

A vibrant graphic for a home improvement supplement. The background features a two-story house with a grey roof and a red chimney. The scene is decorated with various colorful elements: butterflies (including monarchs and a yellow one), flowers (blue, pink, orange, and white), and abstract shapes like circles and lines. The text is presented in three colored ovals: a large pink one at the top, a green one in the middle, and an orange one below it. A blue oval is at the bottom.

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# A guide to survive lengthy home renovations

**R**enovations can transform homes into spaces that mirror homeowners' dreams. Regardless of the scope of a project, a home renovation will involve some level of disruption to residents' daily lives. Lengthy, more involved projects may impact daily life considerably.

Renovation timelines vary depending on the scale of the project. Painting may take a week or two, while a kitchen or bathroom remodel may last anywhere from four to 16 weeks. Larger projects like adding a room can take between three and six months, say the experts at John Merrill Homes. Projects also often take longer than expected, as surprises may be in store once homeowners begin peeling back the layers in homes. Homeowners about to embark on lengthy renovation projects can embrace these tips to come through on the other side relatively unscathed.

## Choose your timing

The timing of a renovation may have to coincide with contractor availability or having the budget to fund the project. But homeowners should consider life circumstances and season before starting a project. You might not have the energy to take on a project right before the holidays. If kids play on sports teams that require a lot of travel, it might be better to wait until the season winds down. Figure out what you can realistically take on to reduce the likelihood that you'll feel overwhelmed.

## Plan accordingly

Creating and sticking to a daily schedule, and knowing what is happening each day, can keep a project on track. It also allows you to determine which days will be the most chaotic. Demolition days can be noisy and messy, and maybe those are days when you plan to be away from the house for a few hours.



## Store items out of harm's way

Invest in a storage solution for the duration of the renovation. Decluttering and removing items before the project is in full force will make it easier to work and maneuver, and it also means fewer items will need to be cleaned afterwards. Renovations tend to kick up a lot of construction dust, after all.

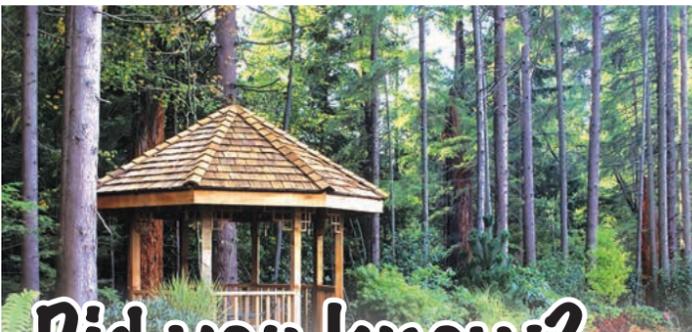
## Designate a safe zone

Establish a room or rooms as work-free areas to which residents can retreat. If multiple rooms are being renovated, you might consider spending time with a family member or friend, or getting a hotel for a short duration until the bulk of disruption dies down.

## Lower your standards

Homecooked meals may be your standard most days of the week, but it's alright to be a bit lax when remodeling projects begin. Relying on frozen foods or takeout might be necessary for a little while.

Remodeling projects can be disruptive and stressful, but certain strategies can make it easier to get through projects without too much disruption.



## Did you know?

A well-manicured lawn appeals to homeowners when they look out their windows. But such a view also can look nice when homeowners peruse their bank statements after selling a property. According to the "2023 Remodeling Impact Report: Outdoor Features" from the National Association of Realtors®, standard lawn care service yields an estimated cost recovery of 217 percent. Landscape maintenance, with an estimated cost recovery of 104 percent, and an overall landscape upgrade (100 percent) also yield great returns for homeowners. The NAR® report also noted the effects of such projects related to homeowners' desire to spend time on their property. Among homeowners who participated in the NAR® report and committed to standard lawn care service, 58 percent indicated they had a greater desire to be at home since completing the project, while 46 percent indicated they have an increased sense of enjoyment when spending time at home.

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# Things to know when replacing windows

Windows are durable, but they do not last forever. The experts at This Old House say the life span of home windows is between 15 and 50 years, with most reaching the upper limits of their life expectancy at around 20 years. Once they reach this age, the seals begin to weaken or fail, and windows become susceptible to drafts and water seepage.

Replacing windows can be a good investment. Such a project is one of the more effective ways to elevate a home's curb appeal and value. New windows are energy efficient and make homes more secure. They also tend to look better than old, fading windows. When pondering a window replacement project, it's important to consider these factors.

- **Know the window types.** Double hung windows are classic and have operable upper and lower sashes. Lowering the upper sash allows warm air near the ceiling to escape and cooler air can flow in through the bottom. Single hung windows only have an operable lower sash. Sliding windows have one or more panels that move horizontally, and picture windows are fixed models designed to offer wide, unobstructed views and lots of light.

- **Repair or replace windows.** Existing windows might just need to be repaired, saving homeowners thousands of dollars. It's best to consult with a professional to see if certain components can be repaired rather than replaced. Typically, rotten framing, wet or weeping windows or significant drafts require replacement.

- **Identify the differences between replacement windows and construction windows.** Traditional replacement windows are sometimes called pocket windows, says Consumer Reports. They fit inside an existing window frame. Construction windows require the removal of the entire old window, including the frame, sill and trim. The latter cost more to install.



- **Familiarize yourself with window frame materials.** Various window frame materials are available for purchase, and variables such as heat transfer, maintenance and durability differ with each product. Vinyl is a common material that's low-maintenance and affordable. Aluminum and aluminum clad windows can be economical options, and they are corrosion-resistant and require little maintenance. Wood also is popular for the interior parts of a window, and offer a traditional look. Wood is available on new construction windows. Fiberglass windows also are available in new construction windows. They won't crack, warp, rust, corrode, or peel, and the frames will not expand and contract as much as other materials.

- **Keep costs in mind.** According to Fixr, an online marketplace for local remodeling services, the average national price for a professional to replace a window is around \$800. For a one-story house, a window replacement project of multiple windows may cost around \$8,000.

When selecting replacement windows, look for The National Fenestration Rating Council label to get a snapshot of the window's energy performance to compare with others. The Energy Star logo indicates that the window meets Energy Star standards.



## Did you know?

The market research experts at Business Research Insights report that the three-season sunroom market size is projected to nearly double between 2025 and 2035. BRI reports that 65 percent of homeowners prefer cost-effective sunrooms when seeking to extend their living space. The popularity of sunrooms can be traced to a number of variables, including year-round access to a home's surrounding landscape. That access might be hindered if the only spaces to experience nature is a patio, deck or another traditional type of outdoor living space. But sunrooms, particularly those equipped with heating and cooling, can bring homeowners in touch with nature during times of year when they might otherwise be compelled to steer clear of their outdoor living spaces due to less welcoming weather.

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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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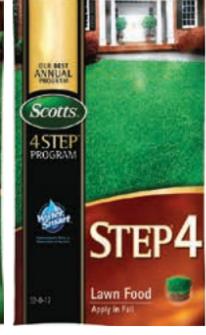
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# The basics of 3 popular siding materials

Few home renovation projects can change the look of a home as significantly as new siding. New siding can make a home look brand new, and a new color can dramatically change the perception of a home.

As homeowners begin to consider siding replacement projects, they might be surprised to learn their options in relation to materials are so numerous. Though it's great to have options, it also can be difficult to pick a material when there are so many products to choose from. Vinyl, fiber cement and wood are three popular siding materials, and understanding the characteristics of each can help homeowners make more informed decisions.

## Vinyl

Vinyl siding has long been among the most popular siding materials. The National Association of Home Builders notes that popularity has declined in recent years, with the market share of vinyl siding dropping 5 percent over the last decade and nearly 13 percent over the last 20 years. Despite that declining popularity, vinyl remains a strong option for many homeowners due to its affordability and minimal maintenance requirements. Consumer Reports also notes that vinyl siding is impervious to insects and water, an attribute that's highly appealing to many homeowners.

## Fiber cement

Consumer Reports notes that fiber cement siding blends cement, sand and cellulose. Many homeowners like fiber cement siding because of its aesthetic appeal, as it looks like real wood without the vulnerabilities associated with wood (see below). The home renovation experts at This

Old House report that fiber cement siding has exceptional durability and offers great resistance to environmental factors like harsh weather, UV rays and moisture. Fiber cement siding also is a low-maintenance, insect-resistant option that won't warp or rot. Fiber cement siding is not easily installed, which contributes to a higher overall cost.

## Wood

Siding materials don't get much more traditional than wood. It shouldn't surprise homeowners to learn that wood siding can warp or rot, and anything made from wood can be vulnerable to insects. However, well-maintained wood siding can be very durable and certain types are less vulnerable to rot than others. Local climate will affect which wood siding options are best for a given area. Many see wood siding as characteristic of a high-end home, making the somewhat higher price tag compared to vinyl siding easier to justify.

There's no right or wrong decision when choosing siding materials for a home. Homeowners are urged to do their homework, including studying cost and the local climate, before choosing a material for their home.

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# Cost-effective curb appeal boosters

One shouldn't judge a book by its cover. However, that often is hard to do, particularly when it comes to homes. Curb appeal bears significant influence regarding how a property is perceived. A property that is neat and aesthetically appealing probably will be preferable to one that looks like the homeowners did not maintain it.

Boosting curb appeal is a common focus of sellers before listing a property. But what can those who don't have big budgets for major overhauls do to improve their curb appeal? Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

## Refresh the front door

Painting the front door can add brightness and improve the look of a home's entryway. Most exterior paint costs between \$30 and \$40 per gallon, so this is undeniably a budget-friendly improvement. If money allows, replacing the door altogether will generate bang for your buck.

## Improve or add landscaping elements

Landscaping should be designed to highlight the home's best features. It should look symmetrical and feel manicured. If it's not possible to plant new flowers or bushes, simply cleaning up debris and weeds, and trimming existing greenery can make it feel neater and more polished.

## Clean up

Power-washing the siding, cement walkways and garage door can create instant impact. It's amazing how much dirt and mildew can reduce the luster of a home. Cleaning off years of grime can be a fast and inexpensive refresh.

## Reseal the driveway

Make sure the driveway is clean and tidy. If it has cracks or discoloration, filling in cracks and applying a new coat of sealer will make a big difference. Homeowners can hire someone to reseal the driveway or do the work on their own.

## Add more lighting

Updating front porch lights and accent lights around the property will cast a more positive glow on a home, both literally and figuratively.

## Add a seating area

If space by the front door allows, add a bench or some chairs to create a welcoming seating area. A potted plant or two nearby will help the area seem intentional.

Improving curb appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A few easy touches can boost the look of any property.



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# How to spot foundation issues at home

Home ownership can be a rewarding endeavor and a good investment over time. But homes require consistent upkeep to ensure a property remains safe, a condition of ownership that renters typically do not need to concern themselves with.

Foundation issues are a component of home ownership that can be easy to forget, as such concerns are not necessarily evident in frequently visited areas of a home. A foundation provides structural integrity for the entire home, so addressing damage is essential. The experts at This Old House indicate that some foundation issues can be relatively easy and inexpensive to address. Other issues may not be so simple, especially if they challenge the structural integrity of a home.

Learning to recognize foundation issues can help homeowners sort through small problems and big ones. But what are signs of foundation problems? Consider these potential issues, as noted by This Old House, Robbie Breaux & Team Real Broker, LLC and Bay Crawl Space Foundation Repair.

- **Cracks in walls:** Cracks appearing in foundation walls, drywall or plaster, especially diagonal or stair-step cracks forming near doorways, windows or corners, might be indicative of foundation movement. If a crack has formed in a living space, something is likely moving below since floors are supported from the foundation upward. Cracks thicker than one-quarter of an inch in foundation walls or home walls can be a problem.

- **Sagging porches and stoops:** Notable sagging of porches or stoops can indicate that a house is sinking or changing faster than other areas.

- **Separation between door and window frames and walls:** Gaps can form around windows and doors if the foundation is shifting. The gaps that form can lead to water and pest infiltration if left untreated, causing even more issues.

- **Cabinets and countertops separating from walls:** Homeowners who notice considerable space forming between cabinets or countertops and the wall indicate that the frame of the home is out of square. That likely means a foundation is settling or sinking.

- **Squeaky, bouncy or sagging floors:** While these issues in floors may not always result from foundation issues, they often indicate that moisture has invaded the basement or crawl space. That moisture may have gained access through a cracked or compromised foundation.



- **Leaning or cracked chimney:** If a chimney resembles the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it could be a sign of possible foundation issues causing settling or sinking.

Bringing in a professional to assess potential foundation issues is a good idea. While certain foundation problems can be remedied by homeowners themselves, it's best to rule out more serious issues that may require professional expertise before going the DIY route.

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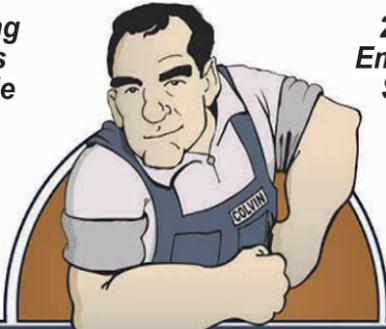
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# Variables to consider before downsizing a home in retirement

**A**spiring to save money in retirement makes perfect sense. Once professionals call it a career and are no longer drawing a paycheck, cutting back on expenses can be a sound decision that ensures seniors won't outlive their money. And housing remains a significant expense, even for retirees who own their homes and no longer have monthly mortgage payments to make.

Many retirees seeking ways to save money consider downsizing their homes. According to the National Association of Realtors, 12 percent of people between the ages of 60 and 69 who move indicated their home was too large, and that percentage grows among movers between the ages of 70 and 78 (16 percent) and those who move after turning 79 (18 percent). Downsizing a home in retirement can seem like an ideal means to saving money after calling it a career, but individuals pondering such a move should consider a number of variables before putting their homes up for sale.

### Costs

Downsizing may help retirees lower their property tax obligations, reduce their utility bills and lower their monthly mortgage payments (for those who are still paying off a mortgage on their current homes), but that does not mean moving will not incur new expenses that render such savings moot. Expenditures like closing costs, real estate commissions, moving-related expenses, and capital gains taxes can quickly add up. In addition, retirees who currently do not pay homeowner's association fees may be subjected to such fees when moving into a new home, and those fees can be substantial and hard to avoid. Indeed, recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that 71 percent of new constructions in the western and southern United States were built in communities with homeowner's associations. Prior to downsizing, current homeowners should calculate all of the costs related to relocating, including anticipated HOA fees, to see if downsizing is to their financial benefit.

### Social benefits

Another variable that merits consideration is the impact that moving can have on seniors' social lives. The World Health Organization reports that more than one in 10 seniors experiences loneliness, which can adversely affect their physical and mental health and potentially reduce their life expectancy. Retirees currently living in communities in which they are socially active should weigh the effects of leaving that social network behind. Retirees also can weigh the benefits of moving to 55 and over communities where they will be surrounded by people at a similar stage in life, and how living in such developments may improve their social lives.

### Adjusting and adapting

Downsizing will require an adjustment period and a willingness to adapt. Retirees may have an emotional attachment to their current homes, and leaving that behind can be a difficult adjustment. Adapting to life in a new community also can be challenging, particularly if retirees are moving from areas where there are no restrictions regarding their properties to communities where homeowners' associations must approve of any changes to properties. Moving also may require finding new health care professionals, which can be a particularly difficult adjustment for retirees who have spent years building a strong rapport with their current health care team.

Downsizing a home might be a pathway to more financial freedom for many retirees. Seniors considering such a move can consider a number of variables to determine if moving is in their best interest.

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(989) 305-0730  
[Valorie@realestateone.net](mailto:Valorie@realestateone.net)



**April Kammerer**  
(989) 335-3920  
[April@realestateone.net](mailto:April@realestateone.net)



# Signs a fireplace is in need of repair

**F**ireplaces are most heavily used during winter, when temperatures outside are less inviting and few activities sound more appealing than huddling up indoors around a warm fire. As winter winds down, a season of heavy use can take its toll on a fireplace, making spring an ideal time to inspect these popular features for damage.

The American Heritage Insurance Group notes that neglect of chimneys and fireplaces can pose a range of notable dangers, including increased risk for carbon monoxide poisoning and chimney fires. Poorly maintained fireplaces also may fail prematurely, which is not insignificant, as a new fireplace can cost thousands of dollars. With so much to gain from a well-maintained fireplace, homeowners can learn to spot signs suggesting a unit is in need of repair.

- **Insufficiently vented smoke:** Smoke from a fireplace is meant to go up and out of a home through the chimney. If that's not happening, and smoke is instead entering living spaces, then a fireplace and chimney inspection is in order. When such situations unfold, the chimney may be blocked or a damper may be damaged. Such issues are easily and often affordably resolved. But smoke coming into a home also might indicate structural damage to the chimney or fireplace, which can be a more costly fix.

- **Foul odors:** Fireplace aficionados tend to love the smoky aroma that emanates from the fixtures while a fire is burning. If that familiar aroma has been overtaken by a foul odor, then there might

be a buildup of creosote within the chimney. The United States Environmental Protection Agency notes creosote is a derivative of the distillation of tar from wood or coal. Though creosote is a byproduct of burning wood, if it's allowed to accumulate over time, the risk of chimney fires increases considerably. A foul odor coming from the fireplace, particularly when it's not in use, is a sign of excessive creosote buildup, which necessitates immediate remediation.

- **Water damage:** Water damage, which can manifest as rust or dampness around the fireplace or chimney, is another sign a fireplace is in need of repair. Water damage often indicates that water is getting inside. Sometimes that's due to a faulty chimney cap, which is a simple and affordable repair. Other times it could indicate issues with the masonry, which requires a more costly fix.

- **Diminished warmth:** If cuddling up around the fireplace isn't quite as cozy as it used to be, that drop in warmth could indicate issues with airflow or suggest the buildup of creosote. Diminished warmth around a lit fireplace should be brought to the attention of a fireplace professional immediately.

These are not the only potential indicators that a fireplace is in need of repair. Physical signs like cracks or loose masonry and even unusual noises like cracking sounds also indicate repairs might be necessary.



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# How growing families can create more space

Many people will admit that home ownership tops their lists of long-term goals. Finding a home that is affordable may require moving into what many real estate agents bill as a "starter home." But the arrival of a child, and then more children thereafter, could make a home that was perfectly functional for two or three feel too close for comfort.

Anyone who would like to raise a family in the future might want to consider certain factors when choosing a residence or designing living spaces. A home that can grow with life changes can truly be a forever home. The following strategies can expand space when a family grows.

- **Declutter.** It is important to go through belongings regularly and remove anything that is no longer needed. This can be the first step to free up physical space in a room or the home in general. Donate any items that still have utility.

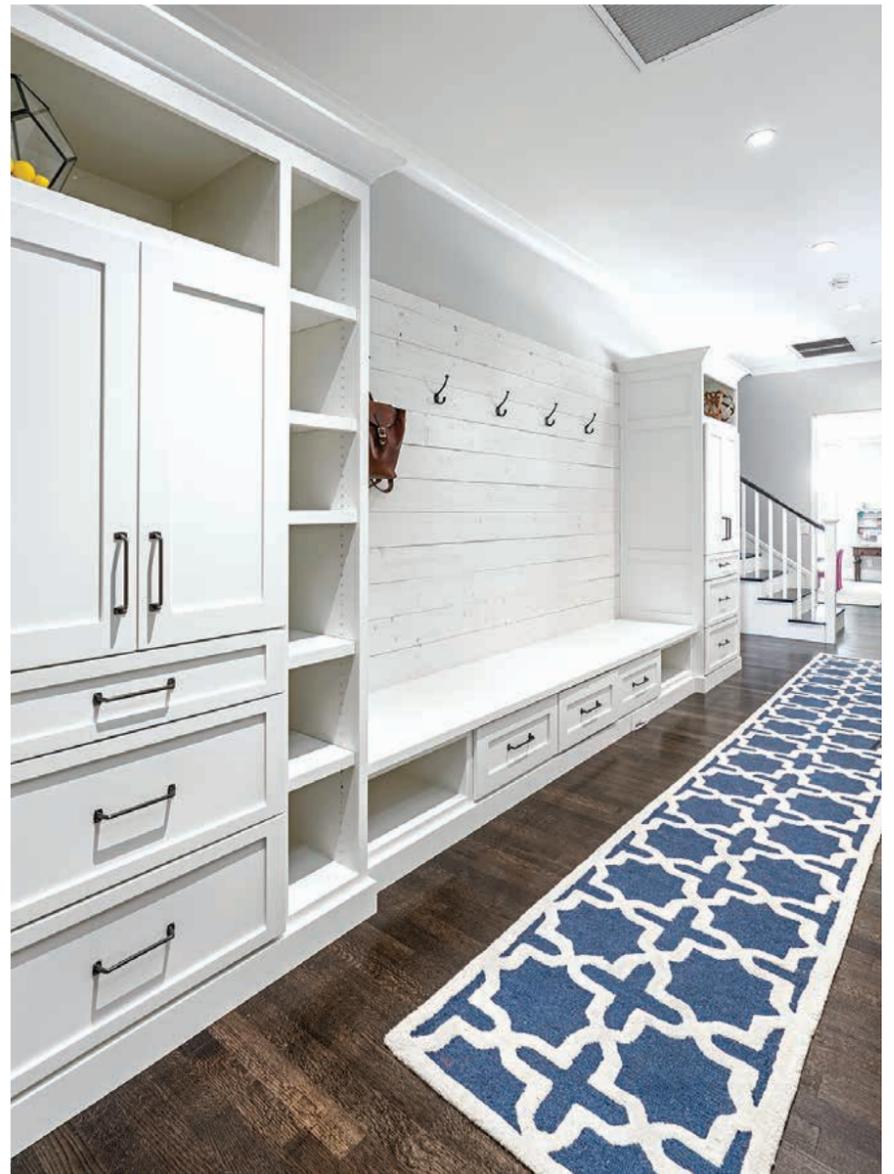
- **Reassess your existing storage.** Look at different ways to maximize existing storage. Utilizing vertical space is one way to do so, so an investment in shelves, hooks and storage systems that maximize space in an upward direction can get items off the floor. Make use of storage under the stairs or in eaves. Loft beds with open space underneath are great for children's rooms because they maximize floor area.

- **Think about toy storage.** Children love to play with toys, and once kids are in a home, toys will accumulate quite quickly. Have a plan for keeping toys neat and stowed away when not in use. Under-the-bed storage, toy armoires (that are secured to the wall) and furniture that can double as storage, such as storage ottomans, are ideal.

- **Revamp a closet.** Although closet space may be at a premium, particularly in older homes, a closet can be turned into a nook to hold a desk for a homework station or remote office space. Compact and organized, it's easy to hide away when not in use by closing the door.

- **Utilize room dividers.** Open floor plans have been the norm for some time. But at some point as a family grows, privacy and multi-functional spaces may be needed. It can be costly to put up permanent walls, but bookcases or pieces of tall furniture can be used as room dividers to cordon off areas as specific spaces, like a child's play area.

- **Convert a basement or garage.** Garages and basements have a reputation for being catch-alls for storage boxes and holiday decorations. However, such rooms have plenty of potential as functional living spaces. Invest in transforming a garage or basement into a room that can grow with the family. At first it may be a play area for young kids. Afterwards, it can be a gaming or homework hangout. As children grow older, spaces can be converted to a family media room. Having this extra space can free up room in the rest of the house so people can enjoy alone time when they need it.



- **Maximize outdoor space.** A yard or another outdoor space can add valuable square footage to a home. A covered patio or deck can make the outdoor areas more usable throughout the year and zones can be created for family meals, play and relaxation.

A family home will need more space as the years go on, and homeowners should keep that in mind when making renovations or choosing a property.

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# 5 ideas to repurpose a formal dining room

Traditional formal dining rooms are not as necessary as they were a generation or two ago. A recent study by Realtor.com found formal dining rooms are often the most underutilized square footage in homes, and a significant percentage of Millennial and Gen Z homeowners prefer flexible “lifestyle rooms” over dining spaces.

So what can homeowners whose dining room tables are covered in mail or the kids’ homework do to repurpose the space into something they will actually use? The following are five ideas to repurpose a formal dining room into a more usable space.

**1. Lounge:** Those who enjoy hosting friends or family without sitting down to formal dinners might appreciate transforming the dining space into a cocktail lounge. Swapping the dining room table and chairs for low swivel chairs around a coffee table or high-backed bar stools around bar tables easily converts the seating space. A built-in wet bar or a bar cart helps complete this social hub for intimate conversation. Paint the room in darker colors or use textured wallpaper to simulate an after-hours feel that separates the space from the rest of the house.

**2. Library:** Homeowners can create a digital detox zone by way of a cozy library. A timeless choice, a library can feature floor-to-ceiling bookshelves or built-ins and comfortable reading chairs stationed by a window.

**3. Music space:** Homeowners who play an instrument may appreciate a designated space for jam sessions. Dining rooms with high ceilings and bare floors often provide excellent acoustics for music. Complement the space with a high-tech audio system and sound baffling panels for those who plan to record.



**4. Home office:** Hybrid work is a permanent fixture in today’s career landscape. A dining room located near the front of the home presents a prime location for a professional workspace. Replace a table with a sleek executive desk. An existing buffet or sideboard can be repurposed as printer storage or for filing. Consider adding French doors or partitions to provide privacy without compromising on light flow.

**5. Homework zone:** Active families may need to transform the dining room into a homework lab that offers a quiet space for educational pursuits. Organized cabinetry can house school materials, craft supplies, and much more, confining it all to one room. Locating the computer in the space creates a centralized “safe” spot for internet browsing and monitoring young children in the process.

Dining spaces may be going the way of the dinosaur, reflecting modern homeowners’ preferences for more flexible and useful spaces.

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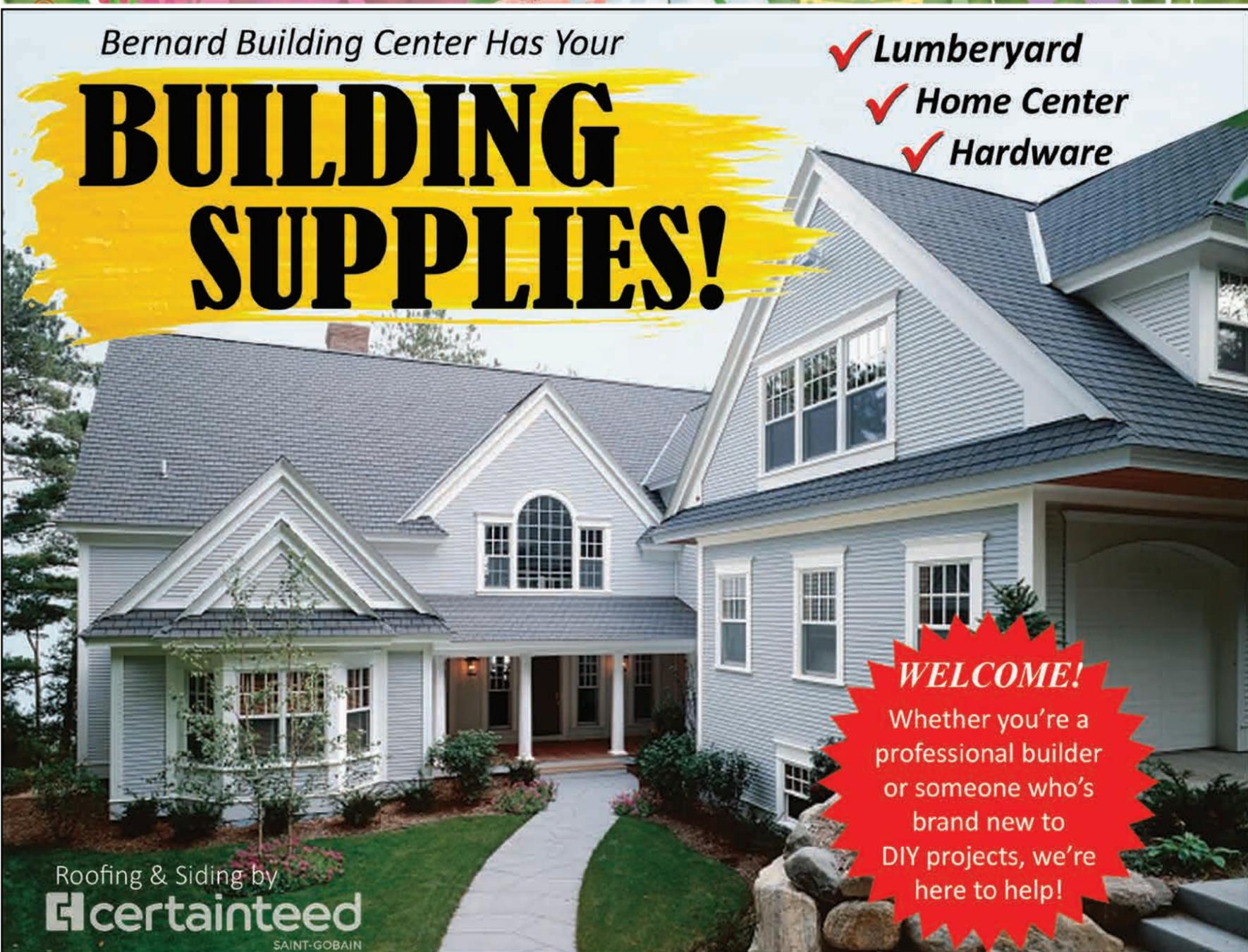
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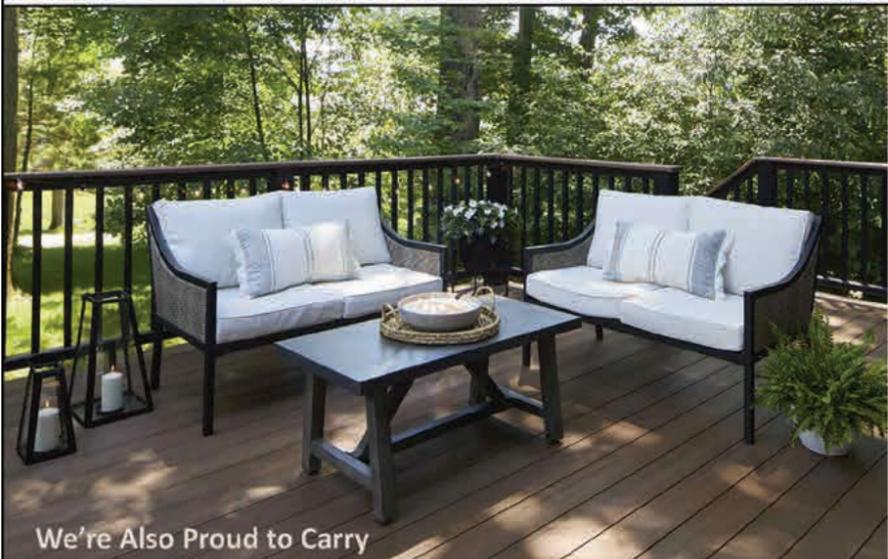
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# How trees and plants can change the look of a landscape

Spring is home renovation season, and no area of a home is off limits. That includes home exteriors, particularly in regard to landscaping.

Lawn and garden centers draw crowds on spring weekends, as homeowners are anxious to get out in the yard after spending more time indoors over the winter. Plants and trees provide a simple and unique way to transform the look and feel of a property. As homeowners ponder what can be done to freshen up their landscapes, they can consider these benefits of incorporating new plants and trees into their properties.

• **Add some pops of color.** There's no shortage of colorful plants to add some pops of color to a property. Azaleas, lilacs, pansies, and, of course, rose bushes can add a wide range of colors to a landscape, providing undeniable and awe-inspiring curb appeal when the plants bloom.

• **Native plants won't compromise their neighbors.** When choosing plants for a landscape, it's important to pick those accustomed to the local climate. A non-native plant might be able to withstand local conditions, but it also might compromise other trees and plants on a property. When choosing new plants and trees for a landscape, work with professionals at a local lawn and garden center to identify native plants that can handle local weather conditions and do so without putting existing plants on the property in jeopardy.

• **Trees can add considerable privacy.** Homeowners who don't want fencing, or those whose towns or homeowners' associations won't allow fencing, may look to trees to add the privacy typically provided by fences. The growth rates of trees vary by species, so homeowners who want instant privacy should look for trees that are already tall and/or fast-growing. Needlepoint holly (which reach an average height of 10 to 15 feet) and sweet viburnum (25 to 30 feet at maturity) are fast-growing species to consider when planting for privacy. Green giant arborvitae are a popular privacy tree, as they can reach significant heights and widths within a few years of being planted.



And while it's always good to consult a lawn and garden center for advice on the compatibility of a given tree with the local climate, green giant arborvitae are known to thrive in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones five through eight, which cover a significant portion of the United States.

• **Evergreens keep a property green throughout the year.** Homeowners who lament the loss of color each fall when their existing trees shed their leaves can keep a property green throughout the winter by choosing evergreen trees for landscapes. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation notes that evergreen trees excel

at conserving moisture, which allows them to keep their leaves and maintain that distinct and appealing green color throughout the winter.

Various plants and trees can help homeowners change the look of their landscapes without busting homeowners' budgets.

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# Tips to revitalize a garden this spring

**G**ardening 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.

## Did You Know?

The waterfall edge style of countertops has evolved from a high-end niche trend into an increasingly popular staple of modern architectural design. Unlike traditional countertops that end at the edge of the cabinet, a waterfall edge makes a 90-degree turn and continues down to the floor, covering a kitchen peninsula or island. According to Angi, waterfall edge countertops are known for their seamless and continuous appearances that really are show-stopping to see. They tend to make a bigger visual impact compared to traditional horizontal slabs. It's important to note that not every stone fabricator is willing or able to execute the waterfall effect. Installation requires a precise mitered edge, which risks chipping the fine-cut corner. The added expense also is nothing to take lightly. Waterfall edges also can make cleaning more involved. There is no lip at the end of counters, so it's hard to get a dustpan flush to catch crumbs off the surface. Also, the side panels of stone mean there's extra surfaces to clean and seal. The uniqueness of waterfall edge countertops merits careful consideration prior to installation.



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# 3 ways to get more use out of a garage

Even though no two homes are the same, rooms have a tendency to take on similar characteristics regardless of which property they're a part of. Kitchens tend to be popular gathering spaces, while basements have become go-to spots for game rooms and watch parties.

Garages also tend to share certain characteristics between homes, and one notable attribute is the tendency to become difficult-to-navigate dumping grounds for a wide range of items, including lawn and garden tools, children's toys, sporting goods, and seasonal home decor. Though there's nothing wrong with utilizing a garage as a storage space, the following are three simple ways homeowners can get more out of these spaces.

**1. Utilize the wall space.** The walls in a garage have lots of potential. Effective use of walls within a garage can ensure garden tools, small toys and other items do not accumulate on the floor. Such accumulations contribute much to the reputation of garages as dumping grounds for miscellaneous items. By clearing the floors of clutter, and utilizing wall spaces to store items, homeowners can open up the spaces to serve any number of functions, including home gyms, art studios or even parking spaces to protect vehicles from the elements. A storage organizer system with various hooks can be mounted on a garage wall to free up floor space, while shelving can be hung to store paint cans, power tool batteries and other items.

**2. Look upward.** If garage ceilings extend several feet above the height of homeowners' vehicles, then the spaces above where cars might be parked can be converted into storage space for

large recreational items, like canoes or kayaks, or seasonal decor that does not need to be accessed on a regular basis. A simple kayak hoist utilizing a pulley system clears floor space and allows kayaks to be stored overhead. Lifting storage racks work in similar fashion and make for great additions for anyone who needs to store containers full of seasonal decor but does not want to do so by stacking items on the floor. A hand crank system for a lifting storage rack makes for easy and safe access.

**3. Install new lighting.** Without ample lighting, garages may not be conducive to recreational pursuits like painting, crafting or even exercising. A lighting upgrade is a relatively affordable renovation that can make a big difference, illuminating spaces not exactly known for brightness, especially if there's no windows. If you want to spend time in the garage during winter and stay warm, then some new lighting can make that possible.

Homeowners whose garages are currently serving as cluttered storage closets can do much to get more out of these useful spaces.

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# A rundown on decking materials

**D**ecks are centerpieces of many backyard retreats, and these spaces can add value to properties. According to Remodeling magazine's Cost vs. Value Report, the average return on investment (ROI) of a deck is between 60 and 70 percent, and some homeowners may recoup as much as 80 percent of their investment in a new deck.

Certain factors can affect how much value a deck adds, including the material from which the deck was made. Homeowners have different options in regard to materials when they are considering building a new deck.

## Pressure-treated wood

Wood has been a staple building material for as long as trees have been hewn for construction. Pressure-treated wood is a popular decking option. The wood is chemically treated and put into a pressure chamber to reinforce it and delay deterioration.

Pressure-treated wood decks are popular because they are cost-effective to build. Many homeowners also find the natural wood aesthetic to their liking in a backyard environment. While pressure-treated wood decks are among the first considerations, homeowners should realize that they require regular upkeep, such as sanding, staining and sealing to maintain appearance and durability. Although treated for longevity, pressure-treated wood decks are not indestructible and may crack and warp, with eventual replacement after 15 years, according to Timber Tech.

## Composite

Composite decking is made from a blend of wood fibers and plastic. Moisture Shield Composite Decking says the ratio of wood fibers to plastic varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. Since it often is made from recycled materials, composite decking is considered an eco-friendly choice.

This decking material is designed to be low-maintenance and durable. Composite decking lasts longer than natural wood



and does not require sanding, staining and sealing to stay in top form. It also resists rot and insect damage. These benefits come with a higher cost than wood, and the material also can get hot underfoot if the deck is a darker color.

## PVC

PVC decking is an alternative to other types of deck materials. It is made entirely from plastic, setting it apart from composite, which has natural wood fibers in it.

Similar to composite, PVC comes with a higher initial cost than wood decks. But that can pay for itself over time since PVC is durable and essentially maintenance-free. Decks & Docks says PVC is a good material to use in water-prone areas. Some are designed to be slip-resistant and can mimic the look of real wood.

Homeowners have many choices when choosing deck materials, making it possible to find an ideal option that aligns with their lifestyles and budgets.

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# Popular kitchen flooring materials

It's well-documented that kitchens are popular gathering spaces in homes. Perhaps that's one reason why homeowners looking to sell their homes direct so much attention to the kitchen before listing their properties. The real estate experts at Trulia note that emphasis is well worth it, as buyers inspect kitchens and primary bathrooms more than any other spaces in a home.

Cabinets and countertops garner considerable attention when pondering kitchen renovations, but it's equally important that homeowners pay attention to flooring when planning a remodel. The following are some notable flooring materials homeowners may want to consider as they plan to remodel their kitchens.

• **Ceramic tile:** Ceramic tile is a popular kitchen flooring material. The flooring experts at Avalon Flooring note that ceramic tile boasts an elegant and clean feel. Ceramic tile also is durable and easy to maintain. That simple maintenance includes ease of cleaning, as ceramic tile can be quickly cleared of spills and dirt tracked into a kitchen from outside. Ceramic tile also comes in a wide variety of colors, a versatility that undoubtedly adds to its popularity.

• **Porcelain tile:** Porcelain tile is another versatile option that can add instant aesthetic appeal to a kitchen. Porcelain tile is waterproof, which appeals to many homeowners looking to renovate their kitchens. Porcelain also is easily cleaned and durable, as flooring experts estimate that porcelain tiles can last anywhere from 15 to 50 years. Porcelain tile also requires minimal maintenance, which appeals to busy homeowners.

• **Engineered hardwood:** Engineered hardwood is a popular choice that many homeowners appreciate due to its strength and aesthetic appeal. This flooring material is made with real wood that's reinforced to make it even more durable and water-resistant. The result is an easily maintained product that also can last as long as solid wood flooring so long as it's well-maintained. Various shades, designs and textures are available, which makes this a versatile option.

• **Laminate flooring:** Laminate flooring is a budget-friendly option that's available in a wide range of styles, colors and patterns. The smooth surface of

laminate flooring makes it easy to clean, and it's resistance to water is another characteristic that appeals to homeowners. But spills on laminate floors are best cleaned up quickly, and the material is vulnerable to warping and staining if exposed to moisture for extended periods of time.

These are some of the options homeowners can consider as they ponder which material to install on their kitchen floors as they remodel these popular rooms.



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# Lighting for every room in the home

**L**ighting in a home is easily overlooked. But power outages serve as a stark reminder of the importance of lighting, which adds to the safety, functionality and aesthetic appeal of a space.

When homeowners go room to room, they can consider various types of lighting to add a unique feel to each space.

## Kitchen

Kitchens are heavily trafficked rooms in many homes. A combination of overhead lighting that will illuminate the entire space and focused task lighting, like under-cabinet lights for meal prep, can help in the kitchen. Separate task lighting for a bill-paying area or homework station also can be a useful touch.

## Bedroom

Bedrooms are cozy retreats where homeowners spend most of their time resting and relaxing. Harsh lighting may not be applicable here, so consider side lamps fitted with warm-hued bulbs placed beside a bed. Lighting can be more stark and targeted in closets to help homeowners see clothing and other belongings.

## Bathroom

Bathroom lighting amenities can include a combination of features to fully optimize this space. Most homeowners will want some sort of overhead lighting to shed light on most of the space. Task lighting by the mirror can offer more visibility while shaving or applying makeup. Lighting in a bathing area can keep such spaces safer by improving visibility in a generally slippery area. In bathrooms with spa-like settings, mood lighting paired with features like steam capabilities can enhance the space even further.

## Did you know?

Light-emitting diode bulbs (LEDs) are energy-efficient and durable options. LEDs convert electricity into light instead of heat, and increasingly are used in a wide range of products, including lighting fixtures. According to Energy Star®, LEDs produce light up to 90 percent more efficiently than incandescent light bulbs. LEDs also do not typically "burn out" or fail, like other types of bulbs. Because of their performance benefits, homeowners may be interested in switching over to LED bulbs to power their existing lighting fixtures. Generally speaking, LED bulbs can work in most non-LED fixtures, provided the base type matches the socket. The LED bulb also should be rated for the same line voltage for the fixture. Also, the fixture should not be enclosed, such as glass-encased ceiling lights or certain outdoor fixtures. The lack of ventilation can cause heat buildup, leading to damage or failure. In such instances, one should purchase LEDs specifically rated for enclosed fixtures.

## Garage and basement

Utility areas like garages, basements and crawl spaces need high-wattage bright lighting for safety. Installation of bright LEDs in these areas can make work projects easier and safer. Well-lit areas also are generally less inviting to pests like insects and rodents, so bright lighting may deter these creatures in areas where they tend to enter a home.

## Living room/great room

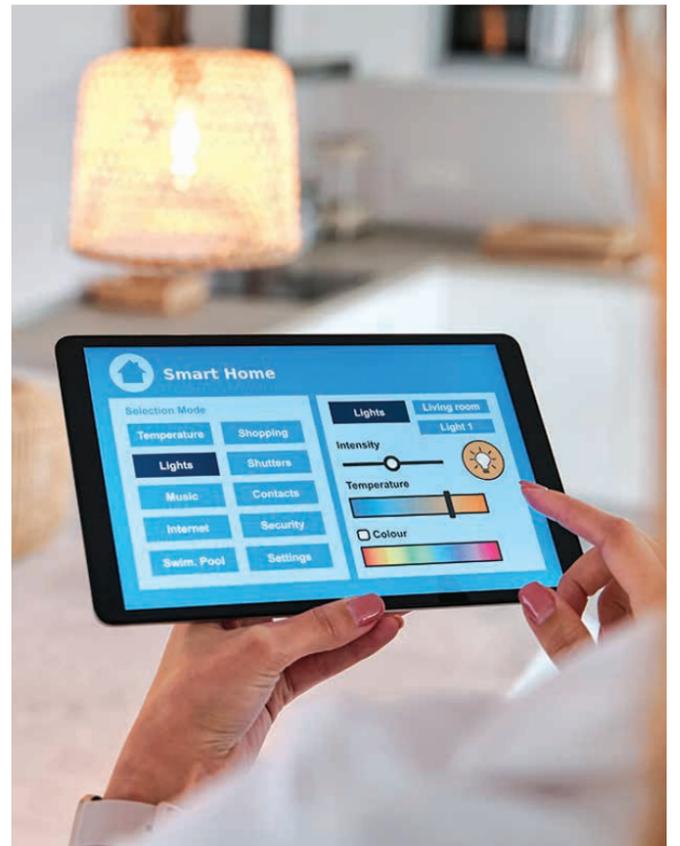
Living areas can benefit from a combination of ambient lighting sources. Table lamps alongside sofas and chairs will provide enough light, but will not compete with televisions or home theater setups. Lighting that highlights artwork or home accents also can add a cozy appeal to the space.

## Additional lighting

Homeowners may want to consider a few additional lighting scenarios to improve their spaces. Lighting in a foyer or above coat racks or shoe cubbies can keep the space functional but attractive. A combination of overhead lighting and accent lighting can make a laundry room less utilitarian. And dining spaces can be intimate or grandiose depending on the fixtures featured in the room.

Homeowners also can utilize smart devices and bulbs to easily control the lights while at home or away.

Lighting plays a key role in a home, affecting the safety, functionality and aesthetics of rooms.



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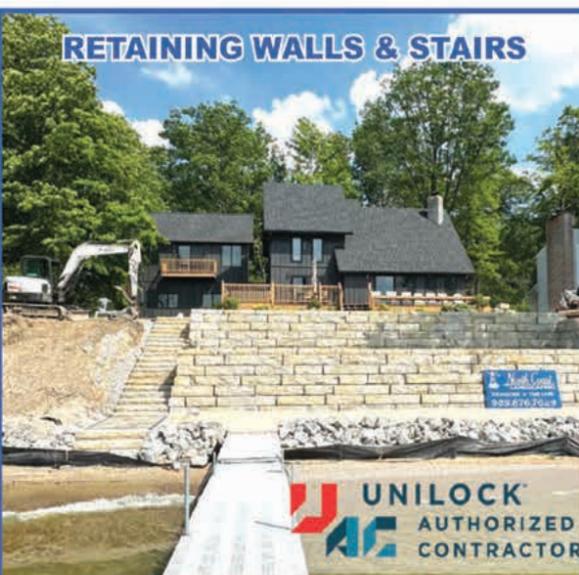
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# The 411 on whole-house generators

**W**eather is unpredictable. Strong winds or storms can wreak havoc on power lines, resulting in outages that may last hours or even days. People have come to rely on electricity, not only for comfort and safety, but to power just about every aspect of modern life. A power outage can be a minor disruption or downright dangerous, unless a whole-house generator can take over when needed.

## What is a whole-house generator?

A whole-house generator, also called a standby generator, is a permanently installed system that provides backup power to a home during a utility outage. The generator typically runs using a natural gas or propane connection.

Unlike a portable generator, a whole-house generator is installed outside on a concrete slab. It is wired to the home's electrical panel through an automatic transfer switch (ATS). This switch will continuously monitor the electrical grid's power and start automatically if an outage is detected. When the power comes back on, the ATS will shut off the generator and reconnect the home to the grid.

## Generator considerations

NJR Home Services says there are some considerations when determining which generator best meets the needs of a household. It's important to identify where power will be needed in the home, whether it's a few essential pieces of equipment or the entire home. The more one wants to have powered, the more costly the generator will be.

The location of the generator on the property must meet local zoning requirements, which vary from town to town. A permit likely will be required for the installation work.

Another consideration is gas meter sizing. A trained technician should schedule a pressure check to ensure that the gas supply to the home can handle the new generator.

## What if there hasn't been an outage?

Most units will test themselves periodically for a few minutes each week to recharge the batteries and keep the engine lubricated, which serves as a testament to the hands-off nature of these systems.

Whole-house generators offer peace of mind in an unpredictable world. When the power goes out, these generators seamlessly kick into action.



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# A rundown on roofing projects

No two home renovation projects are the same. Some projects are highly detailed undertakings that take months if not years from start to finish, while others can be tackled by skilled do-it-yourselfers over the course of a single weekend. Though each project is different, categorizing renovations as needs or wants can help homeowners determine when the time is right to go forward.

Roof replacement projects typically fall into the "need" category. A decaying roof can jeopardize the safety and security of a home and lead to additional issues, like water damage. It's unwise to delay roof replacement projects when signs of a decaying roof start to appear. Homeowners who are starting to see such indicators can look to this rundown of roof replacement projects as they begin the process of replacing their roof.

### Cost

Roof replacement costs vary considerably depending on a host of variables. Materials, location and the cost of labor, dimensions of the roof, and even choice of contractor all affect the cost of the project. The home renovation experts at Angi indicate the average roof replacement project costs \$9,500. Asphalt is among the more affordable roofing materials, costing an average of \$1 to \$1.20 per square foot, according to Nerdwallet. Slate roofs will be more expensive, costing anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per square foot.

### Life expectancy

Homeowners may blanch at the cost of a roof replacement project, particularly if they choose a more expensive material. However, it's important to keep life expectancy in mind when receiving roof estimates. Many homeowners never replace a roof twice, making this a potentially costly but ultimately one-time expense. Though slate roofs are expensive, homeowners may find it reassuring that estimates from various roofing resources indicate slate roofs come with a life expectancy ranging from 50 to 200 years. By contrast, Nerdwallet estimates an asphalt roof lasts around 10 to 20 years, while others suggest such roofs can last as long as 30 years.

### Materials

Choice of materials is arguably the most significant decision homeowners will make when replacing a roof. The experts at This Old House report that materials typically account for 55 to 65 percent of the overall cost of a roof replacement project. Decisions regarding roof materials will be affected by budget, local climate (certain materials are better suited to particular climates than others), aesthetic appeal, and required maintenance. It's also important that homeowners consider the material warranty of each roofing product. Some materials offer longer warranties than others, which can provide a measure of security to homeowners investing so much in the project.

A roof replacement project is not a renovation that can be delayed when signs the roof is fading start to appear. Homeowners are urged to consider a wide range of variables before committing to a project.

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# Put some spring in your cleaning step

Spring is the season of nature's rebirth. Trees and flowers begin to bloom anew each spring, and young animals can be seen frolicking with their parents. During a time when it seems like the entire planet gets a refresh, many homeowners turn their thoughts to refreshing their homes as well.

As the days lengthen and the weather warms, spring cleaning takes center stage. Spring cleaning is more extensive than simply washing away grime, as cleaning a home often offers a psychological reset for the coming months. A clear strategy can make the task of spring cleaning feel less daunting, and these tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen after months spent indoors.

## Declutter before cleaning

The rule of thumb when starting on spring cleaning is to combat clutter before cleaning. Trying to clean around clutter is inefficient and may result in throwing in the towel prematurely. It is important to remove as much as possible from each room before you begin cleaning. As homeowners move through each room, they can assess whether they've used items in the last year or whether they serve any functional or aesthetic purposes. If not, they can be trashed or donated.

## Move top to bottom

It's important to follow the rules of science when spring cleaning. That means that dust and debris will be affected by gravity. Engaging in a top-down approach will help make cleaning more efficient. Beginning at the ceiling and working down towards the floors will help people avoid having to clean the same surface twice.

Using a duster or a microfiber cloth, individuals can clear cobwebs from corners and dust from crown molding. Fingerprints will accumulate near light switches and door handles, so those areas should be wiped down, too.

Homeowners can conduct a thorough cleaning of heating and cooling output and intake vents as they likely have gathered dust over the winter.

## Do a kitchen reset

Focusing attention on the kitchen, which tends to be the busiest room in the house, is a wise idea for spring cleaning plans. This is the time for individuals to pull everything out of the refrigerator and pantry and check for expiration dates. Wiping down the shelves means cleaning away any accumulated food drips or spills. Additional areas to consider include behind the refrigerator, inside the dishwasher filter and inside the microwave.

## Focus on air quality

It's key to replace the HVAC system filters come springtime, as well as any air purifiers in the home. This will help reduce allergens and ensure that the cooling system will run efficiently when it's time to turn it on.

Spring cleaning takes place each year. Prioritizing decluttering and following a systematic path through the home helps people eliminate stress and mess at the same time.



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# Unique features for outdoor living spaces

**O**utdoor living spaces are wildly popular. A 2023 study conducted by Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens found that 63 percent of homeowners indicated they would prioritize an outdoor living space if they were to remodel their homes.

Homeowners cite a multitude of motivations regarding their interest in upgrading their outdoor living spaces. The 2024 U.S. Outdoor Trends Study from Houzz Research found that more than half of homeowners who participated in the study (51 percent) want to renovate to improve aesthetics, while 37 percent hoped to enhance entertaining spaces. One-third view renovating outdoor spaces as a great way to extend the living space of their homes. Homeowners who share these motivations and are committed to renovating their outdoor living areas can look to these unique features to fulfill all three goals.

- **Water fountain:** Water fountains can serve as stunning focal points in outdoor living spaces. Outdoor fountains are ideal for anyone hoping to create an outdoor oasis, as few sights and sounds promote a calming atmosphere as effectively as softly flowing water in a cast stone fountain. Fountains also attract birds, which can add to the soothing sounds of a backyard escape.

- **Shade structure:** Gone are the days when homeowners' most accessible option to create shade on patios and decks were umbrellas extending out from the center of outdoor dining

tables. Pergolas and gazebos are now available in a wide range of shapes and styles, making these a must-have for homeowners who want to entertain while ensuring guests remain comfortable on hot days. A hardtop gazebo with roof hooks to accommodate fans, lights and even plants can serve as an aesthetically appealing safe haven from summer sun.

- **Hammock:** A hammock is a simple yet unique, functional and affordable feature to consider for an outdoor living space. If the existing landscaping allows, situate a hammock between two tall, sturdy trees. Such a sight can contribute to a welcoming and calming ambiance in an outdoor living space, and provide extra room to lounge and relax beneath the shade of trees.

- **Game zone:** If entertaining is the primary motivation behind an outdoor living space renovation, then designate part of the space for games and activities. A designated bocce court will draw visitors who want to relax and enjoy a little friendly competition

away from dining areas and other spaces. A small putting green can allow golfers to work on their short games, and such spaces can offer ample opportunities for fun if homeowners are inclined to host putting contests during backyard barbecues. Whatever game tickles homeowners' fancy, designating a space exclusively for games can up the entertainment value of an outdoor living space.

The popularity of outdoor living spaces remains high. Homeowners hoping to enhance their existing spaces can consider a number of unique features to meet their goals.



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