklist and establish a cleaning plan of attack. Focus on areas that are not regularly cleaned, as they probably need a little attention.

■ **Assemble your cleaning kit.** Spring cleaning can be slowed down considerably if you don't have

all of your equipment at the ready. Items to have on hand include an all-purpose cleaner, concentrated cleaner, microfiber cloths, paper towels, mop, vacuum, dusters, and a squeegee. Adjust your equipment based on the task at hand.

■ **Curate your cleaning playlist.** Create a playlist with songs that will get you moving and motivated to clean.

■ **Work from top to bottom.** Work efficiently by cleaning shelves, ceiling fans and other elevated items first, as dust and debris will trickle down and need to be cleaned next.

■ **Purchase or rent a carpet cleaner.** According to the experts at Clean That Up, carpets help filter indoor air by trapping debris and allergens. By deep cleaning carpets, homeowners can improve

the indoor air quality of their homes. Use a carpet cleaner on a warm, dry day so that windows can be opened and cross breezes will help dry the damp rug.

■ **Clean windows.** Wash windows inside and out and utilize their screens to help brighten indoors spaces.

■ **Deep clean the kitchen.** Clean out and disinfect the refrigerator by wiping it down with warm water and baking soda or a vinegar-and-water solution. While in the kitchen, set the oven to the self-clean function so it becomes cleaner as well.

Homeowners also can focus on cleaning curtains (including shower curtains), steam-cleaning upholstery, removing clutter from closets, cleaning out the dryer vent and duct tubing, wiping inside kitchen drawers, and vacuuming under beds and other furniture.



COURTESY PHOTO

Spring cleaning can bring the revitalizing nature of this beloved time of year into your home.



# Compost is part of the circle of life in gardens

The season for fresh fruits and vegetables grown right in the backyard is upon us. Warm weather breathes life into fresh berries, tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, and many other delectable fruits and vegetables.

Home gardens can be supplemented with delicious finds from the supermarket or farmer's market, including melons, corn and more.

The bounty of the garden can be made more abundant and fruitful with the addition of the right soil amendments. Compost is a key element of rich, nutritious soil. Scraps from items that have been grown in the garden can then be reused in the production of the compost that feeds that same garden. It's a continuous circle of garden life.

Getting started with compost is relatively easy. Homeowners should choose an outdoor space near the garden but far away from the home so that it won't be disturbed by kids or animals. Some people opt for an open compost pile, while others choose closed bins to contain the possible smell and to camouflage the compost. A sunny spot will help the compost to develop faster, according to Good Housekeeping.

The next step is to start gathering the scraps and materials that will go into the compost. Better Homes and Gardens suggests keeping a bucket or bin in the kitchen to accumulate kitchen scraps. Here are some kitchen-related items that can go into the compost material:

- Eggshells
- Fruit peels



COURTESY PHOTO

The bounty of the garden can be made more abundant and fruitful with the addition of the right soil amendments.

- Vegetable peels and scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Shredded newspaper

In addition to these materials, grass and plant clippings, dry leaves, bark chips, straw, and sawdust from untreated

wood can go into the pile. Avoid diseased plants, anything with animal fats, dairy products, and pet feces.

A low-maintenance pile has an equal amount of brown and green plant matter in the compost plus moisture

to keep the bacteria growing and eating at the right rate. Aerating the compost occasionally, or turning the bin when possible, will allow the compost to blend and work together. Compost will take a few months to form

completely, says the Planet Natural Research Center. The finished product will resemble a dark, crumbly soil that smells like fresh earth.

Compost will not only add nutrients to garden soil, but also it can help insulate

plants and may prevent some weed growth. It is a good idea to start a compost pile as a free source of nutrition for plants and a method to reduce food waste in an environmentally sound way.

## Did you know?

Prior to financing home improvement projects, homeowners typically consider a host of variables, including

how significant a return they're likely to get on their investment. Though potential ROI is not the determining

factor for most homeowners, the cost of home renovation projects is so significant that ROI certainly merits

consideration. According to Remodeling magazine's "2022 Cost vs. Value Report," a garage door replacement

recouped the highest percentage of homeowners' initial investment in 2022. The average cost of such a

project was \$4,041 in 2022, and homeowners recouped roughly 93% of that investment at resale.



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# Siding materials to consider for your home

Exterior renovations consistently top the list of projects that offer maximum return on investment, according to Remodeling magazine's annual "Cost vs. Value Report." Siding replacement is a popular exterior renovation and one that can completely transform the look of a home.

Siding comes in a variety of materials, and homeowners can explore the pros, cons and affordability of each to make the most informed decision when replacing their existing siding. Factors to consider apart from price include durability, maintenance and aesthetics.

## Vinyl

Vinyl siding is one the most popular siding materials in North America. That popularity is perhaps due to the relatively low cost of vinyl siding replacement, which Forbes Home



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**Siding comes in a variety of materials, and homeowners can explore the pros, cons and affordability of each.**

estimates is between \$6,150 and \$15,900 to install for a 2,000-square-foot home. A wide array of color options as well as weatherproof protection makes vinyl siding worthy of consideration.

PVC, which is what vinyl siding is comprised of, also is quite fire-resistant. Potential pitfalls of vinyl are that it can fade more quickly than other siding materials

and is sensitive to excess UV exposure.

## Engineered

Engineered materials cost more than vinyl but are considered very durable. They can be advantageous in damp climates or ones where insects are problematic. LP SmartSide® is a type of engineered hardwood that is very durable,

so much so that a 50-year warranty often is offered for the product, according to First American Roofing & Siding. This material can be painted if homeowners desire a change of color down the line. This siding costs around \$2.50 to \$4.50 per square foot for siding and all trim accessories with an additional installation cost of \$5.50 to \$12.00 per square foot. The product is made of wooden strands that have been coated with wax for moisture resistance. A special zinc-based solution is added to protect against rot and insect infestation.

A similar product, HardiePlank®, is engineered from a blend of cement, wood fibers, fine sand, and water. It is similar in price point to the SmartSide and offers resistance to rot and insects. HardiePlank also can be repainted.

Engineered products can

be more expensive to install and generally are not DIY renovations, which may deter homeowners working on tight budgets.

## Wood siding

Wood is one of the oldest siding materials. It can be stained or painted and comes in a variety of styles, from boards to shingles. It's a popular choice in historical homes or ones with classic, architectural details.

It's important to note that wood is a combustible material that can be susceptible to water and insect damage. It also needs to be maintained continuously to look its best. This makes wood siding a true commitment on the part of homeowners. The cost is midrange between vinyl and engineered sidings.

## Metal

Those interested in one of the most energy efficient

options in siding can look no further than metal siding. Metal isn't just for roofing. According to Colonial Contracting, Inc., metal siding creates a uniquely modern appearance and comes in a variety of styles that complement homes.

Unlike fiber, wood or vinyl products, metal siding reflects the sun's rays and keeps interior temperatures cooler in the summer, a boon in hot climates but maybe not the most insulating option for cold climates. One potential pitfall is the possibility of rust, which would make metal siding a less ideal choice for those who live near the ocean. The cost of metal siding is comparable to other siding products, at around \$10 per square foot.

These are a few of the siding options homeowners can investigate if they're revamping the exteriors of their homes.

# The basics of fertilizing a lawn

Spring marks the return of lawn and garden season. Lawns often bear the brunt of winter's wrath, so spring is a great time to nurse them back to health, and fertilizing can be an essential component of that process.

Fertilizing a lawn can be intimidating. An array of fertilizers, with each seemingly designed to address a different issue, can make homeowners' heads spin when visiting their local lawn and garden center. However, fertilizing is a very simple task that any homeowner can tackle. In fact, fears about fertilizing are often unfounded and can be overcome with some basic knowledge of the process.

■ Identify which type of grass is in the yard. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that turf

grass is divided into two categories: cool-season grass and warm-season grass. A local lawn and garden center can help homeowners identify which type of grass is in the yard, and this often depends on location. Fescue, bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are some examples of cool-season grasses, while Bermuda, bahia, St. Augustine, and zoysia are considered warm-season grasses. Identifying which type of grass is in the lawn is important because that will indicate when to fertilize. Cool-season grasses are typically best fertilized in early spring, while warm-season lawns can benefit from an application just before especially warm temperatures arrive.

■ Survey the lawn to identify which spreader to use.

A small yard or a thriving lawn with only a few bald or unsightly patches may not need a full application of fertilizer. In such instances, a hand spreader can suffice. For larger lawns and areas, a broadcast spreader is the ideal option. Spreaders have multiple settings, and the fertilizer package will indicate which setting to utilize when using the product.

■ Test the soil prior to purchasing fertilizer. The lawn experts at Pennington® note that a simple soil test can reveal soil pH and phosphorous and potassium levels. Soil tests can be purchased at most home improvement stores and lawn and garden centers, and they can help homeowners determine which fertilizer will most benefit their lawns.



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**Fears about fertilizing are often unfounded and can be overcome with some basic knowledge of the process.**

■ Water the lawn prior to fertilizing. The experts at Scotts® recommend a good watering a few days prior to fertilizing a lawn. Such an approach ensures the soil is ready to accept the fertilizer once it's applied.

■ Follow the instructions

carefully. Detailed instructions are typically provided on fertilizer product packaging. Once homeowners have identified and purchased the product they need, they can simply follow the instructions on the packaging, including how and when

to water after application, which can make fertilizing less intimidating.

Fertilizing in spring can help a lawn recover from the previous summer and winter, ensuring it's lush and green when summer entertaining season arrives.



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Certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.

## Popular insect repellent plants

Homeowners choose plants for their properties based on a number of variables. Some may be into growing their own foods, while others desire their gardens to be an awe-inspiring mélange of bright colors and alluring scents. There's no wrong reason to plant a fresh garden, but some plants offer extra benefits, such as repelling insects.

Insects can be a nuisance and a threat to individuals' overall health. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, insect-borne diseases are viral and bacterial illnesses that develop from insect bites. Mosquitoes, sand flies and fleas are some examples of insects that can pass on disease. Fever, chills, headache, and muscle soreness are just a few of the more common symptoms linked to insect-borne diseases.

The good news for avid gardeners is that certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic

appeal that so many people love.

■ **Basil:** The aroma of fresh basil is enough to compel any gardener to make a place for it in their garden. But there's more to fresh basil than its scent, as the Farmers Almanac notes it can be used to repel mosquitoes and moths.

■ **Lavender:** Fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and moths are not fans of this aromatic and colorful member of the mint family. Bees tend to be drawn to lavender, a durable plant that many garden centers recommend in areas prone to drought or hot summers without much precipitation.

■ **Mint:** Mint is another plant that is instantly recognizable for its aroma. But mint lovers may not realize that it's also great for keeping ants at bay. Mint also can be used to repel mosquitoes, but gardeners with no experience planting mint should plant it in pots. That's because the Farmers Almanac notes mint is an especially aggressive spreader that can quickly

take over a garden. Separating mint in pots can prevent it from bullying its way into other plants' domains.

■ **Lemongrass:** Lemongrass is a tropical grass that's so fragrant it's often used in perfumes. Lemongrass contains citronella, which many people associate with repelling mosquitoes. A potted lemongrass plant can repel these unwanted guests, keeping them away from decks, porches and/or patios all summer long.

■ **Chrysanthemums:** The Farmers' Almanac® recommends using chrysanthemums, which repel a range of insects from bedbugs to fleas to ants, as border plants around a home. That's because they contain the natural insecticide pyrethrin, which can serve as something of an insect-repelling boundary around a home.

Insects are unwanted guests around a home each spring, summer and fall. Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.



# Let the outside in with all-season rooms

Many homeowners express interest in creating fewer barriers between the interior and exterior of their homes. Some may have backyards built for entertaining and want to facilitate the transition between the inside of the residence and the outside when guests arrive. In other instances, homes may back to a nature preserve that homeowners want to enjoy more readily. Whatever the reason for bringing the outside in, all-season rooms can serve as a welcoming bridge between indoor and outdoor spaces.

## What is an all-season room?

Also known as a four-season room, all-season rooms are specially engineered spaces that provide a connection to the outdoors no matter the season. They are like sunrooms, but climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer and fall.

## What is the difference between a three-season room and an all-season room?

The biggest difference between these two spaces is the level of usage and the capacity of the room to be heated and cooled. Individuals who reside in climates with moderate year-round temperatures may get by with a three-season room. However, those who experience all four seasons may need a more insulated space to make the room usable throughout the year.

## Features of all-season rooms

One of the more notable features of an all-season room is an abundance of windows, which allow plenty of natural light to shine in. All-season rooms also can feature creature comforts like a reading nook, outdoor kitchen spaces and televisions. Retractable screens can be



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Whatever the reason for bringing the outside in, all-season rooms can serve as a welcoming bridge between indoor and outdoor spaces.

installed when privacy or shade is desired.

## Maintaining a comfortable temperature

All-season rooms can be built with adequate thermal insulation and energy-saving features. Insulation will be installed in the walls and roof, and homeowners may have a choice of window ratings for efficiency. Some all-season rooms are specially equipped with HVAC systems that may or may not be tied in to the home's general heating and cooling system. Some people use portable heaters or air conditioners to control the temperature in all-season rooms. It's best to speak with an all-season room contractor to identify heating and cooling needs.

## How much does an all-season

## room cost?

Prices vary by region and are contingent on the features homeowners desire. According to the outdoor resource Garden Center Care, a three-season room can cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$50,000 to build. A four-season room can cost \$20,000 to \$80,000 to add. If there is an existing three-season room, it may be more affordable to upgrade the space into an all-season room, but an architect and contractor should inspect the space to determine the scope of the project.

All-season rooms can be an ideal addition to a property, providing extra space for entertaining or lounging and a connection to the outdoors.



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# Tips for budget-friendly home decor

Home interiors can be spruced up in a number of ways. Ideas run the gamut from relatively inexpensive changes in paint color to more extensive (and expensive) remodels that may include demolition and reconstruction. Investing in new home decor is another way to breathe new life into spaces, and this approach that falls somewhere in the middle in regard to cost.

Material and product costs remain high across the board, so individuals interested in changing the furniture and other design elements in their homes might be seeking ways to do so in the most affordable way possible. In such instances, homeowners can try these budget-friendly ways to overhaul their home decor.

■ **Create the illusion of more space.** Light, bright and white are key attributes to remember when selecting design elements for rooms where you want to create the illusion of more square footage. Painting the walls in very light colors, increasing natural and artificial light, including using well-placed mirrors to reflect



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Homeowners can try these budget-friendly ways to overhaul their home decor.

light, and decorating with light-colored fabrics can help a space seem more roomy.

■ **Replace the accessories.**

Replacing curtains, area rugs, throw pillows, and chair cushions is an easy way to change a room without a big investment.

Consider updating some wall art and tying color schemes together with all of the newly introduced elements.

■ **Splurge on statement pieces that will be used frequently.** These may include chandeliers, unique rugs or an eye-catching piece of

furniture.

■ **Shop 'discount' stores for furniture and accents.** Traditional design centers can be great places to find plenty of high-quality merchandise. However, don't overlook local discount or close-out centers that may have items at very reasonable costs. Stores like Home Goods, At Home and Big Lots routinely get new merchandise that changes with the season, helping homeowners to refresh their spaces without having to dig deep into their pockets. Shop the high-end stores for inspiration, then try to find "dupes" in the discount stores that will mimic the looks for less.

■ **Cut out the clutter.** Modern homes are lean and clean. A home's interior instantly looks more high-end and appealing when the clutter is removed. Consider keeping main living areas free from too many knick-knacks and other accents. If you want to display a special collection, set aside a room specifically for such items.

There are many budget-friendly ways to make interior spaces more inviting.

## 3 potentially low-maintenance trees to consider for your property

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance trees can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without

all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

**1. Jacaranda:** Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The

jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds its leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

**2. American arborvitae:** The

Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

**3. Japanese red maple:** The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees

that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions. During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommodate the Japanese red maple, so this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When considering new trees for a property, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree.

Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse conditions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.



# 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



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Recognition of the many benefits of native plants can make for healthier lawns and gardens and a healthier planet as well.

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.

## Keep groundhogs out of the garden

Groundhogs take center stage on February 2. Individuals across the country anxiously await the news of whether one of these furry fellows sees his shadow or not — the latter indicating that an early spring is on the horizon.

Once Groundhog Day has come and gone, the humble groundhog regains its status as unwanted intruder.

Groundhogs invade lawns and gardens in search of fruits, vegetables and ornamental plants. Groundhogs also can make extensive burrows under the soil ripping up the landscape and

potentially threatening the foundation of a home. Keeping groundhogs at bay is a goal for many homeowners, and the following are some simple ways to do just that.

Make sure it's a groundhog. Before taking any steps to repel groundhogs, first make sure it's really these fuzzy critters who are wreaking havoc. Signs of a groundhog infestation include:

■ Feathery tops of carrots have been removed.

■ A large hole, around 10 to 12 inches wide, under or near a storage shed or other structure with mounds of dirt outside of it.

■ Tomatoes with large bites taken out of them.

■ Newly damaged plants noticed in the afternoon (deer eat garden plants at night).

■ Wide teeth marks on plants and bark.

■ Tracks in the dirt that show four-clawed toes on the front paws and five on the back.

Once you've determined it's a groundhog that is causing damage, you can try these strategies to keep them away.

■ Harvest your garden frequently to remove opportunities for



groundhogs to prey on produce. They're particularly attracted to cantaloupes,

cabbage, green beans, cucumbers, zucchini, and corn. They also like the tender greens from lettuce. Consider using raised garden beds so groundhogs will not have easy access.

■ Groundhogs prefer camouflage around their burrows. Mow the lawn, pull weeds and clean up brush piles to deter groundhogs.

■ Apply safe repellents

that use essential oils or flavors and scents that groundhogs do not like. Epsom salt is believed to repel groundhogs.

■ Call animal control to have a groundhog relocated. Animal trapping professionals can live trap and release a groundhog elsewhere. Don't try to trap a groundhog yourself, as they can be feisty and bite or scratch if scared.

Groundhogs may be heroes for a day in February, but they quickly take a heel turn when they start to damage yards. Getting groundhogs under control can help.



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- **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:** 89,143 (2020 Census)
- **Median household income:** \$47,542 (2017-2021)
- **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$311,500 (2017-2021)
- **Tax rate:** \$10.16 residential; \$21.14 commercial (FY2023)
- **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:** 978-620-3090
- **Youth Services:** 200 Common St., 978-620-3252
- **Elder Services:** Senior Center, 155 Haverhill St., 978-620-3540
- **School Department:** 978-975-5905
- **Libraries:** Lawrence Public Library (Main library) 51 Lawrence St., 978-620-3600; South Branch, 135 Parker St., 978-620-3650

## METHUEN

- **Incorporated:** 1725
- **Website:** cityofmethuen.net
- **Population:** 53,059 (2020 Census)
- **Median household income:** \$87,137 (2017-2021)
- **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$371,300 (2017-2021)
- **Tax rate:** \$11.70 residential; \$22.78 commercial (FY2023)
- **City Hall:** Searles Building, 41 Pleasant St., 978-983-8505
- **Police Department:** 90 Hampshire St., 978-983-8698
- **Fire Department:** 24 Lowell St., 978-983-8940
- **Department of Public Works:** 978-983-8545
- **Youth Services:** Recreation Department, 10 Ditson Place, 978-983-8590
- **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

- **Incorporated:** 1855
- **Website:** northandoverma.gov
- **Population:** 30,915 (2020 Census)
- **Median household income:** \$120,954 (2017-2021)
- **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$547,300 (2017-2021)
- **Tax rate:** \$12.24 residential; \$17.25 commercial (FY23)
- **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, 120 R Main St., 978-688-9560
- **School Department:** 978-794-1503
- **Library:** Stevens Memorial Library, 345 Main St., 978-688-9505

## SALEM, N.H.

- **Incorporated:** 1750
- **Website:** townofsaalemnh.org
- **Population:** 30,089 (2020 Census)
- **Median household income:** \$91,276 (2017-2021)
- **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$355,400 (2017-2021)
- **Tax rate:** \$16.05 (2022)
- **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:** 603-890-2150
- **Youth Services:** Recreation, 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., 603-8938-7064

## WINDHAM

- **Incorporated:** 1742
- **Website:** windhamnh.gov
- **Population:** 15,817 (2020 Census)
- **Median household income:** \$167,641 (2017-2021)
- **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$516,400 (2017-2021)
- **Tax rate:** \$19.76 (2022)
- **Town Hall:** 3 North Lowell Road, 603-434-5577
- **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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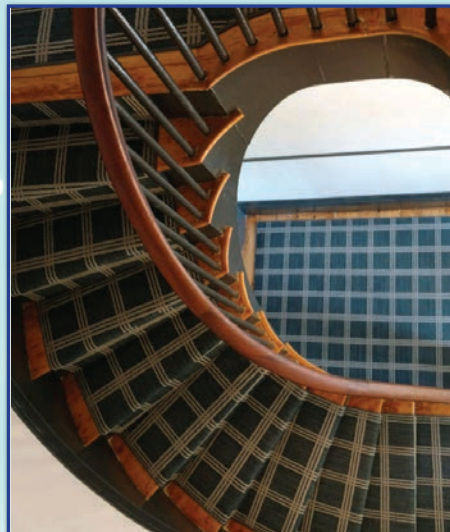
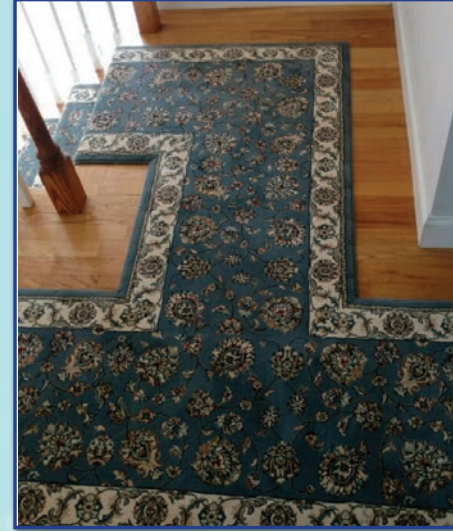
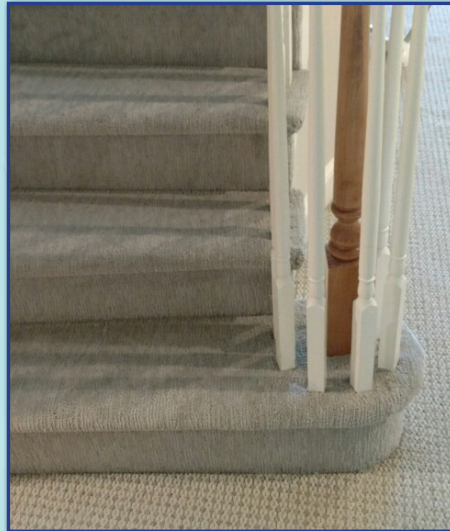
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